

Home > The Message > Chapter 14: Cessation of Revelation > Prophethood and Imamate are Linked Together

Chapter 14: Cessation of Revelation

The soul of the Holy Prophet had been illuminated with the light of revelation and he continuously meditated and reflected upon the onerous duty which the Almighty Lord had entrusted to him by saying:

"O you who are wrapped up in your vestment, arise and give warning. Magnify your Lord . . ."
(Surah al-Muddaththir, (74:1-3))

He was also expecting another message from his Lord, so that by hearing the verses and the word of Allah his mind might become more illuminated and his resolution and determination more firm. However, days and months passed, but the Divine angel who had met him in the Cave of Hira did not re-appear and the invisible voice which had inspired his soul was no longer heard. We are not aware of its reason.

Possibly the purpose of pausing in the revelation was to afford rest to the Prophet, because history tells us that the revelation is always accompanied by unusual spiritual pressure, especially in the early days of the appointment of a Prophet to the prophetic mission, because till that time his soul is not accustomed to such mysterious perception.

The date of cessation of revelation is also not very clear, but after studying the texts of history and traditions it can be concluded that the revelation was cut off before general invitation to the public and special invitation to the Prophet's kinsmen had taken place. It was at the time when the Prophet had not extended his call to the public and special contacts with the individuals had also not yet been established.

However, as quoted by the late Allamah Majlisi ¹ from Manaqib Ibn Shahr Ashob, the time of cessation of revelation was after the extension of invitation by the Prophet to his kinsmen to embrace Islam. Hence, it may be said that this incident took place in the fourth year of the appointment of the Prophet to the prophetic mission, as the invitation to his kinsmen was extended exactly after three years of the commencement of his prophethood.

There are some historians ² who have different views in this regard, which does not conform to the

established facts of the biographies of the Holy Prophet and his dear wife. They say: "When the trail of revelation was cut off the disturbance of mind and doubt to which the Prophet had become subjected at the time of the commencement of his prophetic mission was revived, his wife also became agitated and said to him, "I think Allah has cut off His contact with you." After hearing these words he resorted to his permanent place (Mount Hira). In the meantime the heavenly revelation came twice and addressed him in the following verses:

By the light of day, and by the fall of night, your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He abhor you The life to come holds a richer prize for you than this present life. You will be gratified with what your Lord will give you. Did he not find you an orphan and give you shelter? Did he not find you perplexed and guide you? Did he not find you poor and enrich you? Therefore, do not wrong the orphan, nor chide away the beggar. But proclaim the kindness of your Lord. (Surah al-Dhuha, 93: 1-11)

The revelation of these verses gave him extraordinary happiness and he realized that whatever was being said about him by the people was baseless.

Our opinion on This Subject

We cannot accept this narrative in its entirety. The biography of Khadijah and her conversation with her husband as well as her recollections are still recorded in history. It was the same Khadijah who endeavoured at the time of the commencement of revelation to remove the agitation of her husband.

Then how could she now become the cause of his agitation, when she could still perceive the noble character and morals of Muhammad and knew that Allah, in whom she believed, was just and righteous. Yes! In spite of all this, how could she develop in her mind a strange misgiving about Allah and His Prophet?

Besides this the scholars have remarked in the books on 'Kalam' (scholastic theology) that: "After the acquisition of a chain of prominent habits which distinguish their holder from others the status of prophethood is given to that person who possesses sublime habits and praiseworthy qualities and so long as the Prophet does not possess a number of prominent qualities and does not fulfil some special conditions, this status is never accorded to him. At the top of these qualities are chastity, peace of mind, faith, and trust in Allah and because a Prophet possesses such qualities, his thoughts cannot go astray."

The scholars have said : "The gradual development of a Prophet begins from his very childhood and gradually his knowledge reaches a stage of perfection. Even the slightest doubt does not cross his mind about the things which he sees or hears. Furthermore the remarks of anyone do not create any doubt in the mind of a person who occupies this position."

The above quoted Qur'anic verses and especially the verse "*Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does*

He abhor you," show only this that someone said these words to the Holy Prophet but do not indicate as to who said them and what effect they had on his soul.

