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Unfortunately there has been a long interval in the publication of the Message of Thaqaalayn. The last issue was Vol. 9, Nos. 3 & 4 for Autumn and Winter 1425–1426/2004–2005.

Now that publication of a new series of the Message of Thaqaalayn is starting with this issue through the collaboration of the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly and the Islamic Centre of England, I take this opportunity to thank the previous teams for their work and efforts over the years. I want to also thank the respected readers of the journal for their continuing interest and support.

I should also request our dear readers to join me in praying to God, the Almighty, to guide and inspire the new team to carry out their responsibility of presenting the teachings of Islam in general and the School of the Ahul Bayt (A) in particular as far as this medium i.e. the Message of Thaqaalayn can accommodate. I trust that our readers will help us in this mission by sending their valuable comments and by introducing this journal to others who may be interested.

It is hoped and planned that a new issue of the Message of Thaqaalayn will be published in the beginning of each season. Each issue will address different aspects of Islamic thought, such as the Doctrines, the Qur’anic and Hadith Studies, Spirituality and History. However, due to the occasions and needs of time, in some volumes there may be themes that will receive more attention and therefore more than one paper may be published about them.

Publication of this issue has coincided the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be with him and his household) and the Week of Unity. This also comes after unfair and unprecedented attacks against the character and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (S) in the last few years in some media in certain western countries.

It seems clear that such attempts originate more than anything else from the fear that some fundamentally secular and materialist parties and individuals have deep in their hearts when they see that overall religiosity and faith in God in general, and Islam in particular, are growing in the world. In the past they have tried different so called, “logical”, “philosophical”, “sociological” and even “scientific” arguments to disprove, disarm and dismantle faith-based communities.

However, to their surprise none of these measures has been able to stop what they consider to be the threat and they are left without choice except either to admit their defeat or to resort to emotional and

psychological means such as mocking and ridiculing or frightening and terrifying by things like films, cartoons and novels so that they can at least keep other people away from religious communities and make their own allies alarmed and mobilised.

This reminds us of similar policies adopted by the pagan leaders of Mecca. When they could not find anything wrong in the teachings and conduct of the Prophet and saw how people were impressed by him they started charging him with “madness.” This raised a burning question against them:

How is possible that a mad person could present something like the Qur’an and then challenge all the Arabs who were at the peak of eloquence at that time and their allies to bring something similar to the Qur’an or at least to ten chapters of the Qur’an or even to one chapter of the Qur’an and in the end they all proved incompetent?

Maybe this is why they shifted to another accusation: that he was a magician. They even asked people to put some cotton in their ears when they went around Ka’bah so that the voice of the Prophet who used to recite the Qur’an next to the House of God would not reach them. They also banned people from going near the house of the Prophet in the night and listen to his recitation of the Qur’an.

None of these measures worked. If he were a magician then naturally many questions would arise: Who was his teacher? Why could not the top magicians of the world at that time defeat him or at least compete with him? Why throughout his life before he started proclaiming divine message, that is about 40 years, he was never known to be engaged in anything like magic? And in principle is it possible at all that a text which is available to everyone and remains over centuries be mixed with magic? Why no one, whether those who have believed in the Qur’an or those who have decided not to believe, feels the force of magic.

In any case, history shows that divine religions, and in particular Islam, have proved quite capable of facing such challenges and in the end coming out with success and more opportunities for progress. By no standards, can Nimrod, Pharaoh, Roman pagans, Abu Sufyan and their like be considered as winners. How can they be winners when no one is happy to be ever associated with them!

On the other hand, no one can consider Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad as losers. How can they be losers when billions of people feel honoured to be associated with them!

This is history which serves as a great reassurance for the followers of divine prophets. However, there is a greater reassurance to be found in the Word of God Himself:

“They desire to put out the light of God with their mouths, but God is intent on completing His light though the faithless should be averse” (9:32)

“They desire to put out the light of God with their mouths, but God shall complete His light though the faithless should be averse.” (61:8)

Interestingly, both verses are followed by God's confirmation that

“He is the one who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth in order to make the religion of truth prevail over all religions [of falsity], though the polytheists should be averse.” (9:33 & 61:9)

Progress of truth, justice and other divine values should be welcomed by all truly religious communities and the only people who may be worried are the faithless and modern pagans.

