

Chapter 15: The Object of Prophethood

As now the role of the Prophets in the development of history has been made clear to a certain extent, we take up another question. The question is: What is the main object or the final goal for which the Prophets were raised and the Divine Books sent down?

In general terms it may be said that the main object is the guidance, salvation, well-being and prosperity of people.

There is no doubt that the Prophets were raised for guiding people to the straight path and saving their souls. But that is not the point. The point is to what final goal this straight path leads. What does the well-being of people imply according to the school of the Prophets? From what restraints and impediments does this school want to deliver man? What constitutes the ultimate good and prosperity according to it?

The Holy Qur'an in a number of verses has either expressly dealt with this subject or has hinted at it. It has mentioned two definite points which constitute the ultimate object of Prophethood, while the teachings of the Prophets are a prelude to them. These points are:

- (i) The acknowledgement of Allah and coming close to Him and
- (ii) The establishment of justice and fairplay in human society.

The Holy Qur'an says: **"Prophet, We have surely sent you as a witness, a bringer of good tidings, a warner, a summoner to Allah by His permission and as a lamp that gives light."** (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:45 – 46)

It is evident that out of all the qualities mentioned in this verse, the only quality which is fit to be considered the main object is that of summoning to Allah.

The Holy Qur'an in respect of the Prophets says: **"We surely sent Our Messengers with clear proofs and revealed on them the Book and the criterion (to judge what is right and what is wrong) so**

that people may establish justice." (Surah al-Hadid, 57:25)

This verse expressly describes the establishment of justice as an object of raising the Prophets.

Summoning people to acknowledge Allah and to come close to Him implies preaching the theoretical and individualistic form of practical monotheism, and to establish justice and fairplay in society implies establishing practical monotheism on social level.

Now the question arises whether the main object of the coming of the Prophets is the acknowledgement of Allah, and all other things including the establishment of social justice are a prelude to it, or the main object is the establishment of social justice and the acknowledgement and worship of Allah are the means of the realization of that idea? If we use the same terminology as used by us earlier, we can thus recast this question: Is the main object theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level or is it practical monotheism on social level? Several answers have been given to this question:

(i) From the viewpoint of the object, the Prophets were dualists. In other words their object was two fold. One of their objects concerned the next worldly life and human success in the Hereafter (theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level). The other object concerned human success in this world (social monotheism). In order to ensure the prosperity of mankind in this world the Prophets preached social monotheism and to ensure human well-being in the next world they preached theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level, which is purely a spiritual and intellectual matter.

(ii) Another view is that the main object of the Prophets is social monotheism. Theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level are essential preliminaries to it. Theoretical monotheism concerns the acknowledgement of Allah. Man as such is in no need of acknowledging Him. It is immaterial for man whether the force motivating his spirit is Allah or thousands of other things. Similarly it makes no difference to Allah whether man acknowledges Him or does not acknowledge, worships Him or does not worship.

Anyhow perfection of man depends on his adherence to collective monotheism, which in its turn cannot be achieved without the materialization of theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level. Allah has enjoined on man to acknowledge Him and worship Him so that collective monotheism may take a practical shape.

(iii) The third view is that the main object is the acknowledgement of Allah and coming near to Him. Social monotheism is the means of achieving this noble object. As we mentioned earlier, according to the monotheistic conception of the world its nature is 'from Him' 'to Him'. Hence man's perfection lies in going to Him and gaining His nearness. Man has one special distinction. Allah has said: ***"I have breathed into him My spirit."*** (Surah al-Hijr, 15:29)

As such man's, reality is Divine. By nature he seeks Allah. His well-being, evolution, safety and

prosperity all lie in the acknowledgement and worship of Allah and in making an advancement towards Him. The Prophets have undertaken to establish justice and to do away with tyranny and discrimination, because man being social by nature, we can have no conception of him apart from society. He cannot strive to seek proximity to Allah also, if a just system does not prevail in society. In fact such social values as justice, freedom, equality and democracy and such moral qualities as generosity, forgiveness, love and charity have no intrinsic value of their own. They in themselves are not the qualities denoting human excellence. They are simply the means of gaining excellence and perfection, not the ends. They pave the way for prosperity and salvation but do not constitute salvation.

(iv) The fourth theory is similar to the third one in so far as according to it also the goal or the highest degree of excellence not only of man but of every existing thing is to move towards Allah. But according to it, it is polytheistic to assert that the Prophets have had a twofold object. Similarly it is a materialistic idea to say that the ultimate object of the Prophets is this worldly prosperity, which is nothing but the enjoyment of the gifts of nature in an atmosphere of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Anyhow, according to this theory, though social and moral values are only a means of reaching the real value, that is the acknowledgement of Allah and His worship, they do not totally lack an intrinsic value of their own.

The relationship between a preliminary and the main object is of two kinds. In certain cases the preliminary serves only as a prelude and after the object is achieved, its existence or nonexistence becomes immaterial. For example, a man wants to cross a water channel and for that purpose he puts a stone in the middle of it. Evidently after he has crossed the channel, the existence or the non-existence of that stone is of no importance to him.

The same is the case with the ladder used to climb to a roof and the mark-sheet of a class for the purpose of promotion to the next higher class. In some other cases a preliminary does not lose its value even after the main object has been achieved. Even after the realization of the main object, its existence still remains necessary. For example, the information which is acquired by a student in class I and class II is still required by him when he reaches a higher class. He cannot afford to forget all that he had learnt in these classes. He can continue to be in a higher class only if he retains the knowledge that he acquired in these lower classes.

The explanation is that in some cases a preliminary is a lower stage of the object itself, whereas in some other cases it is not. A ladder is not a stage of getting to the roof. Similarly a stone put in the middle of a channel is not a stage of crossing it. But the knowledge gained in lower classes and the knowledge to be gained in higher classes are the various stages of the same reality.

The relation between the moral and social values on the one hand and the acknowledgement and worship of Allah on the other is of the second type. A man who acknowledges Allah and worships Him cannot afford to be indifferent to honesty, righteousness, justice, charity, sincerity, munificence and forgiveness. All high and noble moral qualities are Divine.

There is a hadith which says: "*Adopt the moral qualities of Allah*". In fact the noble moral qualities are a part of the acknowledgement and worship of the Divine Being, for their adoption emanates from an inherent desire to have Divine attributes, though man may not be conscious of that fact. That is why according to Islamic teachings the good deeds of even the polytheists will not go in vain in the next world if they have such noble qualities as justice, generosity, philanthropy etc. They will be recompensed in some way or other provided their disbelief is not due to stubbornness. In fact such people attain a degree of godliness unconsciously.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/man-and-universe-ayatullah-murtadha-mutahhari/chapter-15-object-prophet-hood>