

Lesson 24: The Imam, Succession to the Prophet (S)

Eventually the inevitable occurred and the spirit of the Prophet (S) flew to its eternal abode. For in the words of the poet Nizami 'he who has not died and will not die is only God.'

It was clear that with the death of this great man a storm would blow up over the peaceful ocean of Islam, and that turbulent waters would be churned up. The ambitious would try to benefit and to get as much as they could from this turbulence and commotion, to fish in these troubled waters. On the other hand, we know that the great mass of people believe anything they see; they have always been thus and have always been fuel for a fire that anyone may care to kindle. They need constant training and continual taking care of, and without an educator they cannot reach their own perfection.

Now we must ask if such a society, in such conditions, needs a leader who can take the reins of command in the place of the Prophet or not, so that the result of all the pains the Messenger of Allah took should not be dissipated. Is there not a need for a knowledgeable, political authority who is thoroughly acquainted with the Divine laws and who can guide and lead the people on the right path in the right way?

The Shia holds that the generous Grace and Love of God and His infinite wisdom demand that after the Prophet the people should not be without a leader. Such a leader must be sinless and wise, so that his correctness of speech and action may be a guarantee and a true sign of a superior man, someone selected by God. He must take the reins of the Muslim community in his hands and lead and guide them with extensive wisdom and foresight, without error, and this he must take from the Prophet of Islam. Because there is no reason for God, Who was considerate of the people in the time of the Prophet to change His judgement and to withdraw His loving concern.

How could it be possible that God, Who by His Grace created thousands of elaborate details for the protection and growth of our bodies, Who caused the eyebrows to grow so that the salty, bitter, tainted sweat of the forehead cannot hurt the eyes, and Who made the eyelashes also so that under their outspread canopy the eyes can be more beautiful and better protected, how can God, Who created

these and many more known and unknown things, have neglected to appoint a goodly successor to the Prophet?

Does not the bringing into existence of the best of communities, which is the aim of Islam need the selection of the best of leaders? Is not the appointment of a sinless leader, educator and Imam the basis of the contentment of society? Can Islamic society attain contentment and happiness without divine supervision and leadership?

So if there is a need for the divine, sinless leader, and Islamic society wants a divine educator, how can it be said that this matter has been ignored by Islam and that the people have been left to themselves?

In short, the same philosophy which demands the appointment of the Prophet also precisely demands that God introduce and appoint a successor through the Prophet.

The Prophet of Islam (S) said in the latter part of his life: “O People, I swear before Allah that I have explained what will make you nearer to heaven (contentment) and what will make you far from the Fire (error)”.^{[1](#)}

With this explanation, how can it be said that the Prophet of Islam did not appoint his immediate successor?

Is the Qur'an Not Sufficient?

The great and mighty Qur'an is the fundamental basis for every kind of Islamic concept. Like a mighty rock, all the fruitful buildings of Islamic knowledge have been made steady on it. It is the clear spring from which all the streams of insight flow. The credibility and prestige of other religious foundations rest on it.

But, on the basis of the proofs we shall give, one cannot be content with the Qur'an alone to solve the problems of leadership, the differences which crop up in Islamic society, or the satisfying of the needs of the Muslim people.

1. Firstly because the Qur'an and its great and abundant contents need commentary and explanation. Since all the verses are not alike in clarity and openness, unacquainted and unknowing readers in the first moments of their journey may become lost and not take the path to their destination.

So the Prophet himself or those appointed by him who have a spiritual link with what is beyond the external world, must be a guide in this valley also, so that they can interpret and explain the ayahs according to Allah's purpose. For if not, ordinary people will sometimes interpret incorrectly and will end up far from the truth.^{[2](#)}

It is recounted that a thief was brought into the presence of the Abassid Caliph Mu'tasim so that he

might have the punishment proscribed in the Qur'an to him. The command of the Qur'an is: "Cut off the hand of a thief." But Mu'tasim did not know from where the hand should be cut. He asked his Sunni 'ulema One of them said: " From the wrist." "From the elbow," another said.

