

Section One: The Necessity of Prophethood

General objectives

After studying this discourse, the students are expected:

1. To realize the rational necessity of prophethood;
2. To be acquainted with the views of philosophers and scholastic theologians about revelation; and
3. To understand the perspective of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* regarding revelation.

Introduction

The issue of prophethood [*nubuwwah*] or apostleship [*risālah*] is the subject of many pages of voluminous history books—the accounts of men who spent their lives conveying the message of God to His servants and experienced different afflictions along this way.

Here, we do not need to scan the pages of history to ascertain their existence because the signs of their existence are so obvious for us that there is no room for doubt. When our eyes are attracted to the architectural magnificence of churches or mosques, when our ears are drawn to the melodious recitation of the Qur'an or the call to prayer [*adhān*], and when we observe faithful men and women sincerely and earnestly treading the path shown by the apostles of God (‘a), 1 we can see within ourselves the luminous visage of the prophets (‘a).

By hearing the sound of the invitation of the prophets (‘a, seeing their celestial countenances and observing their saintly conduct, so many men and women were attracted to and believed in them. This faith [*īmān*] is based on the testimony of human nature [*fiṭrah*] which smells the familiar scent of the celestial world in the persons of the prophets (‘a) and acknowledges their truthfulness or rightfulness without the need for rational investigation. However, this faith does not close the door for reflection [*ta'ammul*] and thinking. In fact, it opens it wide. For those who have not yet embraced the faith, thinking

can be a fertile ground for the growth of the seeds of faith while for those who have faith, it serves as a means of defending the faith and nurturing and cultivating the bud of belief [*'aqḍdah*].

This point shows that the rational study or examination of prophethood is not an indispensable condition of faith in the prophets (*'a*) but only substantiates or supplements this faith.

As the door for thinking about prophethood is now open, questions must be given answers which the intellect or reason [*'aqḥ*] can grasp well. This is exactly the concern of this chapter, and the following questions will be addressed:

1. Why must there be prophets in the lives of humankind? (The necessity of prophethood)
2. What services and benefits have the prophets rendered to mankind? (The blessings of the prophets (*'a*))
3. How did the prophets communicate with God and receive His message? (Revelation)
4. How can we be certain about the truthfulness of their claims to prophethood? (Miracles)
5. Assuming that their presence is necessary, why has the caravan of prophethood ceased to move? (Finality of the prophethood)

In the history of Islamic thought, the debate on the *necessity* of prophethood has delved more into answering the following question: Why must God have sent prophets to mankind? Muslim scholars have tried to explain the philosophy behind the sending down of the prophets (*'a*) which is related to the 'action of God'.

However, there is another question here and that is: Why should we humans pay heed and take seriously the message and invitation of the apostles (*'a*)?

Could we not bother to take their invitation into account and just go along our way and pass by without paying attention to them? This question (regarding the human need to follow the prophets (*'a*)) is of immense importance nowadays. In Islamic philosophy and theology books, the following question is also addressed: Why should man conduct research and investigation about the prophets (*'a*)?

However, this question has not been dealt with at great length. Perhaps, the reason for this is that it is believed that if the philosophy behind the sending down of prophets (*'a*) is established, the philosophy behind the human need to follow the prophets (*'a*) will also be proven.

Muslim scholars have answered these questions by first dealing with God and His Action, and concluding with man and his need to follow the prophets (*'a*). Nowadays, however, there are some transcendent theosophers [*muta'allihḥn*] who start by studying man and his need to follow the prophets

(‘a), and concluding with God and His Action (sending down of the prophets (‘a)). This approach is widely adopted in the Christian world but is also to some extent observed in the works of Muslim scholars.

In this book, we shall follow the dominant approach in the books of Islamic philosophy and theology. By explaining the ‘Action of God’ (the necessity of sending down of the prophets (‘a)), we shall also establish the human need to follow the prophets (‘a).

The necessity of prophethood from the Islamic theological perspective

Scholastic theology or theology [*‘ilm al-kalām* or *kalām*], which is one of the important branches of Islamic sciences, has a long precedence. Scholastic theologians or theologians [*mutakallimīn*] are those who expound religious beliefs and defend them against the misgivings and doubts expressed by others. Sometimes, these misgivings and doubts originate from outside the Islamic world. For example, whenever the principle of the existence of God or monotheism [*tawḥīd*] was under attack, all Muslim theologians would come forward to defend it. However, there have also been times when doubts or misgivings were expressed by Muslims against the beliefs of fellow Muslims, and this has led to the emergence of different groups of theologians.

