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Lesson Two: Background to Prophethood

In the previous lesson, the background to the appointment of the Prophets was discussed with regard to a few statements of the *Nahjul Balaghah*. This lesson is aimed at completing what was mentioned before by analyzing in detail the peculiarities of two periods, which are of concern in our discussion, i.e. the pre-Islamic period or the 'Age of Ignorance' (the period before the appointment) and the Islamic period (the period after the appointment).

The Age of Ignorance

According to “Ali’s words, in the Age of Ignorance, the people suffered from two kinds of inadequacies: material and spiritual.

Material Inadequacy

In this period, the level of social welfare and security was very low. This is explicitly expressed both in the *Nahjul Balaghah* (in different sermons) and the Holy Qur’an. The Qur’an refers to the Age of Ignorance saying (106:4).

Spiritual Inadequacy

Spiritual inadequacy is the very ignorance and bewilderment of the people, i.e., they are devoid of a clear way of living and an aspiration for life. It is, in fact, a great suffering for man and society not to seek a sublime aim in life but only to try to provide for the daily requirements and necessities. Unfortunately, this state of living was characteristic of the 'time of strangulation' (Pahlavi reign), when life was without any aspiration and the best and most active individuals, in the eyes of people, were those who made their utmost effort to enjoy a life of welfare or those who did not have any involvement at all but spent their time in lewdness and buffoonery.

Generally speaking, the middle class, i.e., traders, workers, housewives, university students and others

were all endeavoring to provide for the ordinary requirements of their lives. The similitude of them was the similitude of the car, which refuels from one gasoline station to another gasoline being a means for it to constantly go from station to station.

In fact, the people worked in order to gain their daily bread, which enabled them, in turn, to work again. They actually spent their lives in eating bread and gaining bread. This state of living cannot be perfectly felt by the idealist youth of today who have specific aims and aspirations in mind, who work for the establishment of the true Islamic government and who seek the fall of the superpowers. It is the existence of these aspirations in the society of today which reveals the spiritual inadequacy (lack of aims and aspirations) of the society during the Pahlavi rule.

Society during the 'Age of Ignorance', i.e. before the appointment and revolution of the Prophet, was likewise an aimless and deviated society. The people were bewildered. They turned round themselves just like the 'mill donkey' that permanently turns round the millstone, perhaps traversing ten or fifteen kilometers a day, but never moving more than a short distance away from the mill. They were ignorant but more ignorant than them were those who followed destructive aims and aspirations, which, if realized, would destroy them as well as the whole community.

In this regard the Holy Qur'an says:

“Hast thou not seen those who exchanged the bounty of God with unthankfulness, and caused their people to dwell in the abode of ruin? –Gehenna, wherein they are roasted, – an evil establishment!” (14:28-29)

In fact, all the holders of power and authoritative rulers of the world, all the great capitalists who commit any crime to establish their vast economic networks and all those who have brought about great corruption upon the earth in the course of history can be categorized among the spiritually deviated people with destructive aims and aspirations.

To say the least, it was in such a deviated society and among such a misled people that the Prophets were appointed to prophethood. The most outstanding characteristic of such a society is the alienation of man which causes the development of material aspirations in a group of people who follow the aim of making material, monopolies and increasing the rate of material products which, in turn, results in the poverty of other people.

The Commander of the Faithful says, “I never saw an ample blessing (wealth) unless beside it I saw a trampled right.” Poverty gives rise to class distinctions which bring about deeper gaps among the different classes of people and causes other problems such as the unjust division of social authority under which rich classes gain more power than others, although money is not always efficacious in gaining power, but sometimes social power, too, is effective in making use of money and creating material monopolies.

Thus, both social and economic factors are influential in the appearance of tyranny, exploitation, ignorance and deceit in a society where perverse and destructive aims have replaced noble aims and aspirations.

This is where Islamic analysis and material analysis come face to face, for according to materialists, mental possessions, beliefs and whatever comprises one's soul, mind and thought originate from one's 'class position' which includes the social, economic and even the cultural dimensions of life, whereas the Islamic viewpoint is that the origin of all pressures and adversities existing in a society results from the dominance of ignorance and alienation in that society. Islam says that it is alienation which brings about class distinctions and which divides society into two classes, i.e. the oppressed and the oppressors.

Spiritual alienation is, therefore, an outstanding characteristic of the Age of Ignorance and the Prophets appear, in effect, to lead the people to the straight path and to remove their spiritual depravities. This is what the Commander of the Faithful emphasizes in the second Sermon of the *Nahjul Balaghah* which was previously mentioned and which is hereunder reviewed and explained in detail.