The Qur'an warns us that the real challenge and serious threat for the faith and faithful comes usually, if not always, from within and not without. The Qur'an tells us:

“Today the faithless have despaired of your religion. So do not fear them, but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion.” (5:3)

Islam is made so strong by God that no external threat can put it at risk and, therefore, there is no need to fear the faithless. The only one to fear is God. Why? Is it possible or even conceivable that God may harm His own religion? Is it likely that instead of supporting those who truly believe in Him and sincerely follow his Apostles, God may hurt them? Rather, the Qur'an tells the faithful:

“O you who have faith! If you help God, He will help you and make your feet steady” (47:7);

“God will surely help those who help Him. Indeed God is All-strong, All-mighty. Those who, if We granted them power in the land, maintain the prayer, give the zakat, and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong. And with God rests the outcome of all matters (22:40 & 41);

“Certainly Our decree has gone beforehand in favour of Our servants, the Apostles, that they will indeed receive [God's] help, and indeed Our hosts will be the victors” (37: 171–173)

and so on.

To fear God means to fear bad outcomes and destructive consequences of our own misconduct which would deprive us from receiving certain types of the mercy of God and expose us to divine punishment and administration of justice. The Qur'an confirms that unless people change, God will not take away from people what He has given them:

“That is because God never changes a blessing that He has bestowed on a people unless they change what is in their own souls, and God is All-hearing, All-knowing” (8:53);

“...Indeed God does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls. And when God wishes to visit ill on a people, there is nothing that can avert it, and they have no protector besides Him” (13: 11).

Thus, it becomes clear that “do not fear them (the faithless), but fear Me” implies in a very clear and understandable way that you must be most concerned with your own attitudes and deeds than the external attacks. To take this instruction seriously, two tasks must be accomplished.

Firstly, every single faithful must purify himself, that is, his heart and mind, his actions and intentions, and make sure that he is not serving his own selfish interests and lowers desires in the Name of God. Secondly, all the faith communities must safeguard themselves against disunity and divisions amongst themselves and make sure that they do not weaken and endanger the whole faith in God and common divine values in the name of promoting their own party. Of course, this is more true about adherents to the same religion, such as Muslims. There is no way to justify any attempt, planned or unplanned, which may lead to separation, partitioning and division, let alone to fight or conflict.

The Qur’an tells us that God calls for unity (3: 103; 8:46) and actually brings about unity and saves from divisions (8:63). On the other hand, it is people like Pharaoh who divide people (28:4). It is striking that when the Children of Israel started worshipping the calf in the absence of Moses, Aaron tried to keep calm and avoid anything that may divide the people and waited for Moses himself to come and decide. The Qur’an tells us that on his return,

Moses said, ‘O Aaron! What kept you, when you saw them going astray, from following me? Did you disobey my command?’ He said, ‘O son of my mother! Do not hold my beard or my head! I feared lest you should say, “You have caused a rift among the Children of Israel, and did not heed my word [of advice].” ’ (20:92–94)

If Aaron who himself was a prophet and was appointed by Moses as his successor when he left the people to receive Divine Commands witnesses such an obvious case of mischief and deviation and yet does not feel it right for him to do anything that may divide the community and decides to wait for Moses to return, then how come some Sunni or Shi’a Muslims fail to observe requirements of unity and brotherhood or, God forbid, call for disunity and conflict.

The Message of Thaqalayn feels responsible to present the teachings of Islam in general and the School of the Ahulu Bayt in particular with complete honesty and accuracy and at the same time to stress on the common grounds that bind all Muslims together. Strengthening ties of brotherhood among all Muslims, whatever school of Islam they may adhere to, and establishing genuine, enduring and intimate friendship between all those who believe in God are two of the main aims and tasks of the Message of Thaqalayn and indeed, any responsible media.

This issue includes six papers. The first paper is entitled: “Life of the Prophet Mohammad before Starting the Mission”. In this paper Hujjatu’l-Islam Dr. Sayyed Ahmad Rahnamaei studies some major 16 events related to the first forty years of Prophet Mohammad’s life, that is, from the time of his birth until he was appointed by God as His Apostle. Issues such as the date of his birth, his nursing and

childhood, the story of the splitting of his chest, his participation in the Sacrilegious War and his trip to Sham are discussed.

Hujjatu'l-Islam Dr Rahnamaei is an assistant professor in the Dept. of Education at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum. This paper is a revised version of the second chapter of his M.A. dissertation submitted to the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, in 1995. The author has revised this paper especially for this issue of the Message of Thaqaalayn. God-willing, other aspects and periods of the Life of the Prophet Mohammad (S) will be studied by him in the next two issues of the Message of Thaqaalayn.