In addition, theologians have also differed about the methods of defending their religious beliefs. Some of them such as the Mu‘tazilites [*Mu‘tazilah*] preferred the rational method while others such as the Ash‘arites [*Ash‘irah*] did not much incline to rational theorization. In terms of method, the Shā‘ah² theology has many similarities to that of the Mu‘tazilites but has fundamental differences with it with regard to the beliefs being defended.³

In this section, we shall use the arguments advanced by a great Shā‘ah theologian, Sayyid Murtaḥḥ.⁴

Through use of their intellect, human beings know that some things are good while others are bad, and to know this, they are in no need of revelation [*wahī*]. Without citing any basis from revelation, we know that justice, honesty and trustworthiness are good and that injustice and violation of the rights of others are bad.⁵

Human beings not only understand the goodness of justice and gratitude for the kindness and benevolence of others but also consider themselves bound to observe justice and express gratitude towards others. In other words, the intellect is not only aware that justice is good but also knows that one must behave according to justice and not oppose it. Perception of the necessity and expediency of doing an action does not necessarily mean perception of its goodness and wholesomeness. Theologians have discussed at length the rational perception of duties (rational obligation).

The emphasis on the importance of intellect in perceiving what is good or bad and identifying

responsibility shows the high station of the intellect in the life of humankind. In the Islamic traditions, the intellect is described as the “inner apostle” [*rasūl-e batin*]. Nevertheless, such an expression should not make us negligent of its definitional scope and limitations.

Attention to the scope and limitation of the intellect and its function is the basis of the theological proof [*burhān-e kalām*] for the necessity of prophethood. Some of its limitations are as follows:

1. It is true that the intellect is capable of identifying the general principles underlying good and bad actions, but it is incapable of identifying particular cases in which a person is more involved in his practical life. Whenever the rational intellect [*‘aql-e istidlāl*] intends to identify the ruling on specific cases, it often makes mistakes. The human intellect perceives that expressing gratitude to God is both good and obligatory, but it does not know which actions express such gratitude. The intellect is conscious of the necessity of respecting the rights of others, but it does not know exactly how to respect those rights nor does it know precisely what those rights are.

2. No doubt, the purpose of identifying good and bad actions is for people to train themselves to do good deeds and refrain from evil deeds. The truth of the matter, however, is that just to identify the goodness of actions and to sense the rational duty to do them does not automatically turn into action. In the same manner, mere identification of wicked acts does not translate into abandonment of the same. In addition to perception of an act’s goodness and the feeling of having a sense of duty, the performance of a voluntary action depends on the decision and will of a person. The nature of human will and the manner of decision-making are also completely intertwined with a person’s feelings, inclinations and desires.

Many people know that it is detestable to misappropriate the property of others, but the pressure of hunger can lead them away from this natural sense of responsibility and urge them to sacrifice their will at the altar of needs and inclinations.

It is of immense importance to pay attention to the crucial role of feelings and emotions and it bespeaks of the fact that the guidance or direction of man toward perfection and deliverance does not depend solely on his intellect and reason. In fact, training or upbringing must also be given importance in such a way that feelings and emotions also assist man and not hinder him along the path of doing wholesome and righteous deeds.

The ethicists or moral teachers who reflect much on the elements of moral or righteous deeds inform us that the intellect is sometimes subdued by the desire [*hawā*] and delegates the guidance or stewardship of the ship of humanity’s existence to feelings and emotions. Worse still, apart from delegating the captainship of the ship of existence to the feelings and emotions, at times it even makes itself their slave. Ethicists call such intellect the “satanic intellect” [*‘aql-e shaytan*] which indulges in trickery to satiate bestial instincts and desires. As such, if man is supposed to attain salvation by doing righteous deeds and following the dictates of his reason, his feelings and emotions must be disciplined so as to abide by the intellect, and not the other way around.

Yea, it is a reality that God has made the intellect a light to show the way leading to man's salvation, but it is also a fact that this beam does not shed light on every perspective of this way. Its brightness is not so strong that a breeze emitting from the carnal desires cannot blow it out.

