

Section Three: Revelation and Miracle

General Objectives

After studying this discourse, students are expected:

1. To understand the difference between revelation [*waḥy*], intuition [*kashf*] and witnessing [*shuhūd*] by familiarizing themselves with the salient features and types of revelation;
2. To be acquainted with miracles performed by a prophet [*a'jāzah* or *mu'jizah*] and the difference between these and miracles performed by a non-prophet [*kirāmah*] and supernatural affairs, and also the connection between miracles and the truthfulness of the prophets, specifically the miracle of the Qur'an; and lastly
3. To know, through a theoretical analysis, the reason behind the finality of prophethood and the way and manner of continuity of man's movement towards perfection.

Revelation

Every community or nation has witnessed the call of the prophets (‘a) and this call has been necessary and essential. As demonstrated earlier, the intellect can also perceive this necessity. Now, some questions come up that, in spite of their being human beings, how did the prophets (‘a) communicate with God and how did they receive His message?

Many people have regarded the idea of creatures communicating with the Creator as one of the unbelievable things:

أَكَانَ لِلنَّاسِ عَجَبًا أَنْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى رَجُلٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ أَنْذِرِ النَّاسَ وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنَّ لَهُمْ قَدَمَ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ قَالَ ﴿الْكَافِرُونَ إِنَّ هَذَا لَسَاحِرٌ مُبِينٌ﴾

Does it seem odd to these people that We have revealed to a man from among themselves, [declaring], ‘Warn mankind, and give good news to the faithful that they are in good standing with their Lord’? The faithless say, ‘This is indeed a plain magician’. [1](#)

The Holy Qur’an describes God’s messages to the prophets (‘a) as “revelation” [waḥy]. Waḥy means to impart something in secret. This word is applied in many cases in the Qur’an. This term is sometimes used to reference common individuals:

﴿وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ فَإِذَا خَفَتْ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقَاهُ فِي الْقَيْمِ وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ﴾

“We revealed to Moses’ mother, [saying], ‘Nurse him; then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear nor grieve, for We will restore him to you and make him one of the apostles.’”[2](#)

There are also times when it is applied to animals:

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

“And your Lord revealed to the bee [saying]: Make your home in the mountains, and on the trees and the trellises that they erect.”[3](#)

Even inanimate objects sometimes receive “divine revelation”:

﴿يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا * بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا﴾

“On that day she (the earth) will relate her chronicles for her Lord will have inspired her.”[4](#)

The meaning of waḥy common in all these verses is “guidance or instruction which is hidden from others.” God “guides” the mother of Mūsā (Moses) (‘a), the honeybee and the earth, but we do not fully understand the nature of this “guidance”. Of course, in every case the divine revelation assumes a particular form in consonance with its recipient.

There is also the guidance for mankind through revelation to special individuals chosen for this purpose:

﴿إِنَّا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ كَمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ ﴿١٣٠﴾ وَعِيسَىٰ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَارُونَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَآتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زُبُورًا﴾

“We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and [as] We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, Jesus and Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon—and We gave David the Psalms.”⁵

Our analysis or knowledge of revelation is only based on the prophets' (‘a) descriptions of it. To have faith in revelation, which is an essential prerequisite of Islam, does not require complete knowledge of it. To believe in it and the prophets' (‘a) claim to it is enough. Of course, understanding and knowledge about the revelation is important in deepening one's religious knowledge. We have no option but to take some steps to know revelation further on the basis of the explanations of the prophets (‘a).

Revelation signifies the opening of a window to the unseen world and new horizons of the heaven of meaning to the prophets (‘a). Revelation came from God and the Apostle (ﷺ) was not expecting it:

﴿وَمَا كُنْتَ تَرْجُو أَنْ يُلْقَىٰ إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابُ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ ظَهِيرًا لِلْكَافِرِينَ﴾

“You did not expect that the Book would be delivered to you; but it was a mercy from your Lord.”⁶

This salient feature shows the superiority of *waḥy* to genius [*nubūgh*] as well as mystical intuition [*kashf*] or witnessing [*shuhūd*]. *Nubūgh* means extraordinary intelligence which makes some individuals understand certain “truths” without undergoing the normal pertinent learning processes. However, these types of “truths” are those that could be grasped by the intellect, not truths that are grasped as a result of the opening of new windows.

Genius is like one who has extraordinary senses and can easily sense or feel what others could sense or feel with difficulty. A prophet, on the other hand, is one who has normal senses like all people, in which geniuses are also included; however, in addition he has another sense endowed by God which the others including the geniuses do not have.

