

Nubuwwah

Meaning of 'Nabi' and 'Rasul'

The word 'Nabi' (نبي) is derived from 'Nubuwwat' (نبوة). 'Nubuwwat' means 'to be high' and, thus 'Nabi' means a 'High person': high in the presence of Allah, The word 'Nabi' shows the exalted position of the prophet which he enjoys in the presence of God. Another interpretation of 'Nabi' is that it is derived from 'Nubu-at' i.e., to prophesize. According to this interpretation 'Nabi' means one who prophesizes. The word 'Rasul' (رسول) is derived from 'Risalat' (رسالة).

'Risalat' means to send; and 'Rasul' means one who is sent. Thus the word 'Rasul' means 'one who is sent from Allah.' According to Muslim terminology, 'Nabi' means 'A man sent directly by God to the mankind to lead them to right path.' The word 'man' excludes the angels who are sent by God for various purposes, but they are not called Nabi or Rasul in Islamic terminology. Also, it excludes women. A woman cannot be a Nabi or Rasul.

The phrase 'sent directly' shows that the Nabi does not get his inspiration or revelation through the agency of any other man. By this phrase we differentiate between Nabi and Imam, because Imams also are 'sent by God to the mankind to lead them to the right path' but they are sent through the prophet; they get their directions through the prophet, not 'directly' from God.

As explained above, a Nabi was the highest person of his time in the eyes of God. It was necessary that the Nabi and Rasul be from amongst man-kind; because if Allah were to send an angel to lead mankind, people would have felt shy of him, as he would have been a stranger. That is why God always sent Nabi and Rasul from amongst the mankind.

The Nabi or Rasul resembles human beings in his body, appearance and needs; but his spiritual perfection is so great, his soul is so pure and his mind so receptive of the messages of Allah that, metaphorically, he can be said to be quite different from other human beings. For a clear example of his spiritual perfection surrounded by the human needs, he may be likened to a mirror. A mirror has two sides one is the bright side, the other is the dark side. If we put a mirror directly under the sun, it

receives the light and reflects the rays to the farthest corner of a room. Likewise a Nabi or Rasul, because of his spiritual perfection, received the messages of Allah, and by his human body conveyed it to the mankind—to his people.

Difference Between Nabi And Rasul

Muslim scholars have tried to pin-point the difference between Nabi and Rasul. They have written many differences but none of them stands the test of critical analysis. According to the popular belief a 'Rasul' was that prophet who brought a new *Shariah* (Cods of law) while those prophets who did not bring any new *Shariah* (and followed the *Shariah* of a previous 'Rasul') were called 'Nabi'. Thus the grade of a 'Rasul' is higher than that of a 'Nabi.'

Prophethood: Its Reasons And Benefits

In previous Units the reasons and benefits of the institution of Prophethood have already been described. There are two reasons and two benefits. The reasons: 1st Reason. If Allah were to reward or punish human beings on the Day of Judgement without sending any prophet to them, those who would have been sent to hell would have a right to protest as to why they were being sent to hall without any sin or mistake on their part and without any test being held to test their spiritual perfection.

It was to cut this argument that Allah sent *Shariah* and sent prophets to bring that message of Allah to mankind. 2nd Reason: Also it has been mentioned that Nubuwwat is a *Lutf* (grace) and as such, it was incumbent upon Allah to send prophets to lead the people to the right path.

The benefits: Firstly, to bring the laws of Allah to mankind to ensure impartial justice, safety and progress of society. Secondly, to make people perfect human beings spiritually and bring them nearer to Allah.

Qualifications Necessary for a Nabi

A Nabi or Rasul must have certain qualifications.

The first condition, according to Shia belief, is that he must be the most perfect person in his time in all the virtues like knowledge, bravery, generosity, morals and manners, love and fear of God, piety and worship of God, and other good qualities which are admired and desired in a good man. He must be the supreme most in all such virtues in his time.

The second condition: He must be free from such stigma which causes disgrace and disrepute. Thus, a Nabi or Rasul cannot be an illegitimate child, he should not choose such profession or work which is looked down upon in his society.

Also it follows that he should not suffer from such an ailment which causes repulsion in the people, like

leprosy.

Third condition, which is the most important of all, is that a Nabi or Rasul should be Masum, i.e., free from every sin, mistake and evil.

Fourth condition is that the Nabi must show clear signs and miracles to prove his claim.

Continuity of Prophethood

God, in His grace, never left mankind without a religious guide. That guide may be a prophet, a Rasul or an Imam. The first man, Prophet Adam, was made a vicegerent of Allah on this earth, so that he might lead his children on the right path. Since then, prophets and messengers were sent to all the regions and all the peoples. Allah says in the Qur'an:

Verily, though art a warner; and a guide for every nation. (Sura Saba, 34:28).

In all, there came 124,000 prophets from God.

