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Lesson 10: The Prophet of Islam is the "Seal of Prophecy"

A Clear Meaning of 'Seal'

The Prophet of Islam is the last Prophet of God and the hierarchy of prophethood ends with him. This is one of the necessary precepts of Islam.

What is meant by necessary is that whoever joins the ranks of the Muslims must understand that all Muslims believe this and that this is among their decisive beliefs. That is, just as those who have dealings with Muslims know that they emphasize the principle of unity, they must also know that the seal of the prophethood by the Prophet of Islam is also agreed to by all and there is no group of Muslims who are in anticipation of the coming of another prophet.

In truth, the movement of humanity upon its way towards perfection has passed through various states with sending of the prophets and they have attained a level upon this way so that they can stand on their own two feet. That is, by relying upon the universal teachings of Islam, they can solve their problems.

In other words, Islam is the final law and it is the age of maturity of humanity. From the point of view of belief, it is the most perfect of contents of religious thought and from the point of view of practice, it has so been formulated that it is coordinated with every age and every generation.

The Reason for the "Seal of the Prophecy"

In order to prove this, we have many reasons, the most clear of which are three:

1. The necessity of this issue — we have pointed out that whoever deals with Muslims, wherever in the world they may be, may come to know that they believe in the seal of prophethood with the Prophet of Islam and that if a person accepts Islam with sufficient reasons, they have no choice but to accept the ending of prophethood with him. And as in the previous lessons we have given sufficient proofs of this,

we must also accept this idea, which is one of the necessities of this religion.

2. Verses of the Holy Qur'an are also clear proof of the end of prophethood with the Prophet of Islam.

مَّا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَـٰكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّـهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّـهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

***"Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but* (*he is*) *the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets: and God has full knowledge of all things."* (*33:40*)**

This verse was revealed when the idea of foster children was prevalent among the Arabs. They would accept a child who had a different mother and father as their adopted child and they accepted the child into their home as if it was their own child. The child was Mahram and would inherit, etc.

But Islam came and did away with this ignorant custom saying foster children are not covered by the Divine Law like real children. Among them was Zayd, the foster child of the Prophet of Islam who was considered to be a child of the Prophet.

Thus the Holy Qur'an says that you should only describe the real qualities of the Prophet which are two: Divine mission and Seal of Prophethood instead of introducing him as the father of one of these individuals.

This shows that the seal of prophethood by the Prophet of Islam was clear for all, permanent and decisive as was his mission.

The only question which remains here is, "What exactly is meant by 'seal'?"

Seal means to end something. For instance, a seal is placed at the end of a letter and if we see that sometimes a ring is called a 'seal', it is because in that age, it was used in place of the signature of a name. Whoever at the end of his letter sealed it with the ring in which his name was carved, used it as a seal and every image on the ring was particular to that person.

In the Islamic Traditions, we read, "When the Holy Prophet wanted to write a letter for the kings and leaders of these times, and invited them to Islam, his servant told him that the kings would not accept a letter unless it had a seal. The letters of the Holy Prophet to that time did not have a seal. He ordered that a ring be made for him in which was imprinted, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God." The Prophet, after this, ordered that his letters be sealed with that from then on.

Thus, the meaning of seal is clear.

1. We have many traditions which prove the seal of the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam, among which are:

Among the Traditions recorded by Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari, he records the Prophet as saying, “Among the religions, Islam is like a house which has been built and completed and made beautiful and only one mud brick remains; whoever enters through there or looks through that, says, ‘How beautiful,’ but this has an empty place. I am that last mud brick and all prophets end with me.” (*Tafsir Majma’ al-Bayan,*).

Imam Sadiq says, “The permissible of Muhammad is permissible until the Day of Resurrection and the forbidden is forbidden until the Day of Resurrection.” (Usul al-Kafi, volume 1, p.58).

In the famous Traditions of the Shiites and Sunnite from the Prophet, we read that he said to ‘Ali, “You are like Aaron in relation to Moses in relation to me, other than the fact that after me there will be no prophet,” and tens of other Traditions.

As to the seal of the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam, there are some questions which we should turn our attention towards.

1. Some people say that if the sending of the Prophets was through Divine Grace, why should the people of our age be deprived of this Grace? Why do you not find a new way to guide the people of our age?

But they are negligent of one point and that is that the deprivation in our age is not because they do not merit it, but because humanity’s thoughts and awareness have ended and by understanding the precepts of the Holy Prophet of Islam, they can continue them.

It is perhaps a good idea to give an example here.

The prophets, who came and brought a law or a book, were five: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, peace be upon them and Muhammad, peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants. They made efforts in a particular area of the history for the guidance and perfection of humanity and this passed beyond a certain stage. The second phase of the prophets was handed over and has reached a level whereby they have found their final state and the strength to continue the way.

It is just like a five stages study program which must be followed to be completed.

If a physician does not go to school and college, it does not mean that he does not have merit, it is because of this that this amount of knowledge which he gains will help him to solve the scientific difficulties he faces.

2. As human society is continuously changing, how can we with the permanent laws of Islam, answer the needs of that?

In response, we say that Islam has two kinds of laws: one is a series of laws which resemble permanent qualities of particular human beings, like the necessity for the belief in unity, the implementation of the principles of justice, struggle against any kind of oppression.

But another part is a series of general principles which, with other changes and by the doing away of them, they take on a new form and they answer the problems of each age.
For instance, a universal principle of Islam is: respect the agreements that you make and be loyal.

It is clear that with the passing of time, new social and commercial and political ties will be made whereby a person can answer them by taking the major principle into consideration.

We have another principle, *la zarar*, which says that any law which will harm an individual or society must be limited.

You can see to what extent these universal principles of Islam are effective in solving problems and we have many such laws in Islam.

3. There is no doubt that leadership is a vital part of Islam with the lack of a prophet and the occultation of his successor, the issue of leadership will be terminated. Because of the principle of the seal of prophethood by the prophet of Islam, we cannot wait in anticipation for another prophet. Does this not have harmful implications for an Islamic society?

In response, we say that for this era, the necessary things have been suggested through *wilayat al-faqih*, the leadership of religious jurisprudents who have the necessary conditions of knowledge, piety and political awareness. The means of recognizing such a leader also has been clearly expressed in Islam. There is thus no need for concern in this area.

Thus, *wilayat al-faqih* is the end of the line of the prophets, the leadership of a religious jurisprudent who has all of the necessary conditions so that Islamic society is not left without a guardian.

Think and Answer

1. What is the exact meaning of ‘seal’?

2. How can we use the Holy Qur’an to understand the meaning of ‘seal?

3. Why are the people of our age deprived of the Divine prophets?

4. How many kinds of laws are there in Islam and how do they answer our needs today?

5. Can an Islamic society exist without a leader? How can you solve the issue of leadership in our times?

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