Contrary to *waḥy*, some may acquire mystical intuition [*kashf*] or witnessing [*shuhūd*] as a result of contentment that stems from man himself. If man were to focus his attention on his soul and after some time control his mutinous soul, he would perceive some truths within the depths of his self which others cannot perceive. He does not acquire these truths from others. Instead, control of the self effaces the indignation in his heart and uncovers the hidden truths within it. In regard to *waḥy*, however, the prophet only serves as the receiver of the message. He is an addressee of one who talks to with him. It is said that Jibraʾīl (Archangel Gabriel) (‘a) was teaching the Prophet (ﷺ):

﴿إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ * عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ﴾

“It is just a revelation that is revealed [to him], taught him by One of great powers.”⁷

The prophets (‘a) knew very well that somebody else was teaching them what to say, and on many occasions they could see their teacher, who was an angel of God (Jibra’īl) (‘a). However, with *kashf* and *shuhūd*, this is not the case.

It is this pure perception which protects *waḥy* from any sort of mixture with human words. Contrary to the notion which nowadays is unfortunately advanced by some Christian sects that revelation is inferred from the religious experience of others such that the Bible (the New Testament in particular) is the interpretation or expression of the things which ‘īsā (Jesus) (‘a) had acquired in his state of *kashf* or *shuhūd*, revelation is free from any sort of interpolation or addition by the Prophet (ﷺ) in conveying it.

Perhaps the reason why in more than 300 places in the Holy Qur’an, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) is addressed with the command, “Say” [*qul*] is to stress the fact that his role in conveying the revelation is only to repeat exactly the divine message and that there is not the least room for him to have changed it.

The Apostle (ﷺ) was aware of this heavy burden of responsibility. As such, as soon as he received a revelation, he would immediately recite it lest he forgot a word of it—even though God gave him assurance in this regard:

﴿ فَتَعَالَى اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا ﴾

“So, exalted is Allah, the True Sovereign. Do not hasten with the Qur’an before its revelation is completed for you, and say, ‘My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.’”⁸

For this reason, the prophets chosen by God were those who were not known to have been learned. Some of them did not even know how to read and write. So, it cannot be entertained in the mind that their sayings were a product of their mystical intuition expressed in the language and culture of the time.

﴿ وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُو مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُ بِيَمِينِكَ إِذَا لَارْتَابَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴾

“You did not use to recite any scripture before it, nor did you write it with your right hand, for then the impugnors would have been skeptical.”⁹

The divine revelation has been conveyed to the people in the form that it had been revealed to the Apostle (ﷺ), and in order to remove any doubt about His Messenger (ﷺ), God thus says:

﴿ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ * وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضُ الْأَقَاوِيلِ * لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ * ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ * فَمَا مِنْكُمْ * مِنْ أَحَدٍ عَنْهُ حَاجِزِينَ * وَإِنَّهُ لَتَذِكْرَةٌ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾

“[It is] gradually sent down from the Lord of all the worlds. Had he faked any sayings in Our

name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta, and none of you could have held Us off from him. Indeed it is a reminder for the God-wary.”¹⁰

This verse does not mean that there was the possibility for the Prophet (ﷺ) to have distorted the revelation had he not received a threat of an extremely harsh punishment! Such an understanding shows a lack of knowledge of grammatical rules of the language. The verse emphasizes the importance of the protection of the revealed text from any kind of change or distortion.

As an example, it is sometimes said: “Even if my father were to allow it, I would not do it.” This style of statement emphasizes the distaste for an action, and does not suggest that the father would really ask one to perform the action. In the same manner, God says that the safety of revelation from any kind of distortion [*taḥrīf*] is so vital that even if His most beloved (the Apostle (ﷺ)) were to try to distort it (which he wouldn’t), He would punish him in the way mentioned in the verse, let alone if this act were to be committed by others we could be sure that the punishment would also certainly be carried out!

In sum, *waḥd* is a kind of unusual “intelligence” which is beyond the frame of conventional analysis. It is only possible by the will and permission of God. The fact that it is unusual is the reason it is difficult for some people to accept, and they rightfully ask for proofs of the truthfulness of the receivers of revelation and God grants their requests by showing miracles [*mu’jizah*] or signs [*āyah*].

Miracles

The prophets (‘a) claimed to be recipients of the divine message through revelation [*waḥd*] and, as stated earlier, *waḥd* means transcending beyond the boundary of common human perceptions. In other words, revelation itself or the receipt of a message from God is a miracle [*mu’jizah*] and supernatural. Confirmation of this claim can be made through innate testimony, certainty from the depth of one’s soul, or reasoning and inference. Asking for proof of the authenticity of the prophets’ claims is something reasonable and wholesome that is usually requested by the people:

﴿وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا يَأْتِينَا بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ﴾

“They say, ‘Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?’”¹¹

And whenever this inquiry stems from love of truth, God answers thus:

﴿ثُمَّ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ وَأَخَاهُ هَارُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ﴾

“Then We sent Moses and Aaron, his brother, with Our signs and a manifest authority.”¹²

Whenever the people would doubt the authenticity of the prophets’ claims or the people’s certainty

[*imān*] would diminish for some reason, God would send His signs [*āyāt*] to the prophets (‘a) so as to extinguish the faith-consuming fire of doubt and make the torch of conviction brighter. In the parlance of the theologians [*mutakallimīn*], these signs which substantiate the prophets’ claims to revelation are known as miracles [*mu‘jizah*].