However, some exegetes say that these words were uttered by some polytheists and in view of this probability all these verses cannot relate to the commencement of revelation, because none knew about the commencement of prophethood with the descent of revelation except Khadijah and Ali so that he might resort to criticism.

So much so that as we shall mention later the fact of the Holy Prophet's prophethood was unknown to the polytheists for full three years and he had not been ordered to proclaim his prophethood to the general public, till the verse: *"Manifest that which you have been ordered to do"* was revealed. Hence, the story of the cessation of revelation has only historical and no Qur'anic evidence and that, too, is not in a repulsive shape but in the manner as described in the beginning of this chapter.

The Holy Prophet Commenced Reformation From A Limited Circle

The wise men and leaders of a society chalk out a very extensive programme but start their work from a limited circle and as and when they achieve success they immediately make efforts for its extension and expand the sphere of their activities in proportion to their success, and make endeavours for its gradual advancement.

A wise person³ enquired from the head of one of the big states of modern times: "What is the secret of your success in public matters" He replied: The way of thinking of westerners like us is different from that of you orientals. We always start a work with an extensive and well-calculated programme but commence it from a small place and make an attempt for its expansion after acquiring success. And if in the meantime we realize that the programme is not correct we immediately leave it and begin another business.

On the other hand you orientals enter into a business with an extensive programme and begin the work from a big place and put the entire programme into action all at once. And if in the meantime you encounter a deadlock you have no way of return left, except bearing heavy losses.

Besides this your spirit has been such that you always make hurry and haste, and you always wish to harvest your crop on the very first day. You desire to obtain the final result during the early days and this in itself is the most dangerous way of social thinking which makes man to come to a very strange deadlock.

We feel that this way of thinking is not related to either East or West. Mature, wise and knowledgeable persons always achieve their objects in this manner. The great Prophet of Islam also acted according to this admitted principle and propagated his religion for full three years without making any haste. He

presented his religion to those whom he found to be deserving and ready from the point of view of thinking and capacity.

Although his target was to set up a great world-wide State so that he might bring all people under the influence of one standard (the standard of monotheism) but during these three years he did not at all resort to general invitation. He made only special contacts with certain persons and invited to his faith those persons, whom he found to be deserving, fit and ready for embracing his religion. Consequently, during this period of three years he succeeded in guiding only a few persons.

During these three years the chiefs of Quraysh were intoxicated with the guardianship of the Ka'bah. As and when the Pharaoh of Makkah (Abu Sufyan) and his gang came to know about the nature of his call and claim, they displayed a mocking smile on their lips and said to themselves:

"The flame of his call too will die away soon like the call of Waraqah and Umayyah (who had become Christians as a consequence of the study of the Taurat and the Injeel and pretended to advocate Christianity in the Arab assemblies) and it will not be long before he will also join the caravan of those who have been forgotten!"

During these three years the chiefs of Quraysh did not take the slightest liberty with the Holy Prophet and always respected him. He, too, did not openly criticize their idols and gods during this period and remained busy in maintaining special contacts with clear-sighted persons.

However, Quraysh also woke up on the very first instance when the special invitation to the Prophet's near relatives and general invitation to the public commenced and his criticism of the idols and of the anti-human ways and manners of Quraysh began to be talked about. They realized on that very day that there was a vast difference between his call and those of Waraqah and Umayyah. Secret and open opposition and strife, therefore, started. In the first instance he broke his silence before his relatives and thereafter pronounced his general call.

There is no doubt about the fact that deep-rooted reforms, which influence all spheres of human life and change the course of society, mostly stand in need of two strong forces – the force of speech and the force of defence:

1. The force of speech so that the speaker may be able to state facts in an attractive manner and should convey to the general public his own personal ideas or those which he receives from the world of revelation.
2. The force of defence so that in the event of danger he may be able to organize a defence line against the rush of the enemies. In the absence of this ability the flame of his invitation extinguishes in the very beginning.

The force of speech of the Holy Prophet was extraordinarily perfect and there is no denying the fact that

he was a forceful speaker who could explain his religion with great eloquence. However, during the early days of his call, he was devoid of the second force, because, during these three years, he had been able to convert only about forty persons to his faith and it is evident that such a small group could not undertake his defence.

Hence, in order to acquire a defence line and to organize a central nucleus, the Prophet of Islam invited his own kinsmen to his faith before making a general call.

