

Reply to Several Questions

First Question

If man's true objective is to reach proximity with Allah and if man experiences the greatest and the most lasting pleasures as a result of reaching it, how is it that the majority of people are not bent on having this fulfilled, even though they all seek pleasure and prosperity by nature?

In reply to this question, it must be said that man's endeavour to reach true perfection and prosperity and to reap benefit of its pleasure hinges on recognition and confirmation of its being pleasant. As the majority of the people do not know the main objective behind creation and their own true perfection as is due and as they have not tasted the pleasure of reaching it, they do not seek to find and obtain it. They however, recognize material and worldly perfection and sense the pleasure of reaching them.

For this reason, they use up all their energy to reach them, even though the people are different in their choice of worldly goods and states and (even though) each person, on the basis of his own perception and discernment, regards a group of these perfections as more important and more valuable or as less expensive and easier to find and thus exerts his efforts mainly to reach it.

Even though recognition of the true perfection has an innate basis, it will not spontaneously reach the degree of sufficient awareness and consciousness in the majority of the people and requires sound guidance and training.

For this purpose, one of the greatest responsibilities of the messengers is to awaken this innate unconscious instinct and to remind (the people) of the forgotten divine covenant.

وَاصْطَفَى سُبْحَانَهُ مِنْ وَلَدِهِ أَنْبِيَاءَ أَخَذَ عَلَى الْوَحْيِ مِيثَاقَهُمْ، وَعَلَى تَبْلِيغِ الرِّسَالَةِ أَمَانَتَهُمْ، لَمَّا بَدَّلَ أَكْثَرُ خَلْقِهِ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ إِلَيْهِمْ، فَجَهِلُوا حَقَّهُ، وَاتَّخَذُوا الْأَنْدَادَ مَعَهُ، وَاجْتَالَتْهُمْ الشَّيَاطِينُ عَنْ مَعْرِفَتِهِ، وَاقْتَطَعَتْهُمْ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ، فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولَهُ، وَوَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِيَاءَهُ، لِيَسْتَأْذِنُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ، وَيَذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ نِعْمَتِهِ، وَيَحْتَجُّوا عَلَيْهِمْ بِالتَّبْلِيغِ، وَيُثِيرُوا لَهُمْ دَفَائِنَ الْعُقُولِ، وَيُرُوهُمْ آيَاتِ الْمَقْدِرَةِ: مِنْ سَفْفِ فَوْقَهُمْ مَرْفُوعٍ، وَمِهَادِ تَحْتَهُمْ مَوْضُوعٍ، وَمَعَايِشِ تُحْيِيهِمْ، وَأَجَالِ تُفْنِيهِمْ، وَأَوْصَابِ تُهْرِمُهُمْ، وَأَحْدَاثِ تَتَابَعُ عَلَيْهِمْ

“From his (Adam’s) progeny Allah chose prophets and took their pledge for His revelation and for carrying His message as their trust. In course of time many people perverted Allah’s trust with them and ignored His position and took compeers along with Him. Satan turned them away from knowing Him and kept them aloof from His worship. Then Allah sent His Messengers and series of His prophets towards them to get them to fulfill the pledges of His creation, to recall to them His bounties, to exhort them by preaching, to unveil before them the hidden virtues of wisdom and show them the signs of His Omnipotence namely the sky which is raised over them, the earth that is placed beneath them, means of living that sustain them, deaths that make them die, ailments that turn them old and incidents that successively betake them.”¹

At this juncture, this grand responsibility is vested with people who have well recognized the path of the messengers and who have the power to make it known to others, so as to bring to the right track those who have swerved from the highways of prosperity and to inform them of their innate desire.

Second Question

If the main goal behind man's creation is to reach such a status, then why has man's nature been vested with instincts which constantly draw him towards material pleasures and alluring appearances of the world and which preclude him from proceeding towards the major goal? Is not this a breach of purpose and contrary to wisdom? And if in place of these, there were motives which directed man only towards Allah and the Hereafter, would it not have been more compatible with this objective?

To clarify the answer to this question, two points should be taken into consideration:

(1) The value of man's perfection lies in its being voluntary. This privilege has carried man to the state where he is served and worshipped by the angels. To promote the operation of the will–power, there must forcibly be various means and different attraction, so that treading the path of prosperity would not be done by force and by compulsion.

(2) As man's development is gradual and as it is possessed of linear stages, it is necessary for the will–power to carry on its operation for a considerable length of time, so that in each phase, man could freely choose his way and even change direction.

These two points reveal the secret behind man's worldly and gradual life. Evidently, man's survival in the world of movement, change and gradual development necessitates means, tools, conditions and specific facilities. In fact, natural instincts are motives to provide these means and conditions. In the meantime, they also pave the way for the will–power and if the correct path is chosen, they can considerably promote man's progress towards the main objective and the ultimate perfection. As a consequence, their presence is not contradictory to the motive behind creation. Rather, their inexistence is contrary to Allah's absolute wisdom.

Third Question

Supposing that man's ultimate perfection is in attaining curb with Allah and in giving up all demands and wishes to reach it and supposing that reaching this position is possible, such an aspiration would undoubtedly exist only in a case of a rare number of individuals. Consequently, reaching the desired perfection is exclusive to them. And others, who constitute the majority of the people, are deprived of it.

In this case, can it be said that only the select individuals deserve the name of man and that the others are in fact animals that have no vestige of humanity other than their appearance and are all doomed to eternal adversity and wretchedness?

In response to this question, it must be said:

As we have repeatedly noted, man's true perfection has various stages. If all people cannot reach its greatest degree, they can get to its lowest state. This can be materialized by believing in Allah and taking a step in the way of His servitude. Dispensing with all demands and using all powers for Allah's satisfaction is a prerequisite of reaching the greater degrees.

Of course, the signs deriving from proximity with Allah are not the same in all phases. For example, full knowledge of the realities, power to create anything or complete pleasure in seeing Allah is not fulfilled for every believer in this world. But those who safeguard their belief to the end of their lives and who do not dispense with their faith due to greatness of sin and offence will ultimately reach eternal prosperity, even though it might take long and even though, in the course of it, the believers might undergo difficult and painful stages as punishment of their indecent deeds.

It goes without saying that reaching eternal prosperity and everlasting paradise also have various degrees. In the world hereafter, each person will be rewarded commensurate with the basis of his knowledge, belief, gravity of deeds and ethics. Perhaps in each state, the individuals have the capacity to perceive the pleasures of that state alone and their will-power would tend towards reaching them.

As a result, it is not true that whoever does not reach the peak of human perfection and the ultimate point of proximity with Allah does not deserve to be called human and will finally be doomed to eternal wretchedness and suffering.

1. Nahjul – Balaghah, First Sermon

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