It is said that the miracle—though not mentioned in this way in the Qur’an and the Bible—is one of the *essentials* [*ḥurriyyāt*] of religion. Faith in its occurrence—in the sense of faith in the unseen power of the prophets (‘a)—is a condition for deliverance. The Bible also cites examples of the occurrence of miracles:

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.”¹³

Miracles are also mentioned in many verses of the Glorious Qur’an:

قَالَ إِنْ كُنْتَ جِئْتَ بِآيَةٍ فَأْتِ بِهَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ * فَأَلْقَى عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُبِينٌ * وَنَزَعَ يَدَهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ بَيْضَاءُ لِلنَّاظِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

“He said, ‘If you have brought a sign, produce it, should you be truthful.’ Whereat he threw down his staff, and behold, it became a manifest python. Then he drew out his hand, and behold, it was white to the onlookers.”¹⁴

Regarding the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), it also says:

﴿ اقْتَرَبَتِ السَّاعَةُ وَانْشَقَّ الْقَمَرُ * وَإِنْ يَرَوْا آيَةً يُعْرِضُوا وَيَقُولُوا سِحْرٌ مُسْتَمِرٌّ ﴾

“The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split. If they see a sign, they turn away, and say, ‘An incessant magic!’”¹⁵

These verses refer to the miracle of moon-splitting done by the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). Now, as there is no doubt regarding the occurrence of miracles in terms of faith, we shall turn our attention to miracles from the intellectual perspective.

From the intellectual perspective one may ask: Are miracles occurrences without causes? It can be said that, when Ibrāhīm (Abraham) (‘a) was thrown into a burning fire, it not only suddenly became safe for him without any apparent cause, but it even became a source a comfort. However, such an interpretation of this miracle is not only against the axiomatic principle of reasoning, which associates a cause to every occurrence, but also inconsistent with the logic of the Qur’an which endorses the law of causation.

The acceptance of the occurrence of miracles without any cause is tantamount to the acceptance that things happen by mere chance, which can have dire consequences. For example, if a miracle is supposed to happen without any cause, it is then possible that the entire world of possibilities [‘alam-e mumkin] could have been created without any cause and out of pure chance, which in turn could mean that the world is also not in need of any creator!?¹⁶

That, like all phenomena in this world, miracles have causes or sets of causes cannot be doubted. Therefore, it cannot be accepted that any event, including miracles, happens without any cause. However, different schools and persuasions have offered various answers to the question regarding the causes of miracles.

According to the Ash‘arites [Ash‘irah] the motive behind the occurrence of miracles is the will of God and the fact that His will is above everything. Based on this belief, the fact that fire is usually warm or a source of heat is only a precedent [sunnah] of Allah which He can change whenever He wishes. Conventionally, fire is hot but this hotness is not its essence for it is changeable. We have no power to change the precedents [sunan] of Allah, but God who has set these precedents in the first place can change them and say to the fire:

﴿ قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ﴾

“We said, ‘O fire! Be cool and safe for Abraham!’”¹⁷

گر تو خواهی آتش آب خوش شود

ور نخواهی آب هم آتش شود

If You wish [to favor someone], fire can become pleasant water,

And if You do not, even water can become fire!

For the Ash‘arites, every event is caused by the will of God. Whenever the fire is hot, the cause is God’s will and if it is not hot, it is again because of His will. The only difference is that the first case is repeated many times and assumes the form of a “natural law” while the second case happens rarely.

Philosophers have another view. According to them, the world is not as simple as what the Ash‘arites believe. The natural world is essentially governed by the law of causation. The hotness of the fire is a necessity. Of course, this is not in conflict with the absoluteness of divine power, for the will of God is done through an *essential system manifested by the law of causation*. As such, as advocated by prominent figures in the Sh‘ah world, *mu‘jizah* requires explanation and elaboration because it seems

to go against the essential system of nature.

Under the assumption that the essential system of the world is accepted, there are two ways of explaining and elaborating the mechanism of *mu'jizah*:

1. *Mu'jizah* seems to outwardly violate the laws of nature, but this is not actually so. In this view, the prophets (‘a) have knowledge of processes of substitution and replacement which others do not have. They are aware of factors existing in nature which can turn a piece of wood, for instance, into a living object like a snake. By using these factors, they can perform extraordinary acts. Since we do not know the natural process of turning a stick into a snake, we imagine that it is something unnatural. It is said that the prophets (‘a) knew the secrets of nature through which they were able to perform wonderful acts.

This interpretation, in which there is no room for the intervention of a hidden power, is unacceptable due to the following questions: From where have the prophets (‘a) acquired this wonderful knowledge? Is such knowledge acquired through the usual way of learning from others and through research and study? If so, why aren't there scientists in every period who are forerunners in this field? There is no doubt that the prophets' (‘a) knowledge of the secrets of nature cannot assume a usual and conventional form. It must be acknowledged, therefore, that they have acquired the secrets of nature through extraordinary and supernatural means. However, if it is possible to become knowledgeable through an unnatural or supernatural way, why then would it be impossible to turn a stick into a snake through an unnatural way? If a prophet can know the secrets of nature by relying on the knowledge of the unseen, there is no reason, through the same means, they cannot acquire extraordinary powers by which they can control the natural course of affairs.

