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Guides of Humanity

Every man is bound by the valuable bond of eternity and every one having a sound taste can realize its existence through his natural insight. Anyhow, in human society there are some outstanding men who have a more clear consciousness of it. Their speech and behavior are a conspicuous example of man's bond with eternity and its creative role in human knowledge and practice. These men are the prophets.

The prophets are capable of receiving messages, viz. revelation, direct from the eternal world. These messages are so lucid and so enlightening that they illuminate their whole existence, and unravel to them the facts which are unknown to others. They see the truth so clearly as if they were the video receivers in human form. They learn the facts themselves and then transmit them to others by the order of Allah. That is what is called prophethood. The messages the prophets receive leave a deep and wonderful impression on their soul and personality. They virtually `resurrect' them, stimulate their inner powers and bring about inside them a revolution, a constructive and fruitful revolution unprecedented as far as other people are concerned.

Distinctive features of prophets

These model men who establish contact with the Source of Existence through revelation, have certain distinctive features and specialties. We propose to throw some light on these features.

(1) Miracles

Every prophet who is sent by Allah is endowed by Him with an extra-ordinary power by means of which he works one or more miracles which bear witness to the truth of his mission. The Qur'an calls these miracles, performed by the prophets with the permission of Allah, "Ayaat" or the signs of their prophethood. In view of the fact that the miracles are inimitable by people other than the prophets, the scholastic theologians call them mujizat.

According to the Qur'an the people in every age asked their respective prophets to work a miracle for them, and in case such a demand came from those who were sincere and really interested in ascertaining the truth and could not become sure of the prophethood of the prophet concerned without such a miracle, the prophet acceded to their reasonable request. But if such a demand was made with a motive other than that of seeking truth; for example, if it came in the form of a bargain and the people said that they would accept the message of the prophet if he produced a hill of gold for them so that they might become rich, the prophets rejected such a demand.

(2) Infallibility

Infallibility means immunity from sins and errors. The prophets neither commit sins nor are they liable to fall into any error with regard to their action and mission. It is because of this immunity that maximum confidence can be reposed in them.

Now let us see what is the nature of this infallibility. Does it mean that whenever they are inclined to commit a sin or an error, an invisible Divine messenger comes to them and stops them from doing so?

Or is their nature such that they are not capable of committing a sin or an error, just as, for example, an angel does not commit adultery because he has no sexual urge, or a calculating machine does not make a mistake because it has no brain or is the infallibility of the prophets due to their insight and the degree of their faith?

As we have already said, in our opinion the infallibility of the prophets is of the third type. Man has the power of choosing. He chooses his action on the basis of the advantages and the disadvantages and the gain and the loss involved in it. It is impossible that he would choose anything which has no advantage for him or involves some serious disadvantage. A sensible man interested in his life will never throw himself down off a hill or take any deadly poison.

The individuals vary in regard to the strength of their faith and the degree of their consciousness of the consequences of sins. The stronger their faith and the greater their consciousness of the disadvantages involved in the sins, the keener they are to avoid the sins. We personally know a number of persons who are highly pious and it is second nature with them to keep away from sins. Should anyone attribute a sin to them, we would automatically jump to contradict the imputation, for we are absolutely sure that the charge is false.

The higher the degree of faith and the greater the tendency of being morally good, the less is the possibility of committing a sin. If the faith is absolutely perfect, this possibility is zero. A man who attains

this degree of faith feels that to commit a sin is as bad as taking a deadly poison or throwing oneself down off a hill. This is the state that we call infallibility.

Thus infallibility is the result of the perfection of faith and moral excellence. For being infallible no outside force is required nor is it necessary that by nature one should have no tendency to commit a sin. It is not creditable for anyone not to be capable of committing sin or being forcibly prevented from doing that. Such a person—is just like a prisoner who cannot steal because he is confined in a prison. Does he deserve any credit for his honesty and integrity?

As for the immunity from error, it is an outcome of the insight of the prophets. A man makes a mistake when he is unable to observe the truth direct and finds it out only through mental calculations. Such calculations may go wrong. But if he has the power of seeing the truth direct, there is no possibility of any mistake.