The second paper is entitled: "The Significance of Self-control and Self-purification". In this paper Hujjatu'l-Islam Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali studies the necessity and significance of self-control and selfpurification in Islamic Spirituality. He argues that we cannot develop ourselves by simply doing what we wish. By exercising some kind of control, we are able to transform our soul from one which has an interest in lower desires into a soul which has a yearning for good things.

By training and purifying, our soul itself becomes a helper and an assistant to us in our spiritual journey. A major task of the Prophets and in particular the Prophet Mohammad (S) was to help people to purify themselves. One major way of purification is to give out one's own money for the sake of God in order to get rid of attachment to the materialistic life.

Hujjatu'l-Islam Dr. Shomali is an associate professor and the head of the Dept. of Religions at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Instittue, Qum. He is also the Dean of Postgraduate Studies for International Students at the Jami'at al-Zahra, the Islamic University for Women in Qum. God-willing, other theoretical and practical aspects of Islamic spirituality will be studied by the same author and others in the forthcoming issues.

The third paper is entitled: "The Prophetic Hadiths in Al-Khisal". Al-Khisal is a well-known collection of the hadiths (traditions) from the Prophet Mohammad (S) and his household, compiled by one of the great masters of hadith in early centuries of Islam i.e. Shaykh Saduq, Muhammad b. Babawayh al-Qummi (d.329/940). Mr Mohammad Javad Shomali has selected for our readers fifty one hadiths from the Prophet Mohammad (S) reported by Shaykh Saduq in Al-Khisal which relate to Numbers One to Twelve. Mr Mohammad Javad Shomali is a seminarian at the Shahidayn School, Islamic Seminaries of Qum.

The fourth paper is entitled: "An Outline of Law from a Qur'anic Perspective". In this paper Dr Karim Aghili presents a brief summary and paraphrase of some of the salient points regarding law from a Qur'anic point of view, based on Law and Politics in the Qur'an by Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, one of the foremost masters of the intellectual and transmitted sciences in present-day Iran. This paper studies the need for law in every human society and 18 continues by showing the relation

between law and morality in Islam.

The paper ends by discussing the sources of Islamic law and its goals. In addition to his studies in Iran, Dr Karim Aghili has completed his PhD. on Comparative Philosophy of Education at the University of Sheffield and is currently based in Manchester. God-willing, this paper will be followed by a similar paper on government from a Qur'anic point of view by the same author in the next issue.

The fifth paper is entitled: "Authority and Tradition". In this paper Hujjat'ul-Islam Dr Ghasem Kakaie studies two major concepts of authority and tradition and their relation from a Shi'ite perspective. Studying the authority of the Prophet Mohammad (S), the author refers to four tasks of the Prophet i.e. receiving divine revelation, communicating the revelation to people, interpreting the revelation and administering the divine rulings.

The paper continues with a discussion about the authority after the demise of the Prophet. The author explains that the Prophet Mohammad (S) was the last Prophet so the first two tasks i.e. receiving divine revelation and communicating it to people ended with his demise, but the other two tasks i.e. interpreting the revelation and administering divine rulings had to be continued. These two were handed over in the first place to the infallible Imams.

In the time of occultation when there is no access to the twelfth Imam, it is required of the most qualified Shi'a jurists to administer divine rulings in addition to present teachings of the Prophet and Imams to the people. This paper was presented in the second Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue in UK in July 2005 and published 19 in *Catholic-Shi'a Engagement: Reason & Faith in Theory and Practice* (2006). Hujjatu'al-Islam Dr. Kakaie is an associate Professor and editor-in-chief of *Journal of Religious Thought* of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities of Shiraz University.

The sixth and final paper is entitled: "Authority from a Shi'ite Perspective". In this paper Dr Muhammad Legenhausen contrasts Shi'ite views on authority with those of Catholics, and those of Sunni theologians. The paper begins with explaining the meaning and different facets of authority. The paper continues with a discussion about the source(s) of authority and the way(s) in which it is conferred. After examination of authority, the author turns to the issue of tradition as far as it pertains to authority. This paper was written for the second Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue in UK in July 2005 and published in *Catholic-Shi'a Engagement: Reason & Faith in Theory and Practice* (2006). Dr Mohammad Legenhausen is a professor of philosophy at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed to this volume and pray for their success. I want to especially thank Mrs. Fatima Khimji from Canada for editing and proofreading all the papers of this publication and making valuable comments. I also want to thank Mrs. Zainab Rezavi from UK for reading and commenting on drafts of the second and third papers of this work. I would also like to thank the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly 20 and the Islamic Centre of England for their support and

encouragement. And last, but not the least, I thank God the Almighty for His guidance and favour upon us in the past and present.

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