2. According to the second view, with the help of the unseen, a prophet acquires extraordinary power through which he can control the natural course of affairs in the world. It is said, however, that control over the natural course of affairs takes place within the framework of special rules and this does not equate with going against natural causes. For further clarification, one may take into account a paralyzed person. This physically handicapped person is incapable of movement according to medical principles, but the same person sometimes can surprisingly be able to move in a certain spiritual state.¹⁸ In this case, a spiritual power has exerted influence on the patient's body and changed its natural course. What is called "psychotherapy" does not mean falsification of biological principles. It rather means utilization of a powerful spiritual force that can have natural effects. Regarding *mu'jizah*, it can also be said that by using hidden powers, the prophets exert control over the natural course of affairs in such a manner that the immutable relationship between cause and effect is preserved. It is only because of the interference of hidden powers that there is a change in the natural course.

There is another issue here and that is, fakirs sometimes perform extraordinary acts, but their dissimilarity with the prophets lies in the power which *causes* such acts. The power of the prophets (‘a) pertains to the decree of God while the fakirs perform such acts by enhancing their spiritual power and

exerting influence on the natural course of affairs. This difference becomes clear when we realize that, firstly, the human power possessed by fakirs, no matter how strong it is, can also be acquired by others and secondly, it is always inferior to the unseen power. The power of the prophets (‘a), on the other hand, is not human-based but rather God-given and extraordinary. It is therefore always dominant and can never be imparted to others.

While acknowledging the role of natural factors in the system of creation and the essential relationship between cause and effect, some Muslim scholars give justification to *mu‘jizah* and the intervention of unnatural forces in the natural course of affairs without invalidating their natural effects. In other words, *mu‘jizah* does not take place by undermining natural laws but rather by making use of a natural law and the application of an unnatural force.

Miracles as proof of the truthfulness of the prophets (‘a)

In an attempt to differentiate *mu‘jizah* from *kir‘mah*, which is also a performance of extraordinary acts, books on *‘ilm al-kal‘m* associate *mu‘jizah* with the claim of prophethood and the receipt of revelation, and the absence of these elements in the case of *kir‘mah*. In contrast to mortification (practiced by fakirs), *kir‘mah* relates to seeking help from the Unseen without the purpose of proving any claim to prophethood. The very association of *mu‘jizah* with the claim to prophethood is the basis of proof of the authenticity of the claim.

Apart from proving the possibility of revelation, based on the famous philosophical rule that similar things have identical rulings, ¹⁹ *mu‘jizah* shows that just as power can be acquired from the Unseen and a stick be turned into a snake, the word of God can also be received from the Unseen and knowledge be acquired and taught to others.

As mentioned earlier, *wa‘‘* itself is a *mu‘jizah* and an extraordinary occurrence. If miracles exist, there is also the possibility of *wa‘‘*. However, the role of *mu‘jizah* lies more in proving the occurrence of *wa‘‘* and not its possibility, and *mu‘jizah*’s role in proving the authenticity of the prophets’ claim lies in the receipt of revelation. We shall explain by citing an example:

If an official attributes something to a ruler in the ruler’s presence and addresses the people present, saying that the ruler has said such-and-such, and then in order to prove the authenticity of his claim, says that the sign of the truthfulness of his claim is, contrary to the customary way, that the ruler will clap his hands three times and then, after hearing this, the ruler claps three times, will the people still doubt the truthfulness of the official’s claim? The same is the case with *mu‘jizah* in proving the authenticity of the prophets’ claim. In the presence of God, prophets address the people, saying that God has said certain things and the proof of our truthfulness is that God gives us extraordinary power for us to do wonderful acts in nature. When the prophets perform those wonderful acts, is there any doubt that they are telling the truth? As such, *mu‘jizah* plays an important role in showing the truthfulness of the prophets (‘a) revelation.

Has the period of miracles ended and are miracles no longer performed? Should we look for miraculous accounts in the Bible or in another place? The reply to such inquiry is that there is actually a miracle currently at our disposal. If we open our hearts and look at it through the eye of the intellect, we will realize that there is a great extant miracle and we will come to believe in the presenter of this miracle, the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), and if we already have faith in him, that faith will be strengthened.

The Qur'an as the eternal miracle

The Qur'an is the holy book of Islam and the foundation of Islamic teachings. Its letters, words, phrases, and sounds are all sacred and respected deeply by Muslims. Contrary to the case of the Bible, historically the Qur'an is totally within our sight and its history is as clear as limpid water. We even know which verse has been revealed on which occasion. In this regard, Muslims have written books which are called *asbāb an-nuzūl* [occasions of revelation].