Now, the following question can be raised: Does God truly intend to guide us or not? If not, why has He created the light of reason in human beings? If He does intend to guide humankind toward salvation and felicity—as He must be based on His infinite mercy—then He who knows everything, including the limitations of the “inner apostle”, would certainly send assistance so as to enhance the brightness of the light as well as to make it safe from the whirlwind of whims and caprice.

If God does not want to invite people to do righteous deeds, why has He bestowed them with an intellect which urges them towards righteousness? If He wants to guide humanity towards felicity through righteous deeds, why would He not supplement or complement the intellect's invitation through revelation? If one is serious in inviting a friend and knows that by just reading an invitation the friend will not come, would he not send a representative to accompany the friend so that he would be assured of him coming?

The same is true in the case of God's invitation to do righteous deeds and worship Him [*‘ubūdiyyah*]. Out of His grace, He bestowed man with the intellect. In the same manner, out of His grace, He sent His chosen ones to affirm the intellect's invitation and assist humanity by clearly showing the different dimensions of the way to salvation. In addition, by linking righteous deeds to everlasting bliss in the hereafter and evil deeds to eternal damnation in the afterlife, humanity's feelings and emotions were resolutely set at the service of their intellects.

If a person were to truly understand that by doing righteous deeds he would attain divine proximity [*qurb-e ilāhī*], and that divine pleasure or satisfaction, which manifests in various forms, is the most pleasant of all things, would he not desire to perform more and more righteous deeds? Theologians call these acts of God “grace” [*luḡf*] and consider them incumbent upon Him, for He does not withhold any grace that does not result in some type of harm or corruption among creation.

Therefore, the theologian's approach is essentially based on the fact that God has invited man in accordance with the invitation of the intellect to good, but that without the sending down of apostles (‘a) this invitation is less productive and imperfect. Similarly, without the sending down of revelation the light of the intellect will not be sufficiently bright. He who, out of His grace, endows humanity with the intellect also grants the religion and revelation so as to make the light of reason brilliant enough to assist the intellect against whims and caprice by linking everlasting felicity to righteous deeds. The necessity of prophethood from the Islamic philosophical perspective

Although Islamic philosophy [*falsafah* or *‘ikmah*]⁶ is rooted in Qur'anic wisdom and Islamic traditions, especially the sayings of Imam⁷ ‘Alī (‘a), there is no doubt that its organization or systematization into an organized body of knowledge is the result of the acquaintance of Muslim scholars with Greek thoughts with the translation [into Arabic] of their works during the second and third century AH. The

Islamic civilization has produced great philosophers the most prominent of whom are [Fārābī](#),⁸ Ibn Sīnā,⁹ Shaykh al-Ishrāq,¹⁰ and ʿAdr ad-Dīn Shīrāzī, well known as Mullā ʿAdrā.¹¹ Islamic philosophy deals not only with the common and prevailing subjects in Greek philosophy but also with subjects that are not covered by Greek philosophers. The most important of these are the issues of Resurrection [*maʿād*] and prophethood [*nubuwwah*]. The philosophical discussion on prophethood focuses more on divine revelation, but there is also an examination of the necessity of sending prophets as the conveyers of the divine revelation. The approach which is labeled “proof of general guidance” [*burhān-e hidāyat-e ʿammeh*] is a legacy of Muslim philosophers in this field.¹²

In this section of the book, we shall present the following arguments:

1. Wherever you look at the infinite creation of God, in addition to the order of existence you can also observe a sort of open and hidden guidance and direction everywhere. The order of a being shows the organization and coordination of its different components and the absence of contradiction and conflict. However, its guidance means that God has directed it towards a certain destination. God has not created contingent beings [*mawjūdāt-e imkānī*] just to be abandoned later. Rather, apart from designing an order or system of creation, He has provided a sort of guidance according to the natural constitution of each being:

﴿ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى ﴾

“Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.”¹³

God created the honeybee and then taught it a wonderful system of livelihood and attainment of perfection. If we try to liken the honeybee’s system of life to a strong and organized ship, the instincts which are actually God’s inspirations [*ilhām*] serve as the captain who will direct it toward its predefined destination:



﴿ وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنِ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ ﴾

“And your Lord inspired the bee [saying]: ‘Make your home in the mountains, and on the trees and the trellises that they erect.’”¹⁴

One plants a delicate seed and after sometime it grows, becomes a tree and bears sweet and nutritious

fruit. Certainly, inside the small seed are wonderful elements that remain there until it becomes a full grown tree. In every living thing, there is a sort of program that guides its life through the rocky roads of the material or natural world—which is the arena of struggle and conflict—to a certain destination. Muslim philosophers have called this “the principle of general guidance” [aḥl-e hidāyat-e ʿimmeh].

