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Lesson 5: The Quran and Imamate

The Quran, this great heavenly book of ours is the best guide in all areas and in the area of imamate, also, it presents the issue from its various dimensions.

The Quran Says that Imamate Comes from God

Just as we previously showed in the story of Abraham, peace be upon him, the Quran refers to the state of imamate and leadership of Abraham, peace be upon him, to follow the stage of prophethood, Divine mission and passing the difficult tests presented to him. It says,

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۖ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۖ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

"And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands which he filled. He said, 'I will make you an Imam to the nations."(***2: 124***)

The Holy Quran and various histories show that he attained this stage after struggling with the idol worshippers of Babel, his migration to Damascus, his building of the Ka'bah and taking his child, Ismail, to the place of sacrifice.

If prophethood and the Divine mission must be determined by God, imamate and leadership must also be determined by God for it relates to all aspects of the human being and it is to help direct them towards perfection. This is not something that the people may do. The Holy Quran says,

إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا

"I will make you an Imam to the nations." (***2: 124***)

In another verse it says,

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ

"And We made them leaders, guiding (***men***) ***by Our Command and We sent them Inspiration ..."*** (***21:73***)

Similar to this, it can be shown in other verses of the Quran that God must select the Imam and beyond this, at the time when we read that Abraham asked that his offspring be included, he was told,

لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

"But My promise is not within the reach of wrongdoers.." (***2:124***)

It says that his prayer will be answered but those who had committed oppression would never reach this high station.

Noting the fact that an oppressor, both in the meaning of the word as well as in the logic of the Quran, has an extensive meaning, including the clear and hidden sins of polytheism and any kind of oppression against other people and noting that only God can know this in a complete and perfect way, because only God is aware of what goes on inside people, it is clear that only God can select the person for this stage.

The Verse on Preaching the Mission

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَّغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ

"O, Prophet, proclaim the (***Message***) ***which has been sent to thee from your lord. If you do not, you would not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission. And God will defend you from men*** (***who corrupt***) ***for God guides not those who reject Faith."***(***5:67***)

The tone of this verse shows that the assignment is a heavy one which has been placed upon the Prophet's shoulders. He was anxious about the mission which might possibly meet up with opposition from the people. Thus the verse tells the Prophet that God Commands the endeavors to have Islam be better understood and give him security and that he will be protected.

This important issue clearly does not relate to monotheism and polytheism in the struggle with the enemies from among the Jews and hypocrites, etc. because at the time of the revealing of this verse, this issue had been completely solved.

And, also, the announcing of the normal precepts of Islam did not have these dangers. From the

external interpretation of the verse, it can be seen that it was a command which was of the same weight as the Divine mission. That is, if endeavors were not made, the truth of the Divine mission would not have been expressed. Can this command, then, be anything other than the selection of the successor to the Prophet? In particular, since the verse was revealed at the end of the life of the Holy Prophet and it relates to tile issue of the caliphate, which is the continuation of the issue of prophethood and the Divine mission of the Holy Prophet.

In addition, there are many Traditions recorded from a large group of the Companions of the Holy Prophet including Zayd ibn Arqam, Abu Sa'id Khudri, ibn 'Abbas, Jabir Abdallah Ansari, Abu Hurayrah, Hudaifah and ibn Ma'sud. Some of these Traditions have come to us through eleven ways and a large number of them are from the Sunni scholars, both these who transmit the Traditions, historians as well as recorders which say that the above verse was about 'Ali, peace be upon him, and that it was revealed on the day of Ghadir . (For further informa tion, see the books Ahqaq al-Haq, al-Qadir, al-Marija'at and Dala'il al-Sadaq).

We will discuss the events of Ghadir, with the will of God, in the section on Traditions but here we will simply remind ourselves that this is a clear sign because the Prophet of Islam was duty-bound to announce on the return from his last hajj and at the end of his life that he had officially selected 'Ali, peace be upon him, as his successor and introduce him to the people.

