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Lesson One: Prophethood

Acquaintance with the School of the Prophets

In the world where our existence unfolds, we have never heard of or seen an organization or administration that is left to its own devices without a supervisor being responsible for it. Human reason and intelligence cannot accept that social institutions be without a leader or ruler, and no thinker will approve of an organizational formula that lacks a responsible leader.

Given that, reason and logic emphasize the necessity of a responsible leader for even the smallest social unit; how can humanity as a whole attain the basic goals to which it aspires, or acquire the lofty values of which it is worthy, without a leader and chief?

Now the Creator, within the system of creation, has not withheld anything that may be needed for any being to advance and attain a fitting degree of perfection; He has placed the necessary means and tools at the disposal of all things, and given to each part of every animate being and plant exactly what it needs. How then can it be believed that in the system of legislating for the human being, He should overlook the sending of Prophets who play such a sensitive and multifaceted role in the evolution of the human being? or that He should remain indifferent to this fundamental pillar?

Furthermore, can any intelligent person accept that the vast scheme of being, with all the wonder-inducing manifestations of life, should be based on aimlessness and purposelessness? Is it possible to attribute such an irrational act to the sublime Creator?

The question of reward and punishment, in a precise and calculated form, is involved here.

It is an indubitable scientific principle that purposiveness is the concomitant of all life, thought and will. It is not possible that a wise being should consciously undertake an action in which no goal or purpose resides.

Apart from the fact that the human being instinctively regards an aimless act as incompatible with

wisdom and intelligence, he can clearly perceive that all the atoms in the world of being, are ruled by order and calculation. So just as the orderliness of life springs from the knowledge and wisdom of the Creator, the same may be said of the purposiveness of the whole scheme of being, including the existence of the human being.

Is God indifferent to the fate of humans? Has He abandoned them to their own devices, so they may shed each other's blood, commit any crime they like, and transform the world into a fiery hell?

A God who holds back nothing in order for every creature to attain its perfection cannot possibly be indifferent to the human being's attaining the degree of perfection suitable to him. On the contrary, just as He guides the human being to material perfection by means of his instincts, He guides him to his true perfection both by means of the innate guidance of his nature and by means of legislative guidance, for innate guidance needs help when confronting the instincts.

The Qur'an says that God will give help to both groups, those who worship the world and those who seek the hereafter, so that none should remain deprived of the favor and generosity of their Lord. [1](#)

If the human being were left alone in the world with his own hopes, everyone would judge on the basis of his own temperament and taste. He would do whatever he found pleasing and conformable to his inclinations. Every individual would follow his own path in order to secure his interests, and the result would be a clash of desires and interests, leading to the severance of individual and social relations and unending corruption and anarchy.

The French scholar, Emile Dermenghem, writes in his book 'The Life of Muhammad': The Prophets are just as necessary for the world as the beneficial and wondrous forces of nature, such as the sun, rainfall, winter storms, which shake and cleave open dry and infertile land, covering them with freshness and verdure.

The grandeur and legitimacy of such events can be deduced from their results: inward capacities that have received strength and confidence, hearts that have been given tranquility, wills that have been strengthened, tumults that have been quietened, moral diseases that have been cured, and finally, the supplications that have mounted up to heaven. [2](#)

It can be deduced from the Qur'an that one of the missions of the Prophets is ending differences among human beings and purifying them. The Qur'an says:

"Human beings were one community. God sent Messengers to give glad tidings to the good and a warning to the bad. He sent the Book in truth so they might judge justly in their disputes."
(2:213)

"He it is Who sent a great Messenger among the unlettered Arabs, one from among them, who might recite to them the verses of God's revelation, purify them from the filth of ignorance and

evil characteristics, and teach them the Law contained in His Book, whereas previously they had been in the abyss of ignorance and misguidance." (62:2)

"O Lord, make our offspring worthy of Your raising Messengers from among them who will recite Your verses to human beings, who will teach them the knowledge of the Book and wisdom, and cleanse and purify their souls from all ignorance and ugliness." (2: 129)

The Prophets came in order to convey to human beings Divine knowledge, free of all forms of illusion and error. They came to proclaim to the human being a series of truths which a person would never have attained unaided, such as matters lying beyond the natural realm like death, the intermediate realm, and resurrection.

In Divine schools of thought, the mode of thought that underlies both belief and action, the knowledge of the material and spiritual dimensions of human existence, lies within the bounds of the human being's capacity to perceive. For the human being approaches true happiness, and his growth and ascent become possible, only when his constant and fundamental needs are recognized, preserved and satisfied in a balanced fashion.

One of the most fundamental missions of the Prophets, is then, to bring the excesses of that which causes the human being trouble and torment in his rebellious spirit, under control and reduce them to order, so as to pacify its rebellious tendencies. Thus we see that in the school of the Prophets, pleasures are not negated nor is their value and essentiality denied.

The supreme ideal of the Prophets, who are the source of virtue and the gushing springs of human ethics, is to cure and nurture the human spirit in such a way that it reaches a higher truth and ascends toward ethical values.