That is the case with the prophets. They have a direct contact with the reality. As the reality itself is well-defined, there can be no mistake in identifying it. Take an example. If we put 100 grains of wheat in a utensil and repeat the same action 100 times, we will have 10,000 grains in it. Neither more nor less. But at the time of counting we may go wrong. We may have a wrong impression that we have put the grains 99 times or 101 times. Consequently we may think that there are 9,900 or 10,100 grains in all. But this misunderstanding cannot change the reality. The number of grains will still be 10,000. Neither more nor less. One who knows the truth, will be sure of that number, and will find it exactly the same on counting.

Difference between a prophet and a genius

From the above the main difference between a prophet and a genius may be deduced. A genius is a person endowed with extraordinary intellectual and calculating power. He perceives things by means of his senses, works on his data perceives thing by means of his calculating power, and thus arrives at new and interesting results. He may occasionally make mistakes in his calculations. But a prophet, besides being endowed with intellect and thinking and calculating powers, is also equipped with an additional power called revelation which acquaints him with reality direct. Only the prophets have this power, and that is why the case of a prophet is quite different from that of a genius.

As the two .belong to two different categories, there can be no comparison between them. If we compare the power of seeing of one person with that of another, that is right. But if we compare the power of seeing of one person with the power of hearing of another, that is wrong. The eminence of a genius lies in his intellectual and thinking powers, whereas the superiority of a prophet is largely the result of his contact with the Source of Existence and having an entirely different power known as revelation. Hence the cases of the two are quite different.

(3) Dynamic leadership

Though a prophet begins his spiritual march towards Allah with escape from the people which means introversion, he eventually returns to the people with a view to reform them.

In Arabic language there are two words for a prophet: *Nabi* and *Rasul*. Literally *Nabi* means one who brings news and *Rasul* means one who is sent with a message. A prophet conveys Allah's message to the people and thereby awakens their dormant faculties. He calls them to Allah and urges them to seek His pleasure. In other words he calls them to reform, freedom, integrity, justice, love, peace struggle for the right cause and other virtues. He releases them from the bondage of their passion and that of other false gods. The essential task of a prophet is to guide the people, infuse them with a new spirit and organize them for the pleasure of Allah and for the good of humanity.

(4) Unrivalled earnestness and tremendous firmness in the struggle against polytheism, ignorance and corruption.

As the prophets enjoy Divine support, they are never oblivious of the mission entrusted to them by Allah. That is why they are extraordinarily sincere in their mission. They have no objective other than the guidance of the people. They never ask the people to pay for their services.

In the Surah ash-Shura the Qur'an has reproduced a summary of the dialogue between a number of the prophets and their people. Each prophet gave a sort of message with particular reference to the problem or problems faced by his respective followers. Anyhow, one point common in the messages of all the prophets is that: *"I do not ask for any reward from you"*.

The message of the prophets was always accompanied by an unrivalled firmness. As they entertained no doubt about their mission, they propagated and defended their message with such firmness as was incomparable.

When Musa ibn Imran (Moses) along with his brother Harun (Aaron) called on Pharaoh and invited him to believe in Allah, the entire equipment they had with them, consisted of the rough and tattered woolen clothes on their body and wooden sticks in their hands. Pharaoh was wonder-struck when they said firmly: "Your downfall is imminent if you reject our call, but if you accept it, we guarantee your honor".

The holy Prophet (peace be on him and his progeny) in the early days of Islam when there were very

few Muslims, one day called the elders of Quraish and conveyed his message to them. He firmly declared that Islam was destined to become universal and that their well-being lay in embracing it. They were so surprised that they looked at one another and dispersed without saying a single word. It is because of this courage and extraordinary earnestness that the prophets never compromised on principles.

When Abu Talib, the uncle of the Prophet, conveyed to him the offer of Quraish that they were willing to select him to be their king, to give to him in marriage the most beautiful girls of theirs and to make him the richest man among them, provided he gave up his claim to be a prophet, he answered: "By Allah! even if they put the sun in one of my hands and the moon in the other, I will not give up my mission".