The Verse on Obedience to the Commanders

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

"O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Prophet and those charged with authority among you ..." (***4:59***)

Here, the command to obey 'those charged with authority' directly follows the obedience to God and the Holy Prophet.

Does it mean 'those charged with authority' as leaders and rulers in every age and in every environment? But are Muslims of each age and in each country obliged to follow the commands of the leaders without question (as some of the Sunnis say)?

This does not agree with any kind of logic because most of the leaders, in the various ages, were deviated, polluted, affiliated and oppressive.

Does this verse say to obey the rulers upon the condition that they are not rulers against the precepts of Islam? This also does not fit with the generalization of the verse. Does it mean that they are only to obey the Companions of the Prophet? This also does not agree with the extensiveness mentioned in the Holy

Quran to include all ages and times.

Thus we can conclude that which is meant by the infallible leaders who exist in every age and in every era, obedience of whom is unconditional and obligatory and his commands, like the commands of God and the Prophet, must be carried out.

There are many Traditions in Islam in this area and the fact that those charged with authority has been related to 'Ali or the infallible Imams is further proof of this. (For further information see the Tafsir Nimunah, vol. 3, p. 435).

The Verse of Leadership (Wilayat)

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

"Your (***real***) ***leaders are*** (***no less than***) ***God, His Apostle and the*** (***fellowship of***) ***believers – those who establish regular prayers and regular charity when they bow down humbly*** (***in worship***)***."*** (***5:58***)

The Quran relies upon the word imamah which in Arabic refers to exclusiveness: the vali and leader of the Muslims is exclusive to three people: God, the Holy Prophet and those who have found faith and who pay the zakat at the time of the ruku'.

There is no doubt that what is meant by leadership is not the friendship of Muslims with one another because friendship with one another does not need to have the word 'unconditional' added to it. All Muslims are friends with each other even though, at the time of the ruku', zakat is not paid. Thus 'Wilayat' here means the spiritual and material leadership, in particular, since it is placed a long side the 'Wilayat' of God and the 'Wilayat' of the Prophet.

This point is also clear that the above verse, with the situation in which it appears, refers to a particular person who has paid the zakat while in the state of ruku' because otherwise it is not necessary that one pay the zakat while in that state; this is a sign, not a description.

The totality of this, then, shows that the above verse refers to the meaningful story of 'Ali, peace be upon him, in particular, since he was in the midst of the ruku' when a needy person came to the mosque of the Prophet to seek help. No one answered the needy person but in that state, 'Ali, peace be upon him, with his right hand, indicated his finger with a ring on it. The needy person took the valuable ring. The Prophet saw what was going on with the corner of his eye. After his ritual prayer ended, he raised his head and said, "God. The brother of Moses has asked that you extend his spirit and make things easy for him and cut the difficulty of his tongue, and have Aaron be his helper and assistant...0 God! I am Muhammad, the Prophet, and the person you selected opened my chest and made my work easy and

from among my family, have 'Ali be my helper so that through him, my back will be strong and firm..."

The Prayer of the Holy Prophet had not as yet ended when Gabriel appeared and revealed the verse above.

It is interesting to note that many of the recorders of the Traditions, who are famous Sunnis, and their historians and commentators, say that this verse refers to Hadrat Ali and more than 10 of the Companions of the Holy Prophet.

There are many verses about Wilayat but we have only mentioned four verses in relation to this issue.

Think and Answer

1. According to the Holy Quran, who is to select the Imam?

2. When was the command to endeavor to have Islam be better understood revealed and what is the content of it?

3. In relation to what person is it reasonable to have unconditional obedience?

4. For what reason does the verse, ***'Your*** (***real***) ***friends are*** (***no less than***) ***God,"*** (***5:58***)***'*** refer to the leadership and imamate?

5. In all of the verses of the Quran about the issue of 'Wilayat', what point can be made?

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