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Why Do We Need Prophets?

Wilson: Why does mankind need to have a prophet or a messenger from God? Man is endowed with a mental ability by which he can distinguish between right and wrong. One can say that there is no need for heavenly guidance to tell him what to do or not to do. The average individual is able to conduct himself sensibly, so he may deal with others and with his own family in a rational way without any need for Divine law.

Chirri: The prophethood is needed for many reasons:

1. There Is A Need To Remind People Of God

Theoretically, man is capable of deducing the existence of the Creator through his observation of God's creations on earth. The free human mind is capable of comprehending abstractions and universal ideas. Because of our biological appetites or needs, we are closely bound to the material world. The material attractions of the world divert the best of us. The average person does not seem to be capable of a detached comprehension of his Maker. Nor can we expect the average man to divorce himself from the material things in the world to think clearly about God.

Moreover, the wondrous regulation of the universe implies the existence of an Orderer, the Almighty God. But man is too engrossed in his petty concerns to notice natural laws, let alone think of their origins. Man has become too accustomed to the sun rising in the east to think about why it does. Mankind falls short of the important recognition of the Creator. The universal recognition of His existence by man is not the result of common thinking but due to the teachings of some gifted individuals who succeeded in leading mankind to this conclusion.

2. There Is A Need For An Incontrovertible Authority

People differ in education, abilities, feelings and backgrounds; so they differ in their views. Many important issues concerning man's actions are highly controversial among individuals and groups. Ethics

and morals are strongly disputed. Philosophic justifications can be found for almost any viewpoint. Rather than clarifying the issues so that one finds it possible to make a rational choice, the rational philosophies amplify the confusion. Reason and philosophy have failed as a solution for ethical and moral questions. The answers we seek must come from an incontrovertible authority to which individuals and groups should submit. That authority is God.

3. There is a Need for Adoration of God

Though a free thinker may be able to recognize God and His greatness, he usually overlooks the importance of adoration. Even if one recognizes the need for adoration, he does not know how to do it. Some people may think it is important to sacrifice and burn animals, others pursue animal passions in the name of God. One believes the ascetic life is loved by Gods while others believe that life is an abomination to God and destructive to the human race. Others adore God by singing and playing instruments, while others believe in submission and kneeling as their form of devotion. The acceptable form of devotion must accord with God's will, not our desires and whims. He should make His will clear to us through a messenger or prophet.

4. There Is A Need To Restrain The Impulses

Man, unguided and untrained, resembles the animals in his instinctive constitution. Reason is subverted to the service of satisfying his passions unless a restraining element is introduced. Philosophy is not helpful in restraining our passions, since it is available to only a few; nor is there a consistency in philosophy that urges us to control the passions. Some people reach the conclusion that we should strive only for instinctive satisfaction. We are now struggling against such an ultra-materialistic ideology, the doctrines of which discourage the restraint of passions for moral reasons. The ultimate moral and ethical standards all lie with God. When His messenger transmits His word, it will be a sound basis for ending dispute over these matters.

5. There is a Need For Information About Afterlife

For a man who believes in God, it is highly probable that his life may continue after death in some form. It is also probable that there will be a Day of Judgment on which man will be rewarded or penalized. If there is such an afterlife, man should prepare himself for the judgment. Only God could know about the existence of an afterlife. Philosophy is of no help here; nor can the human mind deduce the existence of the afterlife from observation or experience in this world. Only God has the certain knowledge. He can transmit this information through a messenger so that mankind will know and will be warned.

The answers to the questions raised above lie with God. He can impart the knowledge to man in any way He desires. One of these techniques is to send a prophet who clearly answers each of the questions as a mediator between God and man. The teachings of such a heavenly messenger would

serve the following purposes:

- A. To draw the people's attention to the real significance of the great order of the universe, which becomes insignificant to the common man, because of familiarity. The universe is truly infinite and full of wonders; and, if contemplated attentively, it could lead to a strong and sound faith in the Creator. Man's attention can be drawn to those natural signs through the prophet's teachings and directions.
- B. To express the moral and ethical standards and codes with which mankind could conform and settle the controversial ethical issues.
- C. To make the imperativeness of God's worship evident and to teach us how to perform such adorations.
- D. To deliver to us the codes which are needed for curbing our appetites and to stimulate our aspirations for loftiness and purity which, if progressively increased, could rank us with the angels.
- E. To inform us definitely that there is or there is not a life after death. This information could only be received from the Creator Who alone knows whether or not He will create the other world.

Wilson: The heavenly teachings did not serve all these purposes since we still dispute the ethical and moral issues. Disagreement still prevails on the manner of worship of the Creator, His existence, and life after death.

Chirri: These purposes have been satisfactorily served, since a great portion of humanity had agreed on most of the moral issues and believed in the Creator and the Hereafter. With the acceptance of these heavenly principles by such a great portion of humanity, mankind could restrict the loose appetites and moralize the world to some extent.