Mu'tasim was not satisfied. He was forced to ask Imam Muhammad at-Taqi the 9th Imam (a.s.) who was present, and he replied: "Four fingers must be cut off." "Why?"

"Since Allah has decreed in the Qur'an '**And that the places of sajdah are for Allah.**' (72: 18) That is the seven places of the body, of which one is the palm, which in sajdah contact the ground belong to Allah, they should not be cut off."[3](#)

All those present accepted and were satisfied with his proof.

This kind of interpretation is in fact interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, and is peculiar to the descendants of the prophetic mission, and no-one, to whatever degree he may be a master of interpretation, is able to succeed in perfectly understanding interpretation in this way unless he has taken the habit from the Household of the Prophet and has taken them as his model.

2. Another proof is that what we have said Concerning the need for correct interpretation of the Qur'an concerns only one side of the Qur'an the exotic meaning and the commands of the Qur'an But in the shelter of these exotic words anti meanings, a deeper and wider aim, a spiritual profundity is concealed, especially in the sections on knowledge, beliefs and the virtues.

The respected Prophet (S) said: The Qur'an has a beautiful outer meaning and a profound inner meaning."[4](#)

He also said: "The Qur'an has profundity, and the profundity of that is deep too, up to seven inner meanings."[5](#)

Truly, all the Qur'an has, according to the words of the great exegetists, a hermeneutics and an inner meaning, and to arrive at them by thought and research alone is not possible. It is not explicable to all through words, for the ability to perceive and practice this is not given to all men. Only those near to God, the pure, those free from corruption, can comprehend this, and use it for the solution of the differences and incidents between men, and learn it, and then, by virtue of the immunity from error and mistake that they have from God, teach it to others.

These ones near to God, the slaves immune from error are the Prophet (S) and the Household of the Prophet (a.s.) about whom the Qur'an said:

***Household of the Prophet; Allah desires only to put away from you abomination and to cleanse you out.* " (33: 33)**

There is also a hadith that only the Prophet and his Household, who are the original ones to be

addressed by the Qur'an, can perceive all the truths of the Book.[6](#)

That is to say the Prophet who was addressed by Jibra'il and his Household, since they are the family of the Prophet, are more acquainted with the meaning of the Qur'an.

It is because of this connection (the Qur'an and the Household) that the Prophet said to the people in the last days of his life: "I leave two things in your trust, the Book of Allah and my descendants; if you attach yourselves to these two you will never go astray."[7](#)

3. The Qur'an needs a sinless, enforcing guarantor. Since the Qur'an is a fundamental law, a kind of constitution, it needs an enforcing guarantor and a power to implement it. But only he who like the Prophet (S) is free from error and who understands and knows the Qur'an with competence can be the guarantor of its commands and laws.

These special qualities are to be found in the beings of the Imams (a.s.), and the best witness to this is the few years of the leadership of Ali (a.s.), who, despite the difficulties which beset his holding of the rein of government, carried out to the end the great and resplendent laws of Islam each and every one.

As a postscript, the summary and fundamental of this lesson can be found in a discussion which students following the sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), had with one of the Sunni school in the presence of the Imam.

A man from Damascus was given a meeting with Imam Sadiq (a.s.) and said that he had come for a discussion with one of his students.

The Imam said, "Introduce him to Hisham." Hisham was the youngest of his students.

"O Boy," said the man from Damascus, "ask me concerning the Imamate of this man (Imam Sadiq (a.s.)."

Hisham was angered by his lack of manners and shuddered But he concealed his temper and began.

"Is your Creator more kind and loving towards His slaves or the slaves themselves?"

"The Creator."

"What has the loving Creator done for his slaves?"

"He has appointed a clear guidance and proof, to protect them from differences and disunity, and to establish friendship an unity among them He has made clear to them their religious duties."

"Who is that guide?"

"The Prophet."

“Who is it after the death of the Prophet?”

“The Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet of Allah

“Can the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet prevent us from differences today?”

“Yes.”

“So why do you and I who are both Muslims have a dispute or in other words, why have you come here from Damascus a result of this difference?”