The Muslims' belief in the Qur'an is basically different from what is usually said about the Christians' belief in the Bible. For Muslims, every word of the Qur'an is God's Word while for most Christians the Bible is an interpretation of the religious experience of Jesus (ʿa) which is necessarily affected by the people's culture and language, and its words are not exactly the words as revealed from God. According to His Will, God chose the Arabic language for the guidance of mankind during the last period of prophethood:

﴿الرَّ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ * إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

“Alif, Lam, Ra. These are the signs of the Manifest Book. Indeed We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason.”²⁰

The source of all Islamic sciences—ranging from scholastic theology [*kalām*] and philosophy [*falsafah*] through jurisprudence [*fiqh*], law [*uqūq*] and ethics [*akhlāq*—is the Qur'anic verses. The Qur'an is available to us in the same form it was revealed to the first Muslims, and it has remained safe from any sort of distortion [*taḥrīf*]. This is based on the promise made by God to protect it:

﴿إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ﴾

“Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it.”²¹

In order to clarify the miracle of the Qur'an, three points must be settled: (1) its extraordinariness, (2) its proof of the Prophet's (ﷺ) claim, and (3) the failure of people in discrediting it. The extraordinariness of the Qur'an can be shown in a variety of ways: it is a miracle of means, a miracle of expression and a miracle of meaning.

1. *A miracle of means*: There is no doubt that the receiver of the Qur'an was a common man. His name was never heard among the scholars and men of letters of his time. He was Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh (ﷺ), grandson of 'Abd Manāf, the chief of Quraysh, who was born in Mecca. For forty years he was with the people, he had never recited anything similar to what he recited after the age of forty when he was appointed as a prophet. His moral conduct and trustworthiness were known to everyone but he had no prior talent in composing words of wisdom, and he knew neither how to read nor how to write. The Qur'an describes him as "uninstructed" [*ummī*]:

﴿فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ وَاتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ﴾

“So have faith in Allah and His Apostle, the uninstructed prophet, who has faith in Allah and His words, and follow him so that you may be guided.”²²

Not only was the Prophet (ﷺ) himself *ummī* but also in Mecca, where he came from, knowledge and learning were not prevalent. Arts were only expressed to glorify man's bestial inclinations. Poets recited either lovely poems to incite sensual desires or epic songs to incite anger and vengeance. Given such societal conditions, there is no doubt that only through uncommon means was it possible for the prophet to recite such extraordinary words. If the Qur'anic verses were a product of his own thinking and upbringing, at least some years earlier, words similar to the Qur'an should have been heard from him.

Not only was the Prophet's (ﷺ) receipt of the Qur'an extraordinary but in essence the revelation of the Qur'an in such a state of affairs that existed in the 7th century was also unusual and beyond expectation. The striking difference between the meaning and elegance of the expression of the Qur'an with the literary and scholarly works of those days was so evident that at one glance it could be discerned by every observer. The opponents of the Apostle (ﷺ) were also aware of this fact, and thus, they were not saying, "These words are senseless or beyond methodical eloquence and fluency," or "They are just similar to other Arabic literary works." They were rather saying: "These words must not have come from Muḥammad; he must have learned them from someone else," or "He is practicing magic," or "He is possessed by the *jinn* [*majnoon*]." ²³ In the midst of these calumnies and allegations, an elegant acknowledgment and profound confession of the extraordinariness of the Qur'an is self-evident. In a beautiful expression in the Qur'an, we are told that if we doubt the divine origin of the Qur'an, we should look for another person like Muḥammad (ﷺ) who could compose similar words:

﴿وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

“And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a *sūrah* like it, and invoke your helpers besides Allah, should you be truthful.”²⁴

However, you cannot do so. In fact, even if all humans join together and help one another in whatever

way possible, still they cannot do so:

﴿ قُلْ لِّئِنْ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَى أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا ﴾

“Say, ‘Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur’an, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.’”²⁵

2. *A miracle of expression*: The Qur’an is the peak of eloquence and fluency. That is, as acknowledged by great scholars of language, it conveys intended meanings through elegant and lucid expressions. The Arabs who used to hear Qur’anic verses during that time were acquainted with literary styles and methods of expression. The revelation of the Qur’an with such eloquence and fluency to a people who used to regard themselves as the masters of expression was a great challenge and it can be guessed what a revolution it brought in the literary circles of the day. They did everything they could, but they failed to keep secret their true feelings about the beauty of the Qur’an, and on many occasions they would recite verses of the Qur’an in private.

The orators and poets of the pre-Islamic period of ignorance [*j̣hiliyyah*] who had truly surpassed the men of letters of the previous periods in eloquence and fluency became so helpless in facing the astounding elegance of the Qur’an that they had no option but to accuse the Prophet (ﷺ) of practicing magic and call him a powerful sorcerer who dazzles the eyes and controls the hearts of people.