In this way he removed the deficiency of the second force and was able to construct an important an important fortification against the possible dangers. This invitation was at least useful in the sense that even if his relatives were not inclined to his faith they stood up to defend him on account of their fraternal and tribal sentiments, till the time arrived when his invitation impressed some of the chiefs of the nation and made another group inclined to him.

He also believed that the foundation of reforms rests on internal reform. Until a man attempts to restrain his own children and relatives from evil deeds, invitation extended by him to others can never be effective, because in that event the opponents will indulge in criticism and point out to him the conduct of his own relatives.

In view of these considerations Allah addressed the Prophet about inviting his relatives with the words:

"Admonish your nearest kinsfolk" (Surah al-Shu'ara, 26:214),

whereas with regard to the general call He said:

"Manifest that for which you have been made responsible and remain away from the polytheists, for we will protect you from the enemies. (Surah al-Hijr 15:94)

The Manner of Inviting The Kinsfolk

The manner of the Prophet's invitation to his kinsfolk was very attractive, and the secrets of this manner of invitation become more clear later when the reality became manifest. While commenting on the verse "Admonish your nearest kinsfolk" almost all the exegetes and historians write that the Almighty Allah ordered him to invite his nearest kinsfolk to his faith.

After necessary circumspection the Prophet ordered Ali, son of Abu Talib, whose age did not then exceed fifteen years, to procure food and also to arrange for milk along with it. Then he invited forty five elders from amongst Bani Hashim and also decided to divulge the hidden secret on that occasion.

Unfortunately, however, when the meal was over one of his uncles (Abu Lahab) said some privolous and baseless things and made the atmosphere uncongenial for the presentation of the subject of prophetic mission. The Holy Prophet, therefore, considered it expedient to defer the matter till the following day.

On the next day he again arranged a feast. After the meal was over he turned to the elders of his family and began his talk by praising Allah and announcing His Oneness.

Thereafter he said: "Indeed, the guide of a community never lies to his people, I swear by Allah, besides whom there is no god, that I have been sent by Him as His Messenger, especially towards you and generally towards all the inhabitants of the world.

Yes! O my kinsmen! You will die as if you were going to sleep and sometime thereafter you will be brought to life again and will receive a recompense according to your deeds. This recompense is the eternal Paradise of Allah (for the righteous) and His perpetual Hell (for the evil-doers)".

Then he added: "No human being has ever brought a better thing for his people than that which I have brought for you. I have brought for you the blessings of this world as well as of the Hereafter. My Lord has ordered me to invite you towards Him. Which one of you will be my supporter so that he may become my brother, wasi (vicegerent) and successor amongst you?"

When the speech of the Prophet reached this point, perfect silence had prevailed over the whole gathering and every one of those present was reflecting upon the greatness of the target and of his own fate in the long run.

All of a sudden Ali, who was then a fifteen year old young man, broke the silence prevailing in the assembly. He stood up and said in a forceful tone: "O Prophet of Allah! I am prepared to support you." The Prophet ordered him to sit down. He repeated the aforesaid words thrice but none except the same fifteen year old young man gave him the same reply. He then turned to his kinsmen and said "People! This young man is my brother, vicegerent and successor amongst you. Listen to his words and follow him".

At this stage the meeting came to an end and those present turned to Abu Talib with smiling faces and said: "Muhammad has directed you to follow your son and to take orders from him and has declared him to be your elder".⁴

What has been written above is the gist of the detailed version quoted by most of the exegetes and historians in different words except for Ibn Taymiyah, who holds specific views about the members of the Prophet's family, none has doubted the authenticity of this tradition and all consider it to be admittedly a historical fact.

Crimes and Breach of Trust

Distortion and misrepresentation of facts and concealment of realities is a clear case of crime and breach of trust; and during the course of Islamic history there has been a group of biased writers who have treaded this path and reduced the worth of their treatises on account of misrepresentations. The course of history and evolution of knowledge has, however, exposed them. Here is a specimen of

misrepresentation of this type:

1 As has been observed by the readers, Muhammad bin Jarir Tabari (died 310 A.H.) has narrated the incident of invitation to the kinsfolk in detail in his history. In his Tafsir 5 however, while commenting on the verse "Admonish your nearest kinsfolk" he mentions what he has written in his history along with the text and authority, but when he reaches the sentence: "Ali is my brother, vicegerent and successor" he alters the sentence and says: "Ali is my brother, and this and that". And there is no doubt about the fact that to omit the words "my vicegerent and successor" and to substitute for them the word "etc." is nothing short of breach of trust.