It is said that the credibility of the above mentioned principle is not anchored in a defective inductive reasoning or limited observation, but rather on a proof that bespeaks of the existence of a motive and purpose in the creation of every creature or thing. The reason behind this is that God is All-wise and He does not do anything futile or useless:

﴿ وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَاطِلًا ذَلِكَ ظَنُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنَ النَّارِ ﴾

“We did not create the sky and the earth and whatever is between them in vain. That is a conjecture of the faithless. So woe to the faithless on account of the Fire!”¹⁵

If God did not guide living things to their ideal destinations according to their natural constitutions, their lives would consist of aimlessness and lack of purpose, whereas futility and vainness is unbecoming of Allah.

Like other creatures, human beings are enveloped in God’s mercy and guidance for there is surely a purpose in his creation:

﴿ أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴾

“Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?”¹⁶

Yes, anyone who acknowledges [the existence of] God and believes in His power and wisdom has no doubt about the soundness of the *proof of general guidance*. Is there any doubt about a principle which the Qur’an explicitly affirms?

﴿ وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ إِذْ قَالُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَى بَشَرٍ مِّن شَيْءٍ ﴾

“They did not regard Allah with the regard due to Him when they said, ‘Allah has not sent down anything to any human.’”¹⁷

This verse bears witness to the fact that due recognition of God necessitates acknowledgment and recognition of His general guidance and direction especially His intervention in the lives of humankind.

2. Guidance is commensurate to the faculties and potentials of every being. Stones and other inanimate

objects are guided according to certain mechanical laws. Having a more complex structure, the plants also have a more perfect sort of guidance, while the animals are guided by their instincts.

Among all creatures, humans occupy the highest station. Like the shell, the human being is an animal that has a precious gem within. In appearance, the human being resembles other animals, but in addition he has a divine spirit that bears a heavy burden of trust:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّنْ صَلْصَالٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ * فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

“When your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed I am going to create a human out of dry clay [drawn] from an aging mud. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him’.”[18](#)

Like other animals, man has instinctive guidance for his physical growth and perfection and lives and develops by following that instinctive guidance.

Yet, the divine spirit on which rational human life depends has endowed man with an important advantage and that is the element of freewill or volition [*ikhtiyār*]. Unlike other animals, man is not an innate prisoner of his instincts for he can overcome their influence. He can even regulate his instincts and desires to be at the service of his intellect or reason.

Of course, such a creature requires access to a sort of guidance which is consistent with his freewill.

Aristotle says:

“We must not follow those who tell us that since we are humans, we must think of things human, and since we are mortals, we must engage in transient affairs. Rather, as far as possible, we must make ourselves immortal and we must try our best to live consistent with the best thing (intellect) within us.”[19](#)

Yet, how is it that we can make ourselves immortal and think of eternity? Is it possible except by way of divine revelation? In the absence of divine revelation, it is not possible to attain eternal happiness.

Of course God, who has not spared creating eyebrow and eyelash—which have lower albeit vital functions in the lives of human beings—does not also spare sending prophets in which lie the survival of the human race and the eternal happiness of every person.[20](#)

3. It is true that the “*principle of general guidance*” emphasizes the guidance of humanity toward eternal salvation in the hereafter; however, since worldly life is the preliminary stage of this guidance, leadership and direction in the affairs related to life in the world are among the tasks of the prophets (‘a). In this connection, it is usually emphasized that social life, which is the foundation of human civilization, is only possible under the auspices of revealed teachings. If there had been no historical record of the existence

of prophets, there would also have been no trace of human civilization. Collective life is only possible with the existence of just laws and moral upbringing which in turn emanate from revealed teachings.

If legislative authority had been delegated solely to humans, they would not have taken true justice into consideration and would have enacted laws according to material and personal interests. Moreover, in the absence of superior morality, which is only possible through faith in God and the hereafter, the existence of just laws cannot contribute to the perpetuity of society and serve as the groundwork for material welfare in this world as well as perfection and happiness in the next world. Given the urgent need of mankind for divine guidance and the *principle of general guidance*, the necessity of the mission [bi'that] of the prophets ('a) and their presence in human society is so evident that it cannot be denied.