The Qur’an has special styles of expression which are neither common poetry nor prose. Its fluency and eloquence lie in the elegance of expressions and the use of parables. The elegance of poetry lies in its imaginativeness. Usually, the farther it is from reality, the sweeter it becomes to human taste. However, the Qur’an is devoid of the kind of whimsical and fallacious analogies prevalent in poetry. In spite of this, its elegance is captivating. How is it possible to speak elegantly, and at the same time, avoid any naïve simile and scenario-making? Who could create such elegance in speech without taking advantage of the strength of human imagination?

Even though we do not fathom the profundity of the eloquence and fluency of the Qur’an, we can sense its beauty and divinity. When we compare the sayings of Imām ‘Alī (‘a), who was the master of oration and whose words are the peak of eloquence [*nahj al-balaghah*]²⁶, with a Qur’anic verse the beauty of the former compared to the latter is as the bezel to the gemstone.

The beauty of the Qur’an is not confined to the eloquence and fluency of its expression. In fact, the soothing melody of its sounds is also a manifestation of its miracle. The Qur’an has been essentially revealed in oral form. That is, it was made known in the form of sounds which later came out in written form. For this reason, it has an astounding harmony and its recitation is soothing to the ears and attractive to the hearts.

Beauty always pertains to the feelings, but there are diverse feelings. Beautiful love poetry incites the

carnal feelings of man while an epic song stirs his sense of bravery. However, the Qur'an awakens the spiritual feelings in humanity. Its magnificence brings a person to the sublime world of spirituality, wipes the dust off his God-seeking nature [*fīrah*], and shows the sublime countenance of the divine spirit embedded in every individual.

3. *A miracle of meaning*: The Qur'an is a book of guidance and a luminous torch to the way of salvation. It teaches man everything he needs to know to attain felicity both in this world and the hereafter. That which is usually expected from such book is a set of programs and instructions, and not the discovery of the realities of existence. However, the technique of the Qur'an is to introduce essential instructions and injunctions through the unveiling of fundamental realities of the universe.

According to the Qur'an, the felicity of man cannot be attained without passing through the realities of life. For this reason, knowing God is the most essential reality of life, faith in the angels is an important reality in the field of action, and cognition of many other fundamental realities are all elements of man's felicity. Based on the approaches of the Qur'an, it is only through knowledge and faith in the realities of existence that the felicity of man can be ensured. The topics of the Qur'an in introducing God, who is the Origin and Source of creation, are nature (which is the life domain of humanity), the hereafter (which is the final destination of life) and human beings themselves (who are the wayfarers in the path of salvation).

Regarding God, the human intellect cannot describe Him beyond a specified point: He is the One and Only God, who knows every particle in the universe; the overall Sovereign. The important point here is that it is the Qur'an that introduces God as far as it is comprehensible for man.

While having no similitude whatsoever to any of His creatures, the God of the Qur'an²⁷ is so close to man that He can hear his whisper:

﴿وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ﴾

“Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”²⁸

Contrary to the God of philosophers,²⁹ the God of the Qur'an gives attention to the world of humans. As such, man can seek His assistance and rely on Him. The Qur'an has many descriptions of the agents of Divine Action, i.e. the angels, which the human intellect cannot conceive of.

If man has taken some steps in the valley of knowing God through his deductive reasoning, he has nothing to say in the realm of unraveling the realities of his destination, such as the purgatorial world [*lam al-barzakh*] and the Resurrection. This is while a considerable portion of the Qur'an, i.e. almost one-third, describes such fundamental realities in an elegant and pleasant, yet alarming, manner. How could these concepts and meanings, which become clearer to man with his intellectual growth, be a

product of his mind?

Regarding the natural world in which we presently live, there are interesting passages in the Qur'an many of which are in conformity with the recent findings in natural sciences.

Moreover, a large part of the Qur'an deals with moral and juristic programs which have no parallel. Qur'anic ethics is not alien to the real life of humanity. In fact, it has been organized with the nature and limitations of human beings in mind. God knows that morality is observed only when it is inculcated in one's mind that he shall enjoy everlasting benefit from behaving morally. People render sacrifice and give preference to others to enjoy worldly benefits only when they know that by doing so, they shall obtain everlasting favor like admission to paradise or winning the pleasure of God. This important point is remarkably stressed in the moral training and edification of the Qur'an. Whenever the Qur'an invites a person to help others, it says:

﴿مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ أَضْعَافًا كَثِيرَةً وَاللَّهُ يَقْبِضُ وَيَبْسُطُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

“Who is it that will lend Allah a good loan that He may multiply it for him several fold? And Allah tightens and expands [the means of life], and to Him you shall be brought back.”³⁰

God considers giving a loan to others the same as giving a loan to oneself because the benefits will always return to the giver. This point has been stated in the Qur'an many times. Is there any stronger motivation for doing good deeds? For anyone who reads the verses of the Qur'an and understands their meaning, his conscience will be awakened and he will be encouraged to do good deeds.

In the field of law and jurisprudence, the case is the same. The evidence of the greatness and merit of Qur'anic-based jurisprudence is the testimony of thousands of scholars for centuries in its solution to various legal problems.