(5) General welfare

The prophets prompt individuals and society to move in the direction of self-making in order to ensure human welfare. They never do anything which may ruin an individual or the society.

(6) Normal personal life

Though the prophets have many extraordinary aspects such as working miracles, infallibility, dynamic leadership, unrivalled constructive achievements and incessant struggle against ignorance, polytheism and tyranny, they are, nevertheless, human beings and have all the human characteristics. Like others they eat, they sleep, they walk, they have wives and children and eventually they die. They are subject to all human needs and requirements. They have to perform all those duties which through them are enjoined upon others. The rules as to what is lawful and what is not, equally apply to them.

In certain cases they have more religious duties to perform. For instance in the case of the holy Prophet it was obligatory to keep vigil and offer prayers during the last hours of night. In any case the prophets do not absolve themselves from any obligatory act. Like others and even more than others they fear Allah. They perform more acts of worship than others. They offer prayers, observe fast, perform pilgrimage and take part in *jihad*. They pay *zakat* and work for the welfare of the other people. To earn their livelihood they work and do not like to be a burden on others. The only difference between the prophets and the other people is that the former receive revelation and have the qualifications necessary to receive and preach the message of Allah.

Anyhow, these qualifications do not exclude them from the category of human beings. Their personal and private life is not totally different from that of others. Had it been different, it could not have become a model for others. Everybody interested in his well-being is expected to mould his life according to that of the prophets. According to the Qur'an if Allah were to send an angel as a prophet, he would have

appeared in human form and would have talked and lived like human beings. (Vide Surah al-An'am, verse 9).

Role of revelation in human life

As we have said earlier revelation plays a basic role in the life of the prophets. All or most of the distinctive features of their life such as infallibility, sincere leadership, unrivalled firmness and efforts for the well-being of all, are based on it.

We have seen how revelation brings about an effective and fruitful revolution in the life of the prophets. Now let us see what is its role in our own life.

Revelation cannot automatically have a direct role in our life, unless we acknowledge the prophets and get aware of this extraordinary source of knowledge and belief. If we do not believe in the prophets, the only source of our knowledge will be our own experience and our own ideals. But after we have recognized the prophets and are fully convinced that they have access to a new source of knowledge and that the teachings they claim to have received through their direct contact with the Source of Existence, are not their personal ideas or the products of their personal experience, but are a clear message from the Creator, then the revelation automatically assumes a sensitive role in our life.

Through the prophets we get access to a new source of knowledge about the beginning and the end of this world and the way of leading an upright life. A man cut-off from the prophets has access to only one source of knowledge, viz. his own thinking and experience. But the man attached to the prophets has two sources: his own thinking and experience as well as revelation.

Relationship between knowledge, reason and revelation

The mutual relationship between knowledge, reason and revelation may easily be inferred from what we have said, for they all have the same goal, that is the discovery of the truth and its utilization in the life of man. But as regards their dependability, they are not in the same category. Revelation is one hundred per cent dependable and unambiguous. It is immune from every mistake. But the dependability of knowledge and reason is not one hundred per cent, for there is often a possibility of mistake.

A comparative study of the facts learnt through knowledge and reason and those learnt through revelation shows that not the least inconsistency exists between them. Wherever inconsistency appears to exist either the case is not based on authentic revelation or the verdict of knowledge and reason is a mere approximation and notwithstanding the fact that it has the form of a scientific law and has enough practical value, its significance is only relative.

That is why the Qur'an, the pure Divine revelation, incessantly encourages thinking, pondering and learning. It wants all to exercise their mental faculties fully and to try to learn more and more. At the same time we find that unbiased practical science and realistic reasoning. are not only not in conflict with the Qur'an and its system, but they advocate the necessity of man being devoted to Allah, the prophets and the system approved by them. They want man to work earnestly for improving himself and his environment, and to get benefited for this purpose by both the sources of knowledge which Allah has put at his disposal.

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