

Lesson 13: The Last Message & The Last Prophet

1. Muhammad, the Last Prophet

Islam, from the very beginning, has said that it is the last divine message to mankind, the final manifestation of revelation and prophethood, and the culmination of the previous revealed religions. The Muslims believe that the Prophet of Islam is the last Messenger of God, and that the Qur'^{ān} is the final revelation of God.

The Qur'^{ān} has explained the universality of Islam and has shown that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last messenger sent by God. For example, verse 40 of chapter 33 says:

“Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets; Allah has knowledge of everything.”

Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) himself once said to ‘Ali (a.s.): “In all respects, your relationship to me is like that of H^{ārūn} to Musa (i.e., if H^{ārūn} was Musa's brother, I also take you as a brother; if he was Musa's successor, you also will be my successor). Except that Musa was not the last prophet, and I am the last.”¹ He also said, “I am the last brick in the building of prophethood. With my coming, the prophets have come to an end.”

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said, “With the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad's (a.s.), revelation came to an end.”² The eighth Imam, ‘Ali ar-Riza (a.s.), said, “The pure religion of Muhammad (a.s.) will not be abrogated till the day of resurrection, and also no prophet will follow him.”³

What we have just recounted is only a sample of tens of hadith which clearly and succinctly explain the conclusive status of the Prophet (a.s.) and the perpetuity of his pure religion; they leave no room for doubt.

2. The Universality of Islam

Islam is an everlasting religion because it is all-inclusive. It is a comprehensive project based on human disposition, and it embraces all aspects of life: individual, social, material, spiritual, doctrinal, emotional, economic, legal and so forth, and it explains the basis of each in the most realistic manner for all peoples, in every time and place.

So now let us study some aspects of this universality.

(A) The God of Islam

The God of Islam is the Preserver of all worldly things. He is not the god of a tribe or of a special group only. In their prayers, the Muslims say: ***“Al-hamdu lil Iḥi Rabbi l-`āmin — Praise be to Allḥ, the Lord of the Universe.”*** (Qurḥn 1:2)

God is a reality without parallel, beyond all human attributes and likeness; He is not like the gods of some religions who are presented in the form of a human, an animal or a thing.

The God of Islam is One without equal; He has no son or mother or father; neither partner nor associate. This is the message of a short chapter of the Qurḥn which the Muslims recite every day in their prayers so as to be far away from the possibility of associating anything with Him.

(B) Equality In Islam

Superiority of race or segregation is not only eliminated and void in the eyes of Islam, but the equality of man is an absolute reality in Islam. Islam says that all human beings are equal, all are from one father and one mother, and are members of one family—so from the aspect of nobility, origin and connections, they are equal partners. No one is better than anyone else, except in purity and devotion to God.

The Qurḥn says: ***O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into races and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of Allḥ is the most God-fearing of you. Allah is All-Knowing, All-aware.*** (49:13)

(C) Islam & Freedom of Thought

Islam is a firm supporter of rational argument and freedom of thought. Imposition of ideas or beliefs, or the stifling of voices does not exist in Islam. The Qurḥn says: ***There is no compulsion in religion [because] the truth has become clear from the error.*** (2:256)

In Islam, investigation of the foundations of beliefs is a duty for every individual, and it is an obligation for everyone not to accept anything without proof. Islam censures those who blindly follow the beliefs of their fathers and ancestors, and commends self-investigation and deep examination. It rejects feeble-

mindedness and vain speculation, and urges only to the perusal of knowledge and certainty. The Qur'^{ān} says: ***And pursue not that you have no knowledge of; the hearing, the sight, the heart — all of these shall be questioned of.*** (17:36)

Islam grants its opponents the right to set forth their queries in reasonable discussion and to enumerate their proofs and listen to the answers. Say, ***“Produce your proof, if you speak truly.”*** (2:111) This was the reason that many Jews, Christians and those from other groups who took a stand against Islam, came to the Prophet or the Imams, and sat down and discussed their religious ideas.

(D) Islam & Knowledge

Islam lends great value to thinking. It asks the learned and wise to think and think again about creation, time, night and day, the sky, the earth, animal life, man and the universe and what is in it. The Qur'^{ān} says:

“Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and day, and the ship that floats in the sea with profit to men, and the water Allah sends down from the sky therewith reviving the earth after it is dead, and His scattering abroad on it all types of crawling things, and the turning about of the winds and the clouds suspended between heaven and earth — surely there are signs for a people who use their mind.” (2:164)

The Qur'^{ān} also asks people to study the lives of the nations who came before, their thoughts and the causes of their decline and fall, so that they may keep far from the precipices of their destruction. It says, ***“Indeed many events have taken place before you, therefore travel on the earth and see what was the outcome of those who rejected [the message of God]. This is a clear statement for mankind, and a guidance and an admonition for the pious people.”*** (3:136)

In short, Islam desires that man should think deeply and freely and travel across the far horizons of thought and knowledge and take everything that is best for the improvement of his being.