In addition, notwithstanding the challenges to the Qur'an and strong motives of the enemies of Islam to discredit it, throughout history no one has been able to produce a verse even similar to the verses of the Qur'an. Thus, the miraculous elements of the Qur'an are all-encompassing and there is no doubt that it is a miracle. Because the Qur'an is an eternal miracle that captivates the hearts of all people, then Islam must also be a religion for all times because the Qur'an is the holy book of Islam.

Finality of prophethood

To believe that the prophethood, which began with Adam (‘a), ends with the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is one of the essentials of the religion of Islam. Accordingly, every Muslim must believe in this point. Doubt about it is tantamount to the denial of Islam. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) has mentioned this point many times. It is recorded that during the Tabuk Expedition, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said to Imam ‘Alī (‘a):

أما ترضى أن تكون مني بمنزلة هارون من موسى إلا أنه لانيبي بعدي؟

“Are you not satisfied that you are to me as Harūn (Aaron) is to Mūsā (Moses) except that there will be no prophet after me?”³¹

This and similar narrations [riwāyat] have been recorded in Sunnī and Shī‘ah sources without a broken chain of narrators [tawātur]³² and thus there is no doubt about its authenticity [ṣ/ḥah]. More important than these narrations are the implicit, and at times explicit, verses of the Qur’an regarding this:

﴿ مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴾

“Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Apostle of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets, and Allah has knowledge of all things.”³³

The Qur’an, which is the book of Islam, has been sent down for all people not just those who were present at the time of its revelation. This implies that everyone must put his hopes in the Qur’an for salvation. More explicit than this, however, are verses which indicate that Islam is the religion of God in its complete and final form and thus there is no need for the coming of another prophet:

﴿ الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ﴾

“Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion.”³⁴

Khṭam literally means seal with which a letter or message is usually ended. The Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), as the *khṭam*, signifies that the series of prophets ends with him. Therefore, there is no doubt that one of the pillars of the religion of Islam is the finality of prophethood [*khṭamiyyah*] in which Muslims must believe.

However, why has the prophethood ended? Will the reasons behind the sending of prophets not be repeated again?

In reply to these questions, Muslims scholars have different views, one of which is as follows:³⁵

In theoretically analyzing the reason behind the finality of prophethood in Islam, firstly the intellectual and spiritual condition of the previous communities of people must be compared with that of the later communities after the apostleship of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). Reflecting on the collective life of humankind leads us to the point that just as there are different stages—for example, sometimes humans are in the stage of childhood and the world of fantasy and at times in the stage of adulthood and intellectual maturity—humankind as a whole has also passed through different stages.

The period of immaturity had passed and around the advent of Islam humans had entered a period of adulthood and maturity. The difference between the two periods is manifested in various forms. During the initial stages, humans were like children who were in need of constant care and supervision. Prophets (‘a) used to come in succession so as to constantly lead the people to the way of salvation, and assist them in every circumstance so that they would be able to identify their duties and act upon them. However, the people of today—who are the addressees of Islam—have reached such a stage of understanding and maturity that given their spiritual and material assets they can identify their duties more readily and follow the path of salvation.

The teachings of Islam, which according to the Ahl al-Sunnah are derived from the Qur’an and the sayings of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), and according to the Shā‘ah are derived from the sayings of the infallible Imāms (‘a) as well, are at the disposal of all people so that they can easily tread their chosen path.

The concept of *ijtihād*, which means deduction of laws from the sources of Islam, has immense importance here for it is by means of *ijtihād* that Islam responds to the new and unprecedented needs of mankind. It must be noted that the *mujtahid*³⁶ does not bring in any new decree that contradicts the finality of Islam. What he does is whenever he encounters a new issue whose ruling is not explicitly stated in the religious texts, he deduces its ruling by using the sources of Islam—including the Qur’an and the *ḥadīth*—based on an organized or codified system (principles of jurisprudence [*uṣūl al-fiqh*]) and relays the ruling, suitably deduced, to others.

Therefore, it can be said that the development and maturity of humanity at the present period was the reason God presented His religion in its final and complete form. At his present level of development, whenever humankind encounters a new issue, the level of maturity is available to deduce the correct way and avoid misguidance. The maturity and keenness of the people at the present age make them different from their predecessors who did not recognize the worth and value of their sacred scriptures and distorted them.

One of the reasons behind the continuity of prophethood before was the distortions mankind made to the previous holy books, turning them from books of guidance into common story books and even using them as a source of misguidance for others. Today, however, after many centuries mankind has neither added nor omitted a word or even a letter from the Qur’an and, as God has promised, it has remained safe from any distortion whatsoever.

Moreover, the power of reasoning and intellectual capacity of humanity at the period of the apostleship of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was such that God provided everything humans needed about the fundamental realities of existence. That is, whatever is necessary for the guidance and salvation of humankind to the end of time has been mentioned in the Qur’an.

Understanding and acquisition of knowledge are closely related to one’s aptitude and readiness. God,

who knows that humankind at the present time is at the peak of readiness to grasp such truths, taught it whatever is necessary and feasible. Of course, it is clear that the readiness of humanity to acquire knowledge and information about the world of nature and the secrets of creation that make them capable of dominating nature is always on the rise, but this is beside the point.