Those who assert that the interests of humanity in this world do not need prophetic teachings because we presently witness civilizations devoid of revealed teachings and founded on atheism have ignored the following points:

Firstly, notwithstanding a verbal denial in terms of beliefs and moral principles, humankind of today is in fact deeply indebted to the prophets ('a). There are many religious virtues that hold various societies intact which are actually products of the prophets' ('a) efforts. When looking at history it is clear that humanity has benefited much from the teachings of the prophets ('a). Without the teachings of the prophets would humankind have a stable collective life or would people lead a more bestial life in which right and value would be the slaves of power and might.[21](#)

Secondly, Muslim philosophers do not claim that without the existence of the prophets ('a) and their teachings, no society could be founded whatsoever. They are rather referring to a society which serves as the grounds for human perfection and eternal bliss in the hereafter.[22](#) What rational person can claim that without the guidance of God he can enact a code of law which is not only just and guarantees the perpetuity of human race in this world but is also codified in such a manner that it ensures eternal happiness and felicity in the next world? Only the prophets ('a) can teach the members of society and train them such that they would observe the rights of others completely. Only the prophets ('a) can reform man, send him back to his original nature which is God's spirit, and make him immortal by the grace and mercy of God:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ * وَأَخْرَجَ مِنْهُمْ لِمَأْتَلِحُوا بِهِمْ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

“It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error. And to others from among them [as well] who have not yet joined them.”[23](#)

Some notes

1. In addition to their holy scripture (the Qur'an), the Muslims have access to a great literary corpus called *Sunnah*. In general, *Sunnah* refers to the recorded narrations [*riwāyāt*] of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) and infallible Imams ('a). A considerable section of these narrations explains practical laws on the individual and collective life but many narrations also expound ideological tenets and even deal with the natural world and humanity.

The issue of the necessity of prophethood and the blessings of the prophets has been also reflected in numerous narrations. Here, it suffices to mention two narrations. From the following two narrations, it can be discerned to what extent the writings of philosophers and theologians in this regard are indebted to the *Sunnah*.

a. In reply to someone who asked for a proof of prophethood, Imam aḥ-ḥadiq ('a) said:

“As we have proven that God, the All-wise, is our Creator who is Most Sublime and Exalted to be comprehended and communicated by anyone, we know that there must be prophets among the people to speak on His behalf, express His will and guide the people about what is good and bad on which depend their fate. So, there must be bidders and forbidders who are none other than the prophets ('a).”²⁵

b. In Sermon 1 of *Nahj al-Balaghah*,²⁶ Imam 'Alī ('a) said:

فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولَهُ، وَوَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِيَاءَهُ، لِيَسْتَأْذِنُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ، وَيَذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ نِعْمَتِهِ، وَيَحْتَجُّوا عَلَيْهِمْ بِالتَّبْلِيغِ، وَيُثِيرُوا لَهُمْ دَفَائِنَ الْعُقُولِ، وَيُرُوهُمْ آيَاتِ الْمَقْدَرَةِ: مِنْ سَقْفِ فَوْقَهُمْ مَرْفُوعٍ، وَمِهَادِ تَحْتَهُمْ مَوْضُوعٍ، وَمَعَايِشَ تُحْيِيهِمْ، وَأَجَالَ تُفْنِيهِمْ، وَأَوْصَابَ تُهْرِمُهُمْ، وَأَحْدَاثَ تَتَابَعُ عَلَيْهِمْ.

“Then Allah sent His Messengers and a 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, death which brings an end to everything, ailments that turn them old and incidents that successively betake them!”²⁷

2. Both philosophical and theological arguments show the intellect's limitations in identifying the rational and humane way of life which raises man above the bestial form of living. These limitations are more evident with respect to the otherworldly life which is beyond comprehension of the intellect.