For this reason, Islam values scientific advances and discoveries which are for the help of humanity, and this is why scientists and scholars emerged in the centuries following the advent of Islam, to decorate the high road of human civilization with the jewel of their scientific endeavours, so much so that their great names will shine forever at the summit of scientific history. They include J^ābir ibn Hayy^{ān}, R^āzi, Ibn Sin^ā (Avicenna) and Nas^īru 'd-Din Tusi, who were celebrities in all the sciences of their time: philosophy, natural science, astronomy, alchemy, etc. The books of Ibn Sina were even taught in European universities up to the end of the last century. Jurji Zayd^{ān}, the famous Christian writer of Lebanon, says in his *Ta'rikh at-Tamaddun al-Islami*, “As soon as Islamic civilization found its feet, and the new sciences spread among the Muslims, Muslim scholars appeared whose thinking was more important than the founders of some of the branches of the sciences. In fact these sciences took on a fresh colour with the new researches of Islamic scientists, and progresses due to Islamic civilization.” (p.

(E) Islam's Concept of Life

There is no opposition, in Islam, between the material and the spiritual life. Islam does not approve of those who do not work in this world or make no effort; but neither does it accept those who only work for their material betterment without any regard to the spiritual life. Imam Ja`far as-S`adiq (a.s.) said: "He who abandons this world for the next (i.e., he who withdraws from the worldly life in the name of asceticism) and he who gives up the next world for this world — both are not from among us."⁴

So it can be said that in this matter Muslims should adjust their actions with equal movement in this world, by advancing with its happiness, and in the spiritual world, by enriching with its contentment. There is no monasticism in Islam if monasticism means being a burden on society, withdrawal from social life, egoism or seclusion. The Prophet said, "There is no monasticism for us; the monasticism for my followers is to struggle in the way of Allah."⁵

(F) Islamic Laws & Change in Lifestyle

The transformation, evolution and development of the means of living and progress in the various elements of civilization have no kind of incompatibility with the eternity of the laws of Islam. How? Because the incompatibility of a law with this kind of progress can only happen if the law depends on the specific material means available at the time and place the law was made.

For example, if a law is made that only the hand must be used in writing, or only a donkey must be used for traveling, etc. then this kind of law becomes outdated with the advance of science and technology. But if the law was not based on specific and transitory means of life, and instead it pertained to the basic and permanent need of mankind, then there will be no clash between that law and the new means of life.

Islamic laws are of the latter category, that is, they do not look especially at the means of life at a given period in history. For example, they say, "A Muslim nation must be strong enough to protect itself from foreign powers." This law, even though made at a time when sword was a means of defence, looks at the permanent need of a Muslim society. However, if Islam had said that a Muslim nation must defend itself with swords, then this law would become obsolete in the twentieth century.

Whatever changes take place in the means of life, it will not be outside the all inclusive domain of the laws of Islam — this is, indeed, the secret of Islam's eternity.

3. The Continuation of Divine Assistance

Some people imagine that since Muhammad (a.s.) is the Last Messenger, the divine guidance from God has stopped completely. This is not valid because the meaning of the finality of prophethood is only that after the Prophet of Islam, no other prophet, messenger, book or religion will come. It does not mean

that the connection between the unseen world and this world has been severed.

The divine guidance of God for human society is everlasting and is continued, according to the Shi'a Muslims, by means of the twelve Imams of Ahlu 'l-bayt. According to Mulla Sadra, in *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, "Revelation, that is to say the descent of the angel to the delegated and prophetic eyes, has been forever cut off [after the Prophet of Islam], but the door of inspiration and illumination has not and will never be closed, and it is not possible for it to be interrupted."

You will learn more about this in the next lesson.

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This lesson adapted from Dar Rah-e Haq, *The Roots of Religion*, and has been edited to suit the need of this course by S.M. Rizvi.

Question Paper on Lesson 13

Question 1: [15 points]

True or False:

- (a) Islam preaches belief in a God who is the sole Creator and Sustainer of all things.
- (b) Islam does not allow dissenting views.
- (c) Muhammad is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets.
- (d) Islam discourages theological speculation.
- (e) Islam provides a comprehensive code of conduct to its followers.
- (f) Islam gives more importance to spiritual life than material life.
- (g) Islam promotes monasticism.
- (h) Islamic laws are perpetually valid because they are independent of material means of implementation.
- (i) Islam promotes equality, encourages intellectual inquiry, exalts pursuit of knowledge and maintains a balance between material and spiritual life.
- (j) Islam encourages suppression of desires.

Question 2: [10 points]

Circle the letter of one correct statement:

- (a) According to Islam, Christianity and Judaism are valid religions even today.

(b) It is permissible to revise the fundamental Islamic principles to suit the needs of changing times.

(c) Imam 'Ali ar-Riza (a.s.) said, "With the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (a.s.), revelation came to an end."

(d) Muslims believe that the Prophet of Islam is the Last Messenger of God and that the Qur'ān is the Final Revelation.

(e) Islam is the continuation of Christianity and Judaism.

Question 3: [25 points: 15 for (a) & 10 for (b)]

(a) What is the fundamental criterion for a law to be eternal and permanent?

(b) Describe at least two Islamic laws that would fit the criterion you mentioned in (a).

1. This is an authentic hadith accepted by all Muslims, see al-Amini, al-Ghadir, vol. 3, p. 196-202.

2. Nahju 'l-Balaghah, sermon 133.

3. Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 2, p. 34.

4. Wasā'ilu 'sh-Shi'a, vol. 12, p. 49

5. Bihāru 'l-Anwār, vol. 70, p. 114.

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