He says, "I also stand witness that Muhammad, peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants, is His slave and His Prophet, sent him with the illustrious religion, effective emblem, written Book, effulgent light, sparkling gleam and decisive injunction in order to dispel *doubts (shubuhah)* present clear proofs ... „

Shubuha is the plural form of '*shubha*' and means doubts and differences of opinion, which exist, in the human mind and thought as regards truth and falsehood. These doubts and differences appear, as far as the people's beliefs are concerned, when the society at large goes astray. In fact, society comes to believe that it lacks reality and to disbelieve the most manifest realities.

For instance, during the rule of the previous regime, the people had come to believe in and accept 'monarchy' which was an untrue phenomenon, and had completely forgotten a clear and undeniable reality named, 'Imamat'.

Thus, the Prophet was sent by God to remove mental doubts and errors and to "present clear proofs," as the Commander of the Faithful says i.e. to save people from the perplexity of philosophical reasoning by offering them clear proofs. This does not mean, however, that such reasonings are basically useless and philosophy must be abandoned.

Some people today, find fault with Islamic philosophy, the classic philosophy of Islam on the false basis that it is mixed with Greek philosophy. They insinuate that Islamic philosophy is mixed with Aristotelian philosophy.

They do not realize that Islamic scholars and philosophers, centuries ago, cleansed Islamic philosophy of Greek philosophy. Moreover, they are unaware of the fact that a philosophy with a heavenly world-view cannot be mixed with a philosophy having a material world-view, although they may share some

common aspects.

Thus, philosophy should not be abandoned, although philosophical reasoning is not very effective in awakening and provoking people at a time when a revolution is to be conceived. At such a time, only the clearest proofs and reasoning's can make the people aware of the prevailing situations, the wrong ways upon which they step and the right path they should choose.

This has been the manner of all Prophets of God. They called people to the belief in the One God. They called them to their nature and to their natural beliefs, without exposing them to ordinary, spiritual reasoning's.

In the case of the Islamic Revolution of Iran the reasoning's of the intellectuals for fighting the West never contented the least number of people because the intellectuals themselves were not satisfied with their own reasoning's due to the fact that they never made their appearance in the battle arena, whereas the words and lectures of the Imam Khomeini, which contained clear realities concerning the dependence of the tyrannical regime of Pahlavi on the superpowers and the prevention of the society from practicing their religion (Islam), doctrinal beliefs and worship, could be perfectly understood by the people, and finally resulted in that great movement in our society. It can be concluded, therefore, that the Prophets presented clear proofs and reasoning's which not only elicited but also which the middle class of people could understand and then follow naturally.

The Commander of the Faithful continues to enumerate the tasks of the Prophet saying, administer warning through signs and to warn of punishments.» In fact, he means that the Prophet came to acquaint the people with the signs of chastisement and with the punishments, which happened to the past nations in the course of history, and to tell them that they would also be afflicted with the same punishments if they followed the manners of those nations.

Then he portrays the situations during the Age of Ignorance (before the appointment of the Prophet) and points out the troubles and calamities which endangered the minds, hearts and the spirituality of the people, which blocked the ways of guidance to them and which led them astray – the troubles which did not have anything to do with the material life and apparent welfare of the people.

He says “At that time, people had fallen in to vices, whereby the rope of religion had been broken, the pillars of belief had been shaken, principles had been sacrilege, systems had become topsy turvy, openings were narrow, passages were dark, guidance was unknown and darkness prevailed. God was being disobeyed. Satan was given support and belief had been forsaken. As a result, pillars of religion fell down, its traces could not be discerned, its passages had been destroyed and its streets had fallen into decay.”

The general message of these words is that the society in which the Prophets were appointed to prophethood was devoid of guidance and the Prophets' mission was to lead the people to the straight path so that they could forsake the state of indifference prevailing among them and seek good aims and

aspirations.

As was mentioned before, should a motive more sublime and nobler than eating, drinking and providing for the ordinary requirements of life become dominant in the people's efforts and endeavors and should destructive aims and aspirations forsake society, then social, political and economic conditions will prosper, class distinctions will vanish and the idols of wealth and power will be smashed.

This was experienced during early Islam, at the time of all the Prophets and even in our own revolutionary society (if the opponents let us finish this experience). This is why we believe that our Islamic Revolution has rendered useless all the social, political and revolutionary formulas which support the idea that movements and revolutions originate from material motives, class distinctions and class quarrels in societies which have apparently political systems of their own and which are not subject to colonial rule (like Iran during the Pahlavi regime).