However, the limitations of the intellect do not negate its value and credibility. It is only in comparison with the extensive needs of humanity that we talk about the limitations of the intellect. Similarly,

whenever we talk about the insufficiency of the senses, this does not mean we deny their exceptional cognitive functions. Everyone knows that in the absence of the senses, the intellect or reason cannot function properly. Conversely, without the intellect the senses cannot function at all. The same is true in the case of reason [*‘aq/*] and revelation [*waḥī*]. Reason is kindled under the auspices of revelation. Without the latter, the former will wander in the valley of the unknown. Meanwhile, it is also by the hint of reason that revelation is welcomed, and it is in the hearts of those who apply reason that the tree of revelation bears fruit:

﴿ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ ﴾

“Only those of Allah’s servants having knowledge fear Him.”²⁸

“Reason [*‘aq/*] and religious law [*shar’*] have no option [but to acknowledge] that reason is the basis or foundation while religious law is the structure. A structure without foundation is baseless while a foundation without any structure is useless.”²⁹

In the words of a Christian theologian, Ian Barbour, “Revelation does not negate reason but rather develops it. Reflection and research could be compatible with religious commitment.”³⁰

3. It is sometimes assumed that the concept of “the necessity of doing an action” cannot be applied to God on the grounds that accepting such necessity implies setting a duty for Him to discharge and it does not behoove Him to be *obligated* by others. Therefore, what do we really mean by saying that—it is *‘incumbent upon’* or *‘necessary’* for God to send down prophets? Do we want to set *dos* and *don’ts* for God?! For this reason, the Ash‘arites [*Ash‘irah*] have entirely avoided discussing the necessity of prophethood.

4. What is meant by the necessity for God to *do an action* is that the human intellect or reason understands the continuity of this action within the context of the will of God and perceives God as the Doer of the action. For example, when we say that God is the Necessary Being [*wājib al-wujūd*] it means that the Being cannot be separated or detached from the Divine Essence [*dhāt-e ilāhīyah*]. When we say that it is necessary for God to send down prophets, it means nothing except that God is All-wise and so benevolent to humanity that it is impossible for Him not to send prophets.³¹

^{1.} – The abbreviation, “‘a” stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, ‘alayhi’s-salām, ‘alayhim’us-salām, or ‘alayhī’s-salām [may peace be upon him/them/her], which is mentioned after the names of the prophets, angels, Imams from the Prophet’s progeny, and saints (‘a). [Trans.]

^{2.} – In this volume, I have maintained the word “Sh‘ah” to refer to both the group (single collective unit) and the individuals constituting the group (plural). [Trans.]

^{3.} – See Murtaḥī Muḥahharī, *Understanding Islamic Sciences* (London: ICAS Press, 2002), p. 57–84. [Trans.]

^{4.} – See ash-Sharīf al-Murtaḥī, *Adh-dhakhrah fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, p. 323.

Sayyid Murtaḥī ‘Alam al-Hudā (355–436 AH): a man of versatility with a keen taste and talent for literature, jurisprudence and theology whose verdicts and opinions are taken into account even today. Both he and his brother Sayyid ar-Raḥī, the

compiler of Nahj al-Balaghah, studied from Shaykh al-Mufīd. [Trans.]

5. – Some theologians point out the origin of the difference between good and bad actions, believing that its criterion is the effects they bring about in the lives of human beings. Accordingly, good deeds are the source of felicity while evil deeds lead to perdition.

6. – Regarding its literal and semantic definitions, see Muḥahhar, Understanding Islamic Sciences, pp. 11–19. [Trans.]

7. – Hadrat: The Arabic word Hadrat is used as a respectful form of address. [Trans.]

8. – One of Islam’s leading philosophers, al-Fārābī was born at Fārāb, situated on the Jaxartes (Syr Darya), the modern Otrar. Coming to Baghdad, he studied under the Christian doctor Johanna, son of Hilan. Another of his teachers was Abū Bishr Matta, known as a translator of Greek works. He next proceeded to Aleppo, to the court of Sayf ad-Dawlah, son of Hamdān, and led a somewhat retired life under his protection, assuming the garb of a Sufi. When this prince captured Damascus, he took the philosopher with him, and there Fārābī died in 339 AH/950. Fārābī’s literary production was considerable, but a great number of his works were lost very early. They were chiefly commentaries or explanations of the Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle. In the sphere of moral philosophy he wrote a commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics; in that of political philosophy, he made a summary of Plato’s Laws, and composed a short treatise on the Ideal City. To psychology and metaphysics he contributed numerous works, with such titles as Intelligence and the Intelligible, The Soul, The Faculties of the Soul, The One and Unity, Substance, Time, The Void, and Space and Measure. He also commented on Alexander of Aphrodisias’ book, de Anima. Believing that Greek philosophy was a unity, he labored to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, and with this idea wrote treatises on The Aims of Plato and Aristotle and The Agreement between Plato and Aristotle. He also discussed certain interpretations of Aristotle proposed by Galen and John Philoponus, and composed An Intervention between Aristotle and Galen. [Trans.]