The man from Damascus was silent and said no more.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said to him: “Why don't you speak up

“What shall I say?” he replied. “If I say we have no difference then I lie. And just as I said the Book of Allah and the Sunnah the Prophet should take away The difference between us, so this also is untrue because, in many instances, the Book of Allah and the Sunnah do not have a clear and obvious meaning that could dispel our differences.”

So the man from Damascus said that he wanted to ask the very same question from Hisham. The Imam agreed.

“O Hisham. Who is the more loving towards people? God, or the people themselves?”

“God.”

“Did he send them someone to protect the unit of Muslims and to take over their control, to explain to them truth and falsity?”

“Are you talking about the time of the Prophet, or about now?”

“In the time of the Prophet, it was him; no, tell me about now.”

“Today it is this man who is seated here and to whom people come from every corner of the land, and who gives us news of the heaven and the earth; and this knowledge was bequeathed to him from his father and so on back to the Prophet.”

“How can I verify and accept this statement for myself?”

“Go now and ask him anything you like.”

“That's right, there is no other excuse; only I must ask.”

Then Imam Sadiq (a.s.) told him about his journey and of the things that happened to him on his way,

which only the man could know of. When he had explained so that no doubt remained for him, the man declared his belief in the Imam.[8](#)

Questions

1. What does the poet Mizami say?
2. According to the text a storm would blow upon what and what would happen?
3. Who would try to fish in the troubled waters?
4. Who has always been fuelled for a fire?
5. Who needs training and an educator?
6. What needed to be preserved and how?
7. What do the grace and love of God demand?
8. What kind of a leader did Muslims need after the Holy Prophet (according to Shia Muslims)
9. What would this leader do for the Muslims?
10. Did God reduce his attention to Muslims after the Holy Prophet?
11. How has God arranged means for protection of the Human Body?
12. What means has God arranged for protections of Human eyes?
13. What is the social aim of Islam and what kind of community does it intend to establish?
14. What kind of leader would such a society require?
15. Would God, who has arranged marvellous means for the protection of the Human Body, would not arrange for a leader to educate and lead an Islamic community?
16. Is the philosophy of prophet hood different from that for his successorship?
17. What does the Hadith of Usool-e-Kafi vol. 2. p. 74 say?
18. What is like a mighty rock in Islam?
19. Why does the Holy Qur'an require commentaries?
20. Who could be the best authority to interpret the Holy Qur'an?

21. Who did not know how to cut the hands of the thief and what did he do?
22. What does verse 18 chapter 72 say?
23. What was the basis of Imam Muhammad Taqis decision?
24. What kind of interpretation is the kind Imam Muhammad Taqi applied?
25. Can Qur'an be interpreted by personal opinions?
26. What has the Holy Prophet said about such interpretations?
27. What does Usul Kafi vol. 2, p. 599 say?
28. Who can better understand the Holy Qur'an?
29. What does Verse 33 Ch. 33 say?
30. What does Tafsir Mira't Al-Anwar page 16 say?
31. What does Al-Ghadir vol. 1, p. 55 say?
32. What kind of qualifications does a executive authorities of laws of Qur'an must have?
33. What does the few years of the administration prove?
34. What was the topic of discussion between Hisham and the man from Damascus?
35. Can you answer Hishams Questions 1-6?
36. What did the man from Damascus say after the sixth question?
37. Can you answer the questions of the man from Damascus 1-5?
38. What did Imam As-Sadiq tell the man about his journey?

[1.](#) Usul Kafi vol. 2, p. 74

[2.](#) The great Prophet of Islam (S) said that everyone who interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinions will have the place in which he sits at the Resurrection made the site of the gathering together of fire. (Tafsir as vol. I, p. 21)

[3.](#) Nur ath-Thaqalayn vol. 5, p. 439.

[4.](#) Usul Kafi, vol. 2 p. 599.

[5.](#) Tafsir Safi, vol. 1, p. 39.

[6.](#) Tafsir Mir'at al-Anwar, p. 16.

[7.](#) Ibn Haubab Musnad Beirut, vol. 3, p. 17. al-Ghadir, vol. 1, p. 55 Ghayat al-Maryam p. 212.

[8.](#) Usul Kafi, vol. I, p. 171-173.

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