What happened in Iran was exactly the experience of the Prophets, i.e. the people who lived in a mentally-perverted society were awakened by factors of guidance and hurried towards their natural promise to worship naught but God, to appreciate God's plentiful blessings and to believe in their own social power.

Guided in such a way, these people who had for many years been subjected to the oppression and coercion of the so-called masters and kings, suddenly arose, revolted by the millions and brought about the Islamic Revolution. Today, to continue the Revolution and to guarantee its survival, it is necessary to keep the people's mental guidance intact in order to deepen their belief in God and Islam and to make them more aware of their human dignity and responsibility.

The Commander of the Faithful continues his Sermon with the following statements, providing more details about the mental and spiritual atmosphere of the Age of Ignorance (before the appearance of the Prophet). He says „ ... People obeyed Satan and tread his paths. They sought water from his watering places. Through them, Satan's emblems flew and his standard was raised in vices, which trampled the people under their hoofs, and treaded upon them with their feet. The vices stood on their toes (in full stature) and the people immersed in them were strayed, perplexed, ignorant and seduced as though in a good house with bad neighbors. Instead of sleep they had wakefulness and for antimony they had tears in the eyes ... “.

In fact, he believes that the origin of all adversities, oppressions, corruptions, sufferings, disorders and crimes existing in society during the Age of Ignorance, resulted from obedience to the Satan's of the time who, with reliance on their social authority, i.e. wealth, power and deceit, wasted God's noble blessings and devastated the plentiful, vital resources of the time with unthankfulness and the transient lives of the people or exploited them for their own benefit, regardless of what happened to the real owners of those valuable resources.

It was on the basis of such obedience that the people went only the ways which the masters and

dominant groups showed them, the ways which ended in no desired destination, which brought them nothing but increasing poverty, ignorance and captivity and which provided the dominant groups of society, i.e. the creators of evil, corruption and decadence, with their personal interests.

In the Islamic world-view, the human being is considered a thoughtful, innovative and independent creature. From these three characteristics, the power of thinking of the human being is more important than others, for it provides one with awareness, which enables one to move and make progress.

Thus, the most significant and fundamental factor for the movement of history and society are the knowledge and awareness, which stimulate human beings to action. It is awareness, which induces humanity to move and act. In the course of history spontaneous actions and movements have never resulted in a Revolution.

Maxim Gorki in his book, *Mother*, endeavors to prove that it was the labor movements which gave rise to the October Revolution in Russia, whereas a careful study of his book indicates that these blind movements could obtain no results. In fact, without the existence of awareness and guidance, the spontaneous movements brought about in the history of revolutions could never end in the desired aims.

Thus, class conflicts and wars, which materialists emphasize as the origin of all movements and revolutions, have not been effective at all. Rather, the most significant factor for the movement of history and society has been understanding, guidance and stimulating awareness. Without these, all actions and endeavors have usually ended in undesired effects, which can be observed in a great number of the revolutions throughout the world.

Now, since awareness is the main source of inspiration in societies in which ignorance is dominant, the antihuman elements (holders of corrupt authority), in order to retain their tyrannical system, have always tried to stifle any liberating thought by exposing people's minds to stupefaction and poisonous instructions and to destroy the origins of consciousness.

As a result, in such societies, the people follow only the desires of these satans, learn only what they teach and, like sheep, go only towards the water to which they are led by these treacherous shepherds („they sought water from his watering places”).

It is quite painful that, in the light of the sacrifices and endeavors of the oppressed people, those who stand against the oppressors and criminals are usually defeated and killed, while the chiefs of the atheists are rarely killed. For instance, Mu'awiya, the manifest example of blasphemy, never accepted “Ali's call to challenge him in person because, as a Satan, his emblems flew through the deprived people who have always been employed in the course of history as a ladder which the arrogant have climbed to approach their self-centeredness, dominance and power.

The life of the deprived has always been blended with fear, anxiety, confusion, poverty, hunger, ignorance, disgrace and lack of awareness. This has been an outstanding characteristic of the ages of

ignorance. But according to the principles of our religion and Islamic ideology and according to the Holy Qur'an, which says, "***We have honored the children of Adam***", human beings are honorable. In fact, the belief in the Oneness of God is followed in Islamic thought by the dignity and worth of human beings.

Generally speaking, those societies in which human beings are honored because of believing in God and having will-power, and not on the basis of their social positions, move towards perfection and prosperity; while those societies which grant no worth to human beings and their thoughts do not tread the path of improvement and goodness and are usually administered through dictatorship.