Furthermore, the heavenly information is necessary even if it does not serve any of these purposes. This holds true because the Creator should bring about the opportunity which may enable us to know Him and help promote our morality, which draws the actual line between human beings and animals. When God creates the other world or plans to create it, He should make it well-known to mankind by His heavenly information, which is the only way we can become aware of it. If the Creator does not send his messenger to transmit to mankind this information, we may be excused when we ignore it, and we will have no opportunity to have a relative perfection. Moreover, if He creates the other world and makes it unknown to us, its creation would be utterly futile.

The historical facts had accorded themselves with this hypothesis, the necessity of the heavenly teachings. Providence did not neglect the human beings since they were in their primitive stage. Thus, many gifted individuals were chosen by the Creator to perform the great and noble task of reforming and teaching.

Wilson. From the word “prophet” we understand that the prophet is supposed to communicate with God

and receive His words. The human ways of communication are physical, either through hearing some audible voice or reading some written words. A prophet is a human being like us. He can hear the voice by his ears and see the written word by his eyes. But God is not physical. He does not speak by voice, nor does He write by hand. How can a prophet communicate with God?

Chirri: A prophet may communicate with God through one of the following ways:

(a) He may receive the revelation mentally. God may show him spiritually some specific truth by creating, in his mind, a clear knowledge of that truth.

(b) God may create some words audible to the prophet, in some non-speaking object. The first revelation that was received by Moses came to him by this method. He heard the words of God coming from a tree.

(c) A prophet may receive a clear message from God through an angel messenger. The Prophet Muhammad received the Holy Qur'an through the angel Gabriel. From the Holy Qur'an:

“And it is not fitting for a mortal that God should speak to him, except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He chooses. Surely, He is High, Wise.” 42:51

None of these ways through which a prophet communicates with God is usual to the rest of the people, and none of them is beyond the area of possibility. The Creator is able to communicate with His servant in any way He pleases. The recipient of revelation, however, is supposed to have certain qualifications which place him spiritually above the rest of mankind .

Wilson: History has witnessed many individuals who claimed prophethood. These individuals appeared in various periods, and some of them are still alive. We know that some of them were true prophets, and some of them were untrue. How can we distinguish between true and untrue prophets?

Chirri: A prophet is a messenger of God. He is an ambassador of God to mankind. An ambassador is supposed to have some credential papers, some signs which demonstrate his truthfulness. No one should be received as an ambassador on his own claim. Therefore, we find that those individuals who are believed to be prophets were equipped with some unusual powers which could not be found with other people.

Moses was empowered by God to convert his staff into a serpent, to transform water into blood, and to split the sea with a strike of his staff. Jesus was empowered to cure the sick without medicine, to make the blind see, to bring the dead back to life, and, according to the Holy Qur'an, to speak to the people while he was in the cradle. Muhammad was equipped with the superb speech, the Holy Qur'an, which challenged mankind to produce its like in the Arabic language.

Wilson: Should the prophet be human or may God send to mankind a non-human messenger?

Chirri: A prophet is an example to mankind. He should share with them the same nature, the same ability, and the same limitation. An attractive example to the people must be obtainable. It must have the capability of inducing the people to follow it. Should the prophet be from a different nature, people will not attempt to follow his example.

A relative perfection shown by a prophet should be possible for his followers. Should a human being show me a high degree of virtuous life, I may be tempted to try to attain that degree. He and I are human. What is possible for him is possible for me. But if an angel shows me a high degree of morality, I may not attempt to follow his example. What is possible for him may be impossible for me; he is not from the same nature.

There is another reason to believe that mankind should receive human prophets: We have advanced that a prophet is expected to substantiate his truthfulness by showing people unusual performance. By doing so, people would know that he is empowered by God because what he does is beyond his natural ability. This will not work if the prophet is non-human, – let us say an angel. A human prophet may, for example, show his truthfulness by taking an unaided flight. Should an angel do the same, it will not demonstrate his truthfulness. Such a flight will not necessarily be beyond his natural ability, since he may not be affected naturally by gravitation.

Wilson: What does the belief in the prophethood include from the Islamic point of view?

Chirri: The belief in the prophethood, from the Islamic point of view, includes the following:

1. The belief in the prophethood of Muhammad. Muhammad is a major prophet sent not only to a particular nation, but to all mankind. From the Holy Qur'an:

“Say: O mankind, surely I am the messenger of God to you all, of Him, Whose is the kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth. There is no god but He; He gives life and causes death. So believe in God and His messenger, the unschooled prophet who believes in God and His words, and follow him, so that you may be guided aright.” 7: 158

2. The belief in the prophethood of all the prophets who came before Muhammad because they are recognized by the Holy Qur'an:

“Say: We believe in God and (in) that which has been revealed to us, and (in) that which has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Jacob and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord. We do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.” 2: 136

3. The belief in Muhammad as the final of the prophets whose death brought the prophethood to a close. From the Holy Qur'an:

“Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the messenger of God and the

'Khatam' of the prophets, and God knows all things." 33:40

The word Khatam means the seal which closes a container or the seal whose imprint confirms the authenticity of certain contents of a written document or a message. Sealing for closure or for confirmation comes at the end of what it closes or confirms.

The Prophet Muhammad said to his cousin Ali:

"Thy position from me compares to the position of Aaron from Moses, but there will be no prophet after me. "

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