Many of the prophets were sent to one or two villages, some even to one family or one man. Others were sent to a bigger area; still others to a whole tribe. But none of them, before our Holy Prophet, was sent to the whole mankind.

Our Holy Prophet was sent to the whole mankind for up to the end of the world. No other prophet is to come after him. He was, and is the Last Prophet.

Evolution of Religious Guidance

It appears from the history of divine religions that God sent from time to time many *Shariahs* (codes of law) which were suitable to that particular era. Prophet Nuh (a.s.) brought a *Shariah* which was simple to a great extent. And that *Shariah* was followed by other prophets up to the advent of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) was given a *Shariah* which was more elaborate and more comprehensive than the previous one.

The *Shariah* of Prophet Ibrahim remained in force for the children of Israel up to the time of Prophet Musa (a.s.) When Prophet Musa was given Torah (Law), it was a really comprehensive and fully detailed *Shariah*, which was followed by all the prophets of Bani Israel till Prophet Isa (a.s.) came. Prophet Isa (a.s.) perfected the *Shariah* of Hadhrat Musa (a.s.) and made adjustments according to time. The *Shariah* of Prophet Isa (a.s.) remained valid till the arrival of the Holy Prophet of Islam.

Coming to the other branch of the family of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) we find that the children of Ismael were expected to follow the *Shariah* of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) up to the time of the Holy Prophet of Islam, Prophet Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.).

When he came he abrogated and cancelled all the previous *Shariahs*, and brought the final, most comprehensive and most suitable and moderate *Shariah* of all, which can meet the challenge of the changing times without any difficulty up to the Day of Judgment. The prophets who brought new *Shariah* are called Ulul-Azm. There were 5 Ulul-Azm prophets: Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa and Muhammad Mustafa (may peace be upon them all).

Why Shariahs Were Changed?

It may be asked, why the changes in *Shariahs*, why the gradual revelation and why the separate Ulul-Azm prophets coming one after another. Well, when a child is born, the parents make some garments for him. And as the child continues to grow, the old clothes are discarded, and new ones made according to the growth of the body of the child. This continues during his childhood, during his adolescence, during his teenage, till a time comes after 25 or 30 years, when the body reaches its maximum height and attains its full growth. After that, the size which fits him at that time, continues to fit him up to the end of his life.

Nobody will suggest that as the child at the age of 25 years is expected to be 5 ft. 6 in. high, he should be given the clothes of that size on the day of his birth. Nor will any body think that a young man of 30 years of age should wear the same clothes which he used to wear when he was 10 years old. Likewise, we may suppose that humanity was child in the days of Prophet Adam and Nuh (a.s.), which reached its adolescence in the days of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) and continued to grow (mentally, socially and spiritually). Accordingly, Allah continued discarding and abrogating old *Shariahs* and sending new ones according to the social, intellectual and spiritual needs of the times.

This continued up to the time of Prophet Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.). His time may be compared to the age of 25 or 30 years of a man when he reaches the full height and the highest peak of his strength. Now there is no chance that he will outgrow his clothes, and the size of that age remains in force till his last day. When humanity reached that standard, Allah sent the final *Shariah* which was to serve the mankind to the last day of the world.

After Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.) there was no need for any new *Shariah*; there was no need for any new prophet or messenger from God. And it was for this reason that he was declared by Allah to be, the Last of the Prophets (خاتم النبيين).

Of course, the need for an interpreter of the Qur'an and protector of the *Shariah* will remain forever. But Allah appointed Imams for this purpose, after the (خاتم النبيين) The Last Prophet. The chain of prophethood came to an end and a new system of religious leadership, known as 'Imamat' was introduced. This new system will continue up to Quiyamat; but no other prophet or messenger had come, or will come, after the Holy Prophet of Islam.

Anybody claiming to be a Nabi or Messenger after the Last Prophet is an imposer, a liar and has no

connection with Islam.

Question: Admitted that the body does not grow in height after about 25 years; but still there– appear changes in the build of the body. A person may gain or lose considerable weight, necessitating some changes in the measurement of his clothes. Therefore, how can you say that there will never be any need for a new *Shariah* after Islam?

Answer: Clothes usually do not adjust themselves according to the build of body. But Islam has a built-in capacity to cover all the possible situations which a man may face during his life-time. In this respect, we may compare it with those sophisticated electronic devices which automatically adjust to the temperature, light, humidity and other relevant factors of the operating time. If you take a good camera, for instance, you will find that its lens makes all the necessary adjustments according to the distance and light without any need for you to make those adjustments manually.

Likewise, Islam has the rules for all the possible situations, and as soon as a given situation changes, the *Shariah* automatically recognises the change and another set of rules applicable to the new situation comes into force immediately, and automatically

This flexibility is the unique feature of Islam which is not found in any other religion. And this feature eliminates the need of a new *Shariah*.