Today, other than the Iranian community upon which Islam has shed its light, all human communities throughout the world are ruled either by black strangulation (such as the socialist communities in which the Proletariat dictatorship is dominant and the so-called supporters of the labor classes, i.e. their leaders, have never felt the hardship and poverty of the laborers) or by despotism prevalent in such despotic countries as Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and so forth.

There are, however, other communities (Western ones) which are ruled by the stupefaction of the people, i.e. keeping the people amused with passions, sexual matters, alcoholic drinks and other means of corruption and adversity.

It is only the Islamic community, which establishes equal rights for all the people, whether they be workers, physicians or peasants. But that very Islamic community will keep aloof from Islam, should decision-making, judgment and awareness be confined to a special class of people (whoever they might be) and others is compelled to follow them blindly.

On the whole, what the Commander of the Faithful says is that in societies which are dominated by ignorance and alienation, although humility and worthlessness cast shadows over all human aims and aspirations and hunger, horror, disease, captivity, corruption and bewilderment threaten the society, the people are surprisingly tolerant and in agreement with the oppressors. This is what he calls sedition and calamity (*fetna*), something that brings a person to the state of consternation and deception, which causes damage to one's heart and mind and which destroys one's life completely. It is, in fact, under these circumstances that the Prophets appear.

They do not appear merely to remove poverty, to establish social welfare, to eliminate ignorance and to teach the people how to read and write. But each of these is a part of a great whole, which comprises the aims of the Prophets. The Prophets' aim is to eradicate human deviation, alienation and bewilderment and to give one spiritual elevation. The realization of this aim will, however, be followed by material welfare, social security, eradication of ignorance and class distinctions and so forth.

Questions and Answers

Q. You said that alienation gives rise to class distinctions. Now what are the causes of alienation?

A. The cause of alienation is the lack of the use of the power of thinking, for this faculty can be effective only if it is trained, educated and used properly. It is just like a very powerful projector, which can offer its sparkling nature only if it, is clean and not covered by dust and mist. The power of thinking may lose its usefulness under the influence of various factors, the most important of which being whims and passions.

Of course, other spiritual factors as well as the holders of worldly power are also effective in this respect, but material and economic factors alone should not be regarded as a basis for lack of thinking and alienation. Thinking is the faculty by which the human being analyzes different matters and comes to a general conclusion. It is, therefore, independent and can provide people with reasons concerning their doings.

Q. In one of his sermons, 'Ali says, "I shall bring out the truth from falsehood.» How do you interpret the leftists' justification of the 'dialectic conflict' on the basis of this statement?

This statement cannot justify A. 'Dialectic conflict'. By this statement he implies that he can analyze a collection of saying in which right and wrong have been mixed, distinguish the right from the wrong and introduce it to the people. This is the art of all the thinkers who know the truth.

Q. What is a classless, monotheistic society? Is monotheism and class not two contradictory notions?

A. A classless society is one in which there is no legal distinction among different groups of people and all the individuals are provided with equal rights and opportunities. In such a society, every individual makes efforts in accordance with one's physical and mental faculties and whatever one earns belongs to one's self. No one has the right to ask another for a part of what one has earned. Of course, if an individual kept a long distance from others, that person would be advised to assist them. Islam holds equal possibilities and opportunities for all individuals.

Every one has the right to educate one's self, to enhance one's knowledge, to take one's desired job, to work in the best possible manner and so forth. At the same time, lazy people are not permitted in Islam to have a share in what hardworking people acquire. In Islam the people are free to work and endeavor for themselves, contrary to socialist communities in which all productive jobs and services are a monopoly of the governments and thus being wrongly called classless.

As to the 'monotheistic society', it should be stated that it is a society in which all the people stand at the same level so far as legal, judicial and social laws and regulations are concerned. In a monotheistic society, there is no difference between the ruler and a layman before the law. A Jew and a Muslim are equally treated (the judge calls 'Ali and the Jew to his presence and addresses both of them in the same manner).

A monotheistic society is an Islamic society and a classless one is also Islamic but only within the limits, which were explained above. We do not believe in the classless society, which Marxists define. We do

not believe in what they call class, classlessness and class war. These are all Marxist concepts which the group of so-called Mujahidin (the anti-Islamic group of hypocrites) have mixed with Islamic notions to deceive people. To say the least, society should either be called 'monotheistic', which is in conformity with Islamic culture, or classless (as defined by the Mujahidin) which reminds one of Marxist ideology.

Q. Are all human beings equipped with equal talents and faculties?

A. No, not all human beings enjoy the same talents and faculties and not all of them are equal in understanding different matters and performing various tasks. In fact, every individual has a talent for certain types of work and no one is found to be devoid of certain gifts and talents.

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