9. – Abū ‘Alī al-Husayn ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn Sīnā, or Avicenna, entitled al-Shaykh al-Ra’īs, or Hujjat al-Haqq by his compatriots, simply Shaykh by his disciples, and the Prince of Physicians in the occidental world, was born near Bukhārā in the year 370 AH/980. When Ibn Sīnā was five years old he and his family moved to the city of Bukhārā, where the young boy had a greater opportunity to study. At the age of ten he already knew grammar, literature, and theology as well as the whole of the Qur’an. When the famous mathematician, Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Nāṣirī, came to Bukhārā, he was invited to stay at the house of Ibn Sīnā in order to teach him mathematics. Under his tutelage Ibn Sīnā mastered the Almagest, the Elements of Euclid and some logic, all of which he soon knew better than his teacher. Having mastered mathematics, he then turned his attention to physics, metaphysics, and medicine. By the time he was sixteen, Ibn Sīnā had mastered all the sciences of his day and was well known as a physician. In another two years, thanks to the commentary of al-Fārābī, he was also to complete his understanding of Aristotle’s metaphysics which at first had presented considerable difficulty for him. Despite the loss in part or in toto of several of his major works, such as the twenty-volume Kitāb al-Insāf on the arbitration of Eastern and Western philosophy and the Lisān al-‘Arab in ten volumes, over two-hundred and fifty books, treatises, and letters of Ibn Sīnā have survived. They range from the voluminous Kitāb ash-Shifā and Al-Qanūn fi’l-Tibb to treatises of only a few pages like Risālat al-Fi’l wal-Infī’l and Risālah fi’s-Sirr al-Qadar. His books can be roughly divided into four separate groups: the philosophical, religious, cosmological and physical, and finally the symbolical and metaphysical narratives. Kitāb ash-Shifā, a vast philosophical and scientific encyclopedia, is probably the largest work of its kind ever written by one man. His dominating influence in medicine, philosophy and theology has lasted over the ages and is still alive within the circles of Islamic thought. [Trans.]

10. – A towering figure of the Illuminationist School of Islamic Philosophy [ishraqī], Shāh ad-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (known as Shaykh al-Ishraq), was born in Suhraward, near Zanjan, Iran in 1155. After studying in Isfahān, a leading center of Islamic scholarship, Suhrawardī traveled through Iran, Anatolia and Syria. Influenced by mystical teachings, he spent much time in meditation and seclusion, and in Halab (modern Aleppo) he favorably impressed its ruler, Malik az-Zahir. His teachings, however, aroused the opposition of established and learned religious men [‘ulamā], who persuaded Malik to have him put to death. The appellation al-Maqtūl [the killed one] meant that he was not to be considered a shāhīd [martyr]. Suhrawardī wrote voluminously. The more than 50 works that were attributed to him were classified into two categories: doctrinal and philosophical accounts containing commentaries on the works of Aristotle and Plato, as well as his contribution to the Illuminationist School; and shorter treatises, generally written in Persian and of an esoteric nature, meant to illustrate the paths and journeys of a mystic before he could achieve ma’rifah (gnosis or esoteric knowledge). [Trans.]

[11.](#) – Mullā Sadrī (d. 1050 AH/1640), also called Sadruddīn Shīrīzī and Sadr al-Muta'allihīn, was a philosopher who led the Iranian cultural renaissance in the 17th century. The foremost representative of Ishrāqī [Illuminationist] School of philosopher-mystics, he is commonly regarded by Iranians as the greatest philosopher of Iran. A scion of a notable Shīrīzī family, Mullā Sadrī completed his education in Isfahān, then the leading cultural and intellectual center of Iran. After his studies with scholars there, he produced several works, the most famous of which was his *Asfīr* (Journeys). *Asfīr* contains the bulk of his philosophy, which was influenced by a personal mysticism bordering on asceticism that he experienced during a 15-year retreat at Kahak, a village near Qum in Iran. Toward the end of his life, Mullā Sadrī returned to Shīrīzī to teach. His teachings, however, were considered heretical by the orthodox Shī'ah theologians, who persecuted him, though his powerful family connections permitted him to continue to write. He died on a pilgrimage to Mecca. [Trans.]

