

Lesson Seven: The End of Prophethood

„... Among them was either a predecessor who would name the one to follow or the follower who had been introduced by the predecessor.” (Sermon 1, Nahjul Balaghah)

In the previous lesson, we mentioned that human beings have never suffered from the absence of the Prophets or revealed Books. Here in the above statement, the Commander of the Faithful points out that all the Prophets have had the same direction, although their followers stand against each other today (Jews against Christians and Christians against Muslims...)

He actually means that there have been no dispute or quarrel among the Prophets, all of them traversing the same path, conveying the same message and knowing each other quite well. Everyone of them introduced the Prophet after him and talked honorably about the one before him. For example, Moses informed his followers that Jesus Christ would be his successor and Jesus Christ mentioned, in turn, the name of Moses. Thus, the disputes and wars running among the followers of the Prophets are quite illogical, originating from egotism and selfishness.

We see, therefore, that this situation (the successive coming of the Prophets, heavenly Books and the Prophets' followers such as the Imams) continued along with history and humanity's evolution till God appointed Muhammad peace and the mercy of God be upon him and upon his, descendants as the last Prophet.

In this regard, the Commander of the Faithful continues with the following words: «In this way, ages passed by and time rolled on, fathers passed away while sons took their places till God deputed Muhammad (peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants) as His Prophet, in fulfillment of His promise and in completion of His Prophethood.»

What has God promised which should definitely be fulfilled? The answer can be traced in the Qur'an where it gives good tidings, in the words of Jesus Christ, of the advent of Muhammad, saying:

“And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said. – O children of Israel, I am the apostle of God(sent)

to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad. ...It is He who has sent His Apostle with Guidance and the Religion of Truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion ... » (61: 69)

Thus, God's promise is the victory of Mohammed's religion (or prophethood) over all of humanity's intellectual courses and social experiences. This does not mean, however, that during the Prophet's lifetime this aim should have been achieved (as it was not achieved in practice due to the Prophet's departure), nor does it mean that the Prophet of Islam should, in the long run, overcome all religions, nations and schools of thought (although this has been realized many times in history and the Islamic government has approached a worldwide extent)

The proclamation of truth actually has a more delicate significance. In fact, the thought and mentality of human beings and their creativeness, initiative and innovation increasingly provide them with new ways and manners. Ideologies come into being, grow up and become widespread in this way, and thinkers and philosophers (such as Plato Socrates and ...) make their plans for humanity's social life or the basis of these new ways and manners.

Now, the path (school) of the Prophets will gain absolute victory over all the ways designed by human beings at a time when the whole content of the prophethood is given to the people. The path of Moses was certainly the path of God but no one claims that it was the most perfect path ever disclosed for humanity.

It was quite appropriate for the time of Moses but it lacked that much capacity to encompass various necessities of human life at all ages and times. It is likely that such man-made schools of thought shall appear in the course of the coming centuries as to be more perfect than the school (religion) of Moses.

Thus, Moses' religion was not the one to overcome all other schools and religions because the line of prophecy had not come to an end and the cup of prophethood had not overflowed. Moses filled a part of this cup and Jesus filled another part but they could not go forward because human beings did not have the capacity to absorb more. The people were, in effect, mentally weak. Otherwise, God would have bestowed on them the whole message of prophethood through His first appointed Prophet.

But when the people got the essential readiness, God deputed His Last Messenger to provide them with all (the knowledge and awareness) that could be contained in the human mind and to complete the culture of prophethood, fulfilling the divine promise and overcoming all religions and man-made schools of thought. [1](#)

The completion of prophethood speaks of the end of the line through which humanity connects itself directly with God, i.e. revelation. When this line comes to an end by the appearance of the Last Prophet there is no further need of revelation, Gabriel and so forth, because human beings themselves are thereafter capable of understanding new ways and manners of life and extracting them from what has been offered to them in a complete form by the Last Messenger of God, who stands at the end of the

chain of prophethood.

Now, going back once again to the Nahjul Balaghah, we see that all the Prophets preceding the last, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and so forth, had a commitment to believe in him, as they anticipated his coming: The Last Prophet stood in effect at the peak of prophethood and other Prophets who were below him in rank had to await him, believe in him (i.e. believe in his prophethood and message) and love him.

The Commander of the Faithful says, “God deputed Muhammad (peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants) as His Prophet, in fulfillment of His promise and in completion of His Prophethood. His pledge had been taken from the Prophets, his traits of character were well reputed and his birth was honorable.”