Through the realistic and perceptive training the human being receives from the Prophets, he advances on a path that leads to infinity and he distances himself from alienation. It is natural that those who establish such a program of action should have been chosen at the threshold of heavenly power, the power of One Who is aware of all the mysteries of the human being's creation and the needs of his soul.

The selection that takes place with respect to the Prophets is based on the ascertainment of an human being as a complete model of the powers and faculties of the human being. In order to ascend existentially, to cure their souls and to attain the heavenly rank of fruition, human beings must enter the sphere of the teachings of the Prophets; it is only then that their humanity can be fully realized.

The valuable element that the human being represents in this world has not been abandoned or left to its own devices, nor has God wished to entrust the destiny of the human being to capricious oppressors, who by sinking their poisonous claws into the spirit and mind of the human being, begin their exploitation of humanity by exploiting its mind – for then mankind would be held back from true advancement and be impelled in the direction of false and valueless aims.

Since intellectual and creedal criteria have always played a determining role and constitute an extremely effective factor in the shaping of life, the Prophets have always commenced their mission in precisely this area. Because the intellectual criteria of society are generally tainted by the ignorance of Divine guidance, they have abolished those criteria and presented new, positive and fruitful criteria to replace them.

The Prophets, are then, the true revolutionaries of history.

Shining forth in the darkness, they have come forth to struggle against the sources of corrupt belief and misguidance, and to guide the most sacred and beautiful manifestation of the human spirit to its true and proper course. They rescue the human being from shameful forms of worship that are not worthy of his lofty station, and hold him back from all forms of erroneous thought and deviance that arise in his search for God and inflict harm on him.

They conduct him from the confines of ignorance to the region of light and perception, because all the paths of true happiness and salvation lead to the assertion of God's oneness.

At the same time, the Prophets guarantee the freedom of the human being in accepting belief; he is free to exercise his will by accepting either unbelief or belief. The Qur'an says:

"O Prophet, say: the religion of truth is that which has come unto you from your Lord. So let whoever wishes believe, and whoever wishes, be an unbeliever." (18:29)

The Qur'an explicitly rejects the imposition of belief by saying:

"There is no coercion or compulsion in the acceptance of religion." (2:256)

If we examine deeply the content of the teachings to the Prophets, which determine the method to be followed by all true movements of reform and liberation, we will see that their sole aim was guiding human beings to felicity.

Because God looks upon His servants with favor, He chooses as Prophets the most perfect of human beings, who first enter the arena of human thought and belief, creating there a vast outpouring of energy, and then enter the sphere of action and ethics, in order to draw human being's attention away from the natural realm to that which lies beyond nature.

Thereby they liberate the human being from the scandalous and demeaning multiplicity of gods and from infatuation with the world and material phenomena. They cleanse their minds and their hearts and attach them to a source of hope and mercy that bestows tranquility on their souls.

Once the human being recognizes the origin of his creation and believes in the unseen forces of the world that lies beyond the natural realm, he learns a program of advancement toward perfection from the guides on the path to truth, the chosen ones of the Divine threshold. For it is they who demonstrate to

human society its origin and the goal of perfection toward which it must strive. The human being, then, begins his efforts to reach God, for it is this that is the lofty goal of all being, and he addresses his Lord as follows:

"We have heard Your command and obey it, O Lord; we seek your forgiveness and know that our movement is toward You." (2:285)

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, upon whom be peace, says: "God sent the Prophets to remove the veils covering the human being's innate nature and to bring forth the treasures of thought hidden within him." [3](#)

He also says in the first Sermon of the Nahj al-Balaghah: "God Almighty raised Prophets from among the sons of Adam and took from them a covenant that they would propagate His message. This was after most human beings had perverted the Divine covenant, becoming ignorant of God, the supreme truth, and assigning likenesses to Him, and after Satan had turned them away from the course of innate nature and disposition, preventing them from worshipping God.

It was then that the Creator sent them a succession of Prophets, to remind them of the bounties that they had forgotten and to demand of them that they fulfill their primordial covenant with God, and to make manifest the hidden treasures and resplendent signs that the hand of Divine power and destiny had placed within them."

The school of thought established by the Prophets contains a specific view of the world and society which sets human thought on a distinctive course. Without doubt, the human being's interpretation of the world and the realities of life is a factor which determines a broad area of his efforts and activities.

The first lesson taught by heavenly religions and their most fundamental pillar consists of the Divine unity. At the beginning of their missions, the Prophets raised the cry of Divine unity, seeking thereby to liberate human thought from the bondage of illusion and humiliating subjection to false and mendacious divinities.

Within a short period, they conveyed their Divine message to all classes of society in their age – human beings and women, the old and the young, the rulers and the powerful. They strove to sever the bonds of servitude and to rend the veils of ignorance that were obscuring the mind and intellect of the human being. Through monotheism, they sought to advance society and cleanse the spirit of all peoples from the contamination of everything other than God.

Unlike the philosophers, the Messengers of God did not content themselves with training human beings' minds. Their efforts to convey the message of God's unity also penetrated human beings' hearts, and after cleansing their intellects, they filled the dwelling of the heart with that true love which is a necessary consequence of the human being's spiritual ascent.