[12.](#) – See Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥabībī, *Al-Maḥẓan fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, under the commentary of Sīrah al-Baqarah 2:213. See also Murtaḥḥ Muḥahharī, *Nubuwwat [Prophethood] in Majmū'eh-ye ʿithar [Anthology of Muḥahharī's Works]*, vol. 4, p. 398.

[13.](#) – Sīrah 20:50. In this volume, the translation of Qur'anic passages is adapted from Sayyid 'Alī Qulī Qarī, *The Qur'an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004). [Trans.]

[14.](#) – Sīrah Naḥl 16:68.

[15.](#) – Sīrah ʿād 38:27.

[16.](#) – Sīrah Mu'minīn 23:115.

[17.](#) – Sīrah An'ām 6:91.

[18.](#) – Sīrah Hijr 15:28–29.

[19.](#) – Quoted in Marta Nusham (?), Aristotle, trans. 'Izzat Allāh Fīrīdvand, p. 99. It can be said that Aristotle alludes to those who say that man is flesh, skin and blood and nothing else, and the perfection of human life must be sought in the same animalistic life.

[20.](#) – Ibn Sīnā, *Ash-Shifā*, Theology Section, p. 44.

[21.](#) – For more information see Muḥahharī, *Nubuwwat in Majmū'eh-ye ʿithar*, vol. 4, pp. 351, 364.

[22.](#) – 'Abd ar-Razzāq Lāhījī, *Guz'adeh-ye Ghāhar-e Murīd*, ed. Ḥamad Muwā'id, p. 252.

[23.](#) – Sīrah Jum'ah 62:2–3.

[24.](#) – The abbreviation, “s”, stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, *sallallāhu 'alayhi wa ʿālihi wa sallam* [may God's blessings and peace be upon him and his progeny], which is mentioned after the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). [Trans.]

[25.](#) – *Uḥḥ al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 168 (with slight modification).

[26.](#) – *Nahj al-Balāghah* (The Peak of Eloquence) is a collection of speeches, sayings and letters of the Commander of the Faithful, Imām 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib (a) compiled by Sharīf ar-Radī Muhammad ibn al-Husayn (d. 406 AH/1016). The contents of the book concern the three essential topics of God, man and the universe, and include comments on scientific, literary, social, ethical, and political issues. With the exception of the words of the Glorious Qur'an and of the Holy Prophet (s), no words of man can equal it in eloquence. So far, more than 101 exegeses have been written on the *Nahj al-Balāghah*, indicating the importance of this treatise to scholars and learned men of research and investigation. For more information, visit: <http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul> [1]. [Trans.]

[27.](#) – Syed 'Ali Raza, *Nahj al-Balāghah: The Peak of Eloquence* (Qum: Foundation of Islamic Cultural Propagation in the World, 1995), Sermon 1. [Trans.]

[28.](#) – Sīrah Fīrī (or al-Mal'ikah) 35:28.

[29.](#) – *Risālah Hidāyah ar-Rībiyyīn* in the anthology of treatises of the great philosopher ʿĀjj Mullā Ḥādī Sabziwārī, introduced and edited by Sayyid Jalāl Ashtiyānī, p. 10.

[30.](#) – Ian Barbour, *'Ilm va Dīn [Science and Religion]*, trans. Bah'uddīn Khurramshāhī, p. 305.

Ian G. Barbour (1923–) is an American scholar of the relationship between science and religion whose 1989–91 Gifford Lectures yielded the widely recognized texts, *Religion in an Age of Science* (1990) and *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (1993). His earlier *Issues in Science and Religion* (1965), widely acclaimed as a groundbreaking volume, discussed the relationship of religious thought to the history, methods, and theories of science. As a physicist and theologian, Barbour

was awarded the Templeton Prize in 1999 for Progress in Religion in recognition of his efforts to create a dialogue between the worlds of science and religion. [Trans.]

[31.](#) – Muḥahhar, Nubuwwat in Majm'eh-ye ʿithr, vol. 4, p. 365. For in-depth discussion on the meaning of “necessity” with respect to God, see Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn ʿAbdʿabʿāḥ, Al-Mizzān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʿān, vol. 14, p. 94.

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