There is, however, a subtler significance in these statements and that is that the Prophet's commitment was neither a written nor an oral one. They had, rather, a natural and primordial commitment to heighten the thought and understanding of human beings and to make them ready for the advent of the Last Messenger.

This commitment is similar to the commitment of the teachers of lower grades towards the teachers of higher grades, although they may not know one another. In fact, the former are responsible to train the students' minds in such a proper way that the latter can make the more advanced matters and more extended concepts easily understood.

The Commander of the Faithful continues that the Prophet's «traits of character», i.e. his physical, familial, spiritual and behavioural signs and characteristics were known to one and all and thus a few number of people such as Salman of Fars could unprecedentedly, and without being exposed to his later teachings and programs, know him and come to a perfect belief in his religion. As to the birth of the Prophet, the Commander of the Faithful uses the adjective „honorable” to indicate that there was not weakness regarding this matter, i.e. the Prophet's father and mother (were both chaste and pious. Also, his birth was honorable in respect to circumstances of time and place.

Questions and Answers

Q. Can people, other than the Prophets establish connection with God through revelation? If so, can we conclude that after the end of prophethood too, God inspires His pure beings with some mysteries?

A. The answer to this question lies in the difference between revelation and inspiration. Revelation is the descension of specific concepts together with their special wordings to a Prophet. The Holy Qur'an is, in the eyes of the Muslims, a revelation sent down to the Prophet of Islam through Gabriel. It is completely different from what ordinary human beings receive in their hearts or understand in an unusual manner.

Theirs are inspirations that pure, faithful and sincere creatures of God occasionally receive. Thus,

revelation is far beyond inspiration and there is no matter if some people are inspired with some secrets in the period after the end of prophethood.

Q. If all the Prophets have had the same line and direction why have their followers, who have to practice their commandments, not followed the same way?

A. The reason is that the followers of the Prophets were gradually deceived, that is, as time passed, malicious and ignorant hands were put to work, beguiling the followers and distorting the teachings of the Prophets.

Q. What is wilayat- al-faqih (the guardianship of religious jurists)? Is it among the „Essentials of Religion” or among the „Secondary Principles” of Religion?

A. „Wilayat” means the guardianship of the community and faqih is a jurist or theologian. Thus, „wilayat- al-faqih” is the guardianship of the Islamic community by the religious theologians or jurists in the period when the immaculate Imam is absent. It is one of the „Secondary Principles of Religion”, a ruling system, and those who do not believe in it and deny it are disbelievers in Islam.

Q. What are common to monotheistic religions and what are their differences?

A. The doctrinal principles which they offer are common to all monotheistic religions (i.e. heavenly religions, for we do not have non-monotheistic heavenly religions), and the differences among them lie perhaps in the special decrees and commandments, each of them provides for that specific era in which it is founded.

Q. What is ijtihad?

A. Its literal meaning is «to try or endeavor» but in its technical sense it refers to a theologian's effort in understanding Islamic rules and regulations and deriving them from the Book (the Holy Qur'an), Traditions, etc. through the special skill he has acquired in his long course of discipleship under great Islamic experts and authorities. A person who has the ability to perform this job is called a «Mujtahid.».

Q. Why did the Prophet of Islam appear among the Arabs and not among the Persians, for example? Is it true that had he not appeared among the Arabs, the Arabian civilization would have been forgotten?

A. There is no definite reason concerning this matter but perhaps it can be argued that since Arabs were the most untrained and uneducated as well as the most quarrelsome nation of that time, and since they could more easily be affected and influenced than others, they possessed a proper background for the acceptance of the Prophet's invitation to Islam. Their lack of education and training was not, however, an obstacle to their acceptance of the invitation but, rather, caused more trouble and distress for the Prophet in attracting their attention.

Perhaps if this religion appeared among other nations, it would be more difficult to convince them. Arabs,

though fastened to the chain of superstitions, possessed certain privileges such as bravery, devotion, tolerance (against hardship) and freedom (not being under the rule of satanic powers) which made them the most deserving nation to be exposed to this heavenly religion of Islam.

As to the Arabian civilization it should be said that the Arabs, having a civilization, a culture and a history of their own, would not have been forgotten, had the Prophet not appeared among them, in the same way as the Turks, Tajiks, Spaniards and so forth have remained up to this day.

1. For a better understanding of this matter, refer to Martyr Murtada Mutahhari's The End of Prophecy.

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