Our Responsibility Towards Previous Prophets

It has been mentioned earlier that God sent 124,000 prophets throughout the world. It is not possible to know the names of all those prophets. Only a few of them are mentioned in the Qur'an, as God says:

We did a foretime send Apostles before thee: of them there are some whose story We have related to thee and some whose story We have not related to thee." (Qur'an, 40:78)

A Muslim is obliged to believe in the truth of all these prophets, as their names are part of the Qur'an. Some other prophets are mentioned in the traditions of the Holy Prophet and Imams. We also believe in the truth of those prophets.

Now we come to those leaders and founders of religions whose truth is neither vouchsafed nor refuted in the Qur'an and Hadith (traditions). We are obliged not to dishonour them (because they might have been true prophets); but, on the other hand, we cannot positively assert that they were true prophets.

This formula applies to those founders of religions who had appeared before the Holy Prophet of Islam. So far as those founders are concerned who claimed to be a prophet after the Holy Prophet of Islam, we must condemn them as imposters and liars, because we know that no new prophet is to come after Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.).

As the immediate audience of the Qur'an consisted the people of Arabia, whenever there was any need to give an example Allah used the names of those prophets who had appeared in or near Arab peninsula, so that the hearers may understand the reference easily. It is for this reason that the majority of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an are from Arabia, Palestine, Egypt and Ethiopia.

Names of Prophets and Successors Mentioned in Qur'an and Traditions

(A) Here is the list of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an:

No. Arabic Name Transliteration

1.	آدم	Adam (a.s.)
2.	إدريس	Idris (a.s.)
3.	نوح	Nuh(a.s.)
4.	هود	Hud (a.s.)
5.	صالح	Saaleh (a.s.)
6.	إبراهيم	Ibrahim (a.s.)
7.	لوط	Lut (a.s.)
8.	إسماعيل	Isma'il (a.s.)
9.	إسحاق	Ishaq (a.s.)
10.	يعقوب	Yaquub (a.s.)
11.	يوسف	Yusuf (a.s.)
12.	أيوب	Ayyub (a.s.)
13.	شعيب	Shuaib (a.s.)
14.	موسى	Musa (a.s.)
15.	هارون	Haroon (a.s.)
16.	إلياس	Ilyas (a.s.)
17.	إليسع	Ilyasa (a.s.)
18.	ذو الكفل	Dhul-Kifl (a.s.) —
19.	عزير	Uzair (a.s.)

20	داود	Dawood (a.s)
21	سليمان	Sulaiman
22	لقمان	Luqman
23	يونس	Yunus (a.s.)
24	زكريا	Zakariya
25	يحيى	Yahya (a.s.)
26	عيسى	Isa (a.s.)
27	محمد	Muhammad (s.a.w.)

(B) There are some prophets whose stories are given in the Qur'an without mentioning their names. These are:

No.	Arabic Name	Transliteration	English Version
1.	خضر	Khidhr (a.s.)	—
2.	يوشع بن نون	Yusha bin Nun (a.s.)	Joshua
3.	شموئيل	Shamuel (a.s.)	Samuel
4.	حزقييل	Hizqueel(a.s.)	Ezekiel
5.	ذو القرنين	Dhul-Quarnain ¹	—
6.	رسول اصحاب الاخدود	An Ethiopian Prophet ²	—
7.	شمعون الصفا	Shamun	Simon (Peter)
8-9.	حواريان آخران لعيسى	Two other disciples of Jesus Christ	—

Note: Nos 7 to 9 were "Wasi" (successors) of Prophet Isa. It is not known whether they were 'Nabi' or not.

(C) Now we may mention some of the prophets whose names are found in the traditions:

No.	Arabic Name	Transliteration	English Version
1.	شيث	Sheth	Seth
2.	سام	Saam	Shem
3.	ارميا	Armia	Jeremiah
4.	دانيال	Danial	Daniel
5.	عموس	Amus	Amos
6.	عبيدة	Obaidiah	Obaidiah

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 7. حبقوق | Habakkuk | Habakkuk |
| 8. جرجيس | Jirjis | — |
| 9. بوذاسف | Budhastav | Budhastav
(Gotam Bodh) |
| 10. خالد بن سنان | Khalid bin Sanan | — |

(D) All the ancestors of the Holy Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.) and Ali (a.s.) from Qedar (Cedar) to Abdullah and Abu Talib followed the *Shariah* of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) and they were successors of Prophet Ismail (a.s.). Abu Talib was the last successor; after the advent of Islam, he followed the Holy Prophet. They were 'Wasi' (successor) of Ismail, (a.s.), not 'Nabi' themselves. Also, Salman, the Persian, is believed by the Muslims to be a successor of Prophet Isa (a.s.). He also followed, in due course, the Holy Prophet of Islam. He, also, was a 'Wasi'; not a 'Nabi'.

-
1. There is a difference of opinion whether he was a prophet or not.
 2. Mentioned in Sura 85 of the Qur'an

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/prophethood-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi/nubuwwah>