It is this veritable love which impels human beings towards dynamic and passionate motion, and makes of them vibrant and creative personalities. Passionate love for the infinite source of existence is like the motor for human life; if it be taken away from the human being, he becomes a lifeless and motionless form.

The principle of Divine unity distinguishes the structure of the society in which it prevails from all other societies, with respect to both its internal and its external relationships; it creates a profound structural change in whatever society that accepts it, to such a degree that in its ability to reform both the individual and society, no other movement in human history can be compared with it.

In addition to the fact that it clarifies the relationship of the human being with the source of being, through restricting all worship to the Creator of the world Who is the absolute ruler and owner of all things, it also determines economic, political and legal relationships among human beings.

The word "mission" (ba'that) is used in Islamic texts to designate the function of the Prophets, a word that contains the sense of an outpouring of energy, swiftness in action, and unrelenting effort. No better or more precise word could be found to designate the profound and fundamental movement that is that of the Prophets.

The unity of sovereignty derives from the oneness of the Creator, because the sole authority for the fashioning of laws and the issuing of commands is His unique essence. It is the exclusive right of the Creator of being to command and prohibit, and for this reason the doctrine of Divine unity necessarily implies that none other than God has the right to exercise sovereign power or promulgate laws.

A full understanding of Divine unity goes beyond the recognition that the world has only one Creator; we must also recognize that it has only one sovereign and only one legislator, and that precisely this concept brings to an end the tyranny of oppressive and arbitrary rulers.

Whoever claims to possess sovereignty and the powers that flow from it has, in reality, claimed divinity, for one of the indications of polytheism is for the human being to imagine that he possesses sovereignty and an unconditional right to legislate. This contradicts the Divine unity and the fundamental beliefs of religion. It is a basic mission and concern of heavenly religions that they propagate the true meaning of the Divine unity in order to deliver the masses of humanity and save them – by their belief in the oneness of God – from slavery to unjust and arbitrary rule.

If it were not for the remarkable profundity and comprehensiveness exhibited by the contents of religion, and if it were not for the purposive movement of the Prophets, and their summons to awareness and perception, the conditions of human societies would never have changed. Today there would be no trace of humanity left, and we would have no path to convey us to the station of true love.

In the course of human history, it is only religion with its comprehensiveness and all-inclusive scope that has been able to come to the aid of human beings, to lead the masses by the hand, and play the most

crucial of roles in guiding them toward ascent and advancement.

No dimension of human existence has remained untouched by the positive effect of the Prophets, and their influence even on the formation and growth of human knowledge has been very extensive. If we examine the history of the missions of the Prophets and the swift, remarkable and unparalleled growth of their movements, we will see that more than anyone else, they have served as sources of profound intellectual change and transformation in society. It is they who have breathed into the form of humanity the spirit of brotherhood, love and philanthropy, and who have taught human beings the culture of justice, peace and unity.

God has attributed to Himself the reconciliation of hearts and the establishment of solidarity that occurred as a result of Islam and the efforts of the Noble Prophet:

"He is the God Who has reinforced you with His own aid and the assistance of the believers, and joined their hearts together. Were you to spend all the riches in the world thus to unite and reconcile them, you would be unable to do so. Rather, it is God Who has joined their hearts together for He is empowered over all things and all-knowing of the mysteries and benefits contained in all things." (8:62-66)

The Prophet David was able to establish the most just of all conceivable judicial and political structures on the basis of the Divine message he had received. The Qur'an says:

"O David, We have bestowed rule on earth upon you, so rule justly among human beings. Never follow your own inclinations, for this will lead you away from God's path. Those who stray from God's path will be chastised with a great punishment, for they have forgotten the day of reckoning." (38:26)

The celebrated historian, Will Durant, says: "Religion bestows a profound and masterly power and capacity on both society and the state. The rites and practices of religion give tranquility to the spirit, link the generations together, and bind individuals to each other, thus strengthening the fabric of society." [4](#)

If such a Divine movement had not taken place in human history, mankind would have been eternally entangled in the swamp of misguidance and humiliation and could never have entered the realm of virtue and perfection. Even those individuals who deny the Prophets have benefited in some way from the blessed legacy of those human beings of God, from the great cultural achievements they brought about which wrought transformations and fashioned history.

Furthermore, there is a profound and absolute link between the movement of the Prophets and knowledge in the absolute sense. Those periods in which historical movements were led by human beings of God were among the most brilliant epochs of human history with respect to scientific advancement.

The authentic teachings of Divine schools of thought, together with the foundations and principles they expounded, laid both a theoretical and a practical groundwork for appropriate social relations that permit the sciences to advance. Numerous are those philosophers and scientists throughout the world whose profound insights have been inspired in them by the Prophets, those guides to Divine unity.

- [1.](#) Ref. 17: 18–19.
- [2.](#) Mas'ala-yi Vahy, page 31.
- [3.](#) Allama Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Volume XI, page 60.
- [4.](#) Will Durant, The Story of Civilization.

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