The Qur'an is meant to state the facts essential for the *salvation* of all people and so it has not abandoned anything in this regard. As such, the advancement in natural sciences, mathematics and even philosophy do not change the teachings of Islam, and scientific and technological progress do not bring about the need for a new prophet, because prophetic knowledge is related to the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.

In addition, the moral values of religion are also eternal and must be given attention and acted upon in all aspects of life. If a civilization demands that lying must be the basis of action, one should not submit to it on the pretext that the exigency of time demands it. One must rather doubt the foundation of such a civilization and *always* rely upon the firm foundation of religious morality. However, some things that may undermine religion in modern times are changes in legal relations. Modern life has raised new issues but, as we have said, the solution to these kinds of problems is the method of *ijtihad*.

Given this concise explanation, it is clear that the present human is not in need of a new prophet and of course God was aware of this fact before and more than any person. Now, fourteen centuries have passed since the advent of Islam, and no new religion or new prophet has come. This is in spite of the fact that usually the time interval between two prophets had been very short and sometimes there had even been numerous prophets present at the same time. This itself is a living testimony that the door of revelation is closed and the criterion for salvation embedded in the Islamic sources, i.e. the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Hence, the complete proof or argument [*ujjah*] of God has been disclosed to all who open their ears, eyes, and hearts to the truth.

[1.](#) – Sūrah Yūnus 10:2.

[2.](#) – Sūrah Qaṭaṭ 28:7.

[3.](#) – Sūrah Naḥl 16:68.

[4.](#) – Sūrah Zalzalah 99:4–5.

[5.](#) – Sūrah Nisā' 4:163.

[6.](#) – Sūrah Qaṭaṭ 28:86.

[7.](#) – Sūrah Najm 53:4–5.

[8.](#) – Sūrah Ḥā 20:114.

[9.](#) – Sūrah 'Ankabūt 29:48.

[10.](#) – Sūrah Ḥāqqah 69:43–48.

[11.](#) – Sūrah Ta Ha 20:133.

[12.](#) – Sūrah Mu'minīn 23:45.

[13.](#) – Exodus 14:21–22. In this volume, the translation of biblical passages is adapted from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible (Colorado: International Bible Society, 1984). [Trans.]

[14.](#) – Sūrah A'rāf 7:106–108.

[15.](#) – Sūrah Qamar 54:1–2.

[16.](#) – See Muḥsin Jawād, Darḥmad bar Khudshin's Falsaf [An Introduction to Philosophical Theology] (n.p: n.d.).

- [17.](#) – Surah Anbyā’ 21:69.
- [18.](#) – Take for example the medical treatment of Amr Sāmīnī by Ibn Sīnā. See Muḥahharī, Nubuwwat, p. 160.
- [19.](#) – For information about this ruling and its application, see Ghulām-Muḥsin Ibrāhīm Daynī, Qawā’id-e Kulī-ye Falsafī dar Falsafī-ye Islāmī [General Philosophical Rules in Islamic Philosophy], vol. 1, p. 208.
- [20.](#) – Surah Yūsuf 12:1–2.
- [21.](#) – Surah Hijr 15:9.
- [22.](#) – Surah A’raf 7:158.
- [23.](#) – Majnūn means that a person has connection with the jinn. The Arabs believed that the jinn could teach man and thus, they regarded the Qur’an as taught by the jinn!
- [24.](#) – Surah Baqarah 2:23.
- [25.](#) – Surah Isrā’ (or Banī Isrā’īl) 17:88.
- [26.](#) – Nahj al-Balaghah (ḥubūb ḥalī), Sermon 233, p. 354.
- [27.](#) – That is, God as described in the Qur’an. [Trans.]
- [28.](#) – Surah Qaf 50:16.
- [29.](#) – That is, God as usually described in philosophy by philosophers. [Trans.]
- [30.](#) – Surah Baqarah 2:245.
- [31.](#) – Surah Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, p. 520; Ibn Qajar (al-‘Asqalānī), Al-ḥawā’iq al-Muḥriqah (Egypt, 2nd Edition), Book 9, Chapter 2, p. 121. [Trans.]
- [32.](#) – By tawḥīd is meant the multiplicity of the sources of a certain report that leads to certitude in the listener that the report is indeed true. A mutawḥḥid hadīth is one which has been reported by so many different chains of transmission and such a number of narrators in every generation that normally one could not fabricate such a tradition without the fact of its fabrication becoming known. [Trans.]
- [33.](#) – Surah Aḥzāb 33:40.
- [34.](#) – Surah Mā’idah 5:3.
- [35.](#) – The following view is extracted from the works of Sayyid Muḥammad Murtaḥā Muḥahharī, Khatm-e Nubuwwat [Finality of Prophethood] in his compendium of works, vol. 3, p. 151.
- [36.](#) – Mujtahid: one who exercises or practices ijtihād. [Trans.]

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