

## Lesson Four: How are Prophets chosen?

What are the Prophets' responsibilities towards God? What is the social, cultural and intellectual background in which the Prophets appear? To answer these questions, we analyze the following statements of the first Sermon of the Nahjul Balaghah. "From his progeny (Adam), God chose (istafa) Prophets and took their pledge for His revelation and for carrying His message as their trust."

Istafa (to choose the best) is a very important and fundamental issue. In Arabic, not all selections are indicated by this word. Only when a pure element is recognized and chosen from amongst a collection of elements is the 'istafa' used. It is actually employed when the pure and the impure are separated in a collection of things and the pure portion is extracted.

As far as physical and spiritual aspects of humanity are concerned, the Prophets have been ordinary human beings but, at the same time, they have possessed the competence needed for gaining high ranks and positions. Accordingly, they have been selected, distinguished individuals, born of parents none of whom have been involved in polytheism and human Corruption Thus 'istqfa' in its general sense implies that a trained and educated Generation deliver a more trained Generation to society.

As an example, the Prophet of Islam was born in a pure and holy family, from a father and mother who were, in turn, distinguished from the point of spirituality and morals (and not on the basis of race, blood, wealth and aristocratic privileges). In fact, 'Abdullah was superior to all fathers and Amina was superior to all mothers. These two spiritually trained beings married and provided society with a child nobler to all children, a better spiritually trained being.

So much is certain that the Prophets who appeared before Moses; peace be upon him, enjoyed lesser spirituality than those who came after him and after Jesus Christ, peace be upon him, for every Prophet has been the product of the training and education brought by the Prophets before him, i.e. the prevailing divine and spiritual training provided by past Prophets have been quite influential for the growth of the coming ones. Thus, the Commander of the Faithful uses the word 'istafa' to indicate that God has appointed those beings to prophethood that have had this spiritual training.

And took their ledge for His revelation and for carrying his message as their trust." Here the Commander

of the Faithful mentions the Prophets' commitments and says that they are committed in two respects: First they have a commitment towards the divine revelation, meaning that they are obliged to say merely what they receive as revelation and not to intermix their personal views with the divine message. Second, they are obliged to deliver the message they have received and not to bury it with themselves.

In the course of time many people perverted God's trust with them and ignored his position and took partners along with Him. Satan turned them away from knowing him and kept them aloof from his worship.” In five short sentences, the Commander of the Faithful provides us with a precise account of the mental, practical, social and cultural background of the people at the time of the Prophets' appearance.

In the first sentence he uses the Phrase 'aktharu khalqihī' (the majority of His creatures) to indicate that not all the people, but a great many of them, had perverted God's prescription and commands because absolute darkness or ignorance has never had dominance over a society, that is, in no age and era People have been left without heavenly guides, teachers and messengers who have themselves had some faithful followers.

In fact he refers to a society and a time in which people ignored God's orders, changed the general principles delivered through the chain of prophethood and deviated the course and program of life determined by the Prophets through the application of prejudices, perversions and Personal grudges.

He continues with the phrase 'facahiluhaqqah' (thus they ignored His Position), meaning that people forgot about God's power and providence in administering the affairs of society (the same situation is dominant today among the westerners who do not feel the absence of God in their lives, because they have remained far away from their true nature. They have forgotten the existence of God although they apparently believe in God and hear His name repeatedly. They actually do not know God's Position and status in society).

What is God's trust and covenant (ahd)? Almighty God has provided human beings with a general pattern of life and a specific course within which people should move. This course or pattern is the very reality to which all the Prophets have invited people throughout history, i.e. monotheism, respect for humanity and moral, natural and legal quality of human beings. This is the divine program, a command and covenant.

Satans try to pervert this course and command and to induce people to obey and worship God's creatures instead of God. God calls people to honor the human being and satans invite them to humiliate and belittle him. Thus, the perversion of the divine covenant is to deviate from the mentioned course and pattern, to ignore God's position and to transform society into a satanic one in which partners are taken along with God.

Taking partners along with God is not merely confined to worshipping an object. But when God's position remains unknown and the people do not know that creation and Legislation belong to God (i.e. in the

same way as the laws of creation – laws relating to the movement of heavens and the earth, day and night, man, birth and death – are in possession of God alone, Legislation or administration of the society and life, too, is under His authority. This is the meaning of God's position in human life).

They accept certain lines of thought as their guide, certain human beings as their rulers and certain false customs and traditions as their manners of living. They thereby replace God with ignorance, unawareness and satans (which only in our limited minds are regarded as rivals to God for, in reality, God has no rival). For example, Egyptians were actually taking a Pharaoh like Anwar Sadat as a partner along with God when they left their destinies in his hands.

The Commander of the faithful continues with the statement, „Satan turned them away from knowing Him..” to emphasize that when God's position remains unknown in a society, satans try to fill up the human mind, which is bereft of the knowledge of God in some way or other.

Sometimes one lacks something and he knows that he lacks it, but more painful is the case when one lacks something and he knows it is not due to the fact that the empty place of what he lacks has been filled with something else of his thirst has been quenched with muddy water. (This is the greater oppression the victims of human beings, i.e. suppression of man's God seeking sense or imposition of unawareness on man). Later on we shall see that Prophets have the responsibility to remove this oppression and compensate for it.

It is to be noted here that Satan (shaitan), referred to in “Ali's sermon, should not be mistaken for Iblis, the creature who, according to the text of the Qur'an, refused to bow down to Adam and then implored God to keep him alive till the Day of Judgment but God promised only to keep him alive, until the Day of the Time Appointed. This creature should not in any way be assimilated with other creatures. We should grow accustomed to accepting the exact concepts of the Qur'anic statements, and not merely what our prejudices warrant.

Satan has a different meaning. Generally speaking according to the Qur'an, it is applied to those forces, which, create corruption, wickedness and deviation. On this ground, we have in the Qur'an” satans among men and jinns», i.e. satans among humankind who put on clothes, walk and do the like, and satans of the kind of jinns. These satans who sometimes dwell within the human being and are called selfishness, carnal desire, avarice, Aggression, negligence and so forth. Sometimes they dwell outside the human being and are titled king, ruffian refractory, corrupt religious leader, aphrodisiac scene, etc.

Now, should we not develop satans within ourselves, outside satans cannot influence us. For the very reason we cannot put the blame of our own deviations on social conditions or on those who have led us to negligence. It is in the Qur'an that the arrogant and the deprived will quarrel on the Day of Judgment. The deprived accuse the arrogant of having misled them but the arrogant deny it and argue that they themselves should not have listened to them. Both of them tell the truth and at the same time, both are condemned.

***“... And kept them aloof from His worship.”***

By this statement the Commander of the Faithful means that when human beings do not know God, it is quite natural for them not to worship Him and not to serve Him (servitude is submissive action before God).

## **Summary**

God has chosen the best of His servants (istafa) as His Prophets.

He has bound the Prophets to two responsibilities: To tell people only what they received as revelation and to hide not any part of revealed matters.

At the time of the Prophets' appearance, the people had taken partners along with God due to lack of knowledge concerning Gods position, and thus satans had led them away from God – seeking course towards the negligence of God.

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