He has not contented himself with this alone and has not only altered the interrogative remark of the Holy Prophet, but has also altered the sentence which the Prophet himself uttered about Ali (This is my brother and vicegerent and successor) and has again used the very word "etc.".

A historian should be free and unbiased in recording facts and should write that which he has assessed and found correct, with unmatched bravery and candour. It goes without saying that the thing which prompted Tabari to omit these two words and to substitute two allusive words for them is the very religious bias of his, because he did not consider Ali to be the vicegerent and immediate successor of the Prophet.

And as these two words clearly indicated that Ali was the wasi and the immediate successor, Tabari considered it necessary to defend his own religious attitude also, while commenting on the occasion of the revelation of the verse.

2. Ibn Kathir Shami, who died in the year 732 A.H. has also treaded the same path in his history 6 which was treaded earlier by Tabari in his Tafsir. We cannot excuse Ibn Kathir on any account, because Tarikh-i Tabari itself forms the foundation of his history and he has clearly referred to Tarikh-i Tabari in arranging this portion of his book, but, in spite of this, he has failed to quote this matter from the said history and has, contrary to expectations, mentioned the event according to Tafsir-i Tabari.

3. And then we come across the crime which has been committed by Dr Haykal, the former Education Minister of Egypt and the writer of "Hayat-i Muhammad" who has opened the path for the new generation for resorting to distortion of facts. It is rather strange that whereas in the preface of his book he has used very harsh words for the orientalists and accused them of distortion of facts and forgery, he himself commits the same thing, rather goes a step forward, because:

Firstly: In the first edition of the said book he quoted the incident in a mutilated manner and, out of the two essential sentences, recorded only one (viz. the Prophet turned to the elders and said: "Who amongst you will be my supporter in this task so that he may be my brother, wasi and successor) but totally omitted the other sentence which the Prophet uttered about Ali after expression of support by him, and did not at all mention that the Holy Prophet said about him: "This young man is my brother, vicegerent and successor."

Secondly: In the second and third editions he went one step forward and omitted both the sentences from the two places and thus struck an irreparable blow to his own position as well as to that of his book.

Prophethood and Imamate are Linked Together

The proclamation of the successorship (imamate) of Ali in the early days of the Prophethood of Muhammad goes to show that these two offices are not separated from each other, and when the Prophet of Allah was introduced to the people, his successor was also appointed and introduced on the same day and this shows by itself that prophethood and imamate are linked together and there is no distance between them.

This event clearly proves the spiritual heroism and bravery of Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful. For, in an assembly in which experienced and aged persons were drowned in reflection and astonishment, he pronounced his support and devotion with perfect boldness and expressed his enmity with the enemies of the Holy Prophet without treading the path of self-seeking politicians.

Although at that time he was the youngest amongst those present so far as age was concerned, but this association with the Holy Prophet for a long time in the past had prepared his mind for the acceptance of the realities which the elders of the nation were reluctant to accept.

Abu Ja'far Askafi has been very eloquent about this event. Readers may refer in this connection to Sharh-i Nahjul Balaghah. 7

-
1. Biharul Anwar, vol. XVIII, page 197.
 2. Tarikh-i Tabari, vol. I, pp. 48-52.
 3. One of the Qajar Monarchs when he visited London.
 4. Tarikh-i Tabari, vol. II, pp. 62-63; Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. II, pp. 40-41; Musnad Ahmad, vol. I, page 111 and Sharh-i Nahjul Balaghah by Ibn Abil Hadid, vol. XIII, pp. 210-221.
 5. Tafsir-i Tabari, vol. XIX, page 74.
 6. al-Bidayah wan Nihayah, vol. III, page 40.
 7. Ibn Abil Hadid (Egyptian edition, vol. XIII, pp.215 onward).

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/the-message-ayatullah-jafar-subhani/chapter-14-cessatation-revelation>