

Lesson 16: The purity of the Prophets

Why the Prophets must be ma'sum (Infallible)

The Merciful and Wise God inspired the prophets, so that through their leadership and guidance human society might recognise the right way as opposed to the precipitous way, and might be able to stride up to the highest peaks of true pride, perfection, and laudable virtues, and stay on that way.

With the same intention, the Merciful and Wise God also made His prophets and messengers immune from every kind of sin and error, and, in one word, made “infallible” (ma'sum) so that they might be able to lead mankind towards real development in all directions, and towards obedience and submission to the commands of God without any error or mistake.

It is obvious that the very same reason, which prompted the need for prophethood and the sending of prophets also, requires that the prophets be immaculate and immune from all kinds of sin, impurity error and fault. Since the aim and purpose of sending prophets is to lead society towards guidance and instruction. This aim is to be secured through the infallibility of the prophets and messengers, for it is clear that to do things which are repulsive or indecent, to sin, and also to be a source of error and fault is a reason for people to be averse to and diverted from these things, and thus the aim, which was the guidance and instruction of society, would be lost.

No people of wisdom would not do anything against their aim, and that they take regard for what is effectual in attaining and reaching their aim. For example, someone who wants a number of distinguished individuals to take part in a celebration in his honour knows that no one without an invitation can honourably attend. He will never send an invitation to someone who is averse to him, rather he will try to send his invitations in such a way that they will all be accepted, and, if he doesn't do this, his work will not have been prudent and wise, and it will be regarded as having been unseemly and unbecoming.

The Merciful and Wise God also takes account of what basically interferes with the guidance and education of society, and does not want people to depend on and follow the will of capricious and impure men, and so to end up far from, and be deprived of their true development. Therefore He has sent

immaculate prophets so that the guidance and instruction of society might be in the best possible way.

The following are further details why the prophets must be infallible.

1. The Principle of Instruction.

It is obvious that the purpose of sending prophets was to educate people, and that in teaching the teacher's behaviour is a more effective instrument than his speaking and verbal instruction.

The habits and deeds of the teacher can bring about a radical transformation in man due to people's tendency to imitate, one of the indisputable fact in the working of the mind, man gradually adopts the manner and conduct of his teacher, and becomes of the same colour so that it is as if he is the clear, limpid surface of a pool which reflects the image of the sky above him.

Speech alone cannot play the part of instruction, rather it serves instruction, and this is the idea of the prophetic mission, that prophets must possess praiseworthy habits and qualities and be untainted with sin and error so that they can effectively attract the people of this world towards the sacred aim.

It is clear that one who has soiled his hands with sin, even though in secret and without anyone being aware so that he himself remains pure in the eyes of his fellow men, will never have that unwavering strength of mind to bring about a radical transformation in the area of the human spirit.

One who taints his lips with wine can never dissuade others from drinking it, and raise the voice of truth and establish an iron will in combating this act.

The intense discomfort and disquietude of the prophets, and especially the noble prophet of Islam, about the sins and indecencies of people is itself the best witness to the fact that they were disgusted with every evil and were not involved in sins at all.

The great secret in the progress of the prophets was the consistency in their words and deeds, and it is this harmony which enabled them to transform the fundamentals of human thought and lead societies toward more meaningful cultural values.

2. Confidence and Acceptance.

The greater the degree of faith and confidence that people have in a speaker, the more their agreement with him increases, and vice versa.

For this reason, the prophets, who revealed the Divine commands and restrained people from sin and immorality, must, according to this be endowed with the greatest, most admirable qualities, and be free from every kind of sin and indecency, even error and mistakes, so that people's confidence and faith in them be greater and they may accept their guidance and what they say, and so that people may strive more assiduously in carrying out the plans and practice the reformative instructions of the prophets, and

trust from the depths of their hearts their leadership. Thus the aim of the prophetic mission, that is to say the leading of people from darkness to light would be accomplished; the aim of the prophetic mission would not be obtained under any other circumstances, and that would be very far from the wisdom of God.

This purity and worthiness of the prophets was so extraordinary that people became devoted to them to such a degree that their followers felt great love towards them and gave up their lives in following and obeying them, without heed for the consequences.

How can a man be completely free from sin and error? The following will answer this question.

How can a man be ma'sum, (infallible)?

1. Real Love of God

The holy prophets were deeply devoted to the Merciful Lord, God, and why should they not have been? They, who with their seeing and hearing and profound insight knew God better than anyone, who understood His greatness, glory and majesty to be above all things, who found Him alone worthy of love, honour and obedience, who had nothing in view but to please Him, who gave their hearts to none but Him, who did everything with devotion to Him, and who knew who were they worshipping.

It was for this very reason that the prophets welcomed difficulties and formidable situations, and also paid attention to God with smiling, open faces even when they were in the most critical circumstances. And so, when, in their beloved, true way, they met with difficulties, they became overflowing with joy.

History has recorded the endeavour of these heavenly, torch-bearing men of guidance as also the condemnable behaviour of people towards them. Could steadfastness in these difficulties have had another motivation apart from love of God and obedience to His commands? Certainly it did not have other motives.

How can it be imagined that those who are completely engrossed in their beloved way, and who utter nothing except according to His wish, and in whose heart, soul, spirit and thoughts not one corner is empty of remembrance, love and honour of Him, can disobey His commands? Or can give themselves up to sin? Rather, they followed the path of obedience to Him and were submitted totally to Him.

Someone asked the noble Prophet of Islam (as) why he applied himself to worship to such an extent with suffering and hardship since he was purified and had no sins. His answer was that why should he not be a grateful and thankful servant of God.¹

Amir al-mu'minin, 'Ali (A.S.) made reference to the great qualities of the Prophet of Islam when he said that the greatness of God had so deeply overwhelmed prophet Muhammad (S) with the Messengership and leadership that he was a witness for creation, the bearer of good news, and a Warner. In his

childhood he was better than everyone, in his maturity more preferred, and his nature was, of all the pure ones, the purest. His bounty and his generosity were more freely showered down than that of any other benefactor.²

“He is the leader of the pious, and the eyes of those who are led”³.

Thus, the perfect knowledge of the prophets and the deep and true love which they had for God resulted in their infallibility and absolute purity, so that, in addition to precluding sin from their will and thinking, they withheld themselves from sin.

2. The Deep and Perfect Insight of the Prophets

Perceptiveness is not the same in everyone. Someone who is ignorant and illiterate will never think like a doctor does about microbes and the contamination of the blood vessels by them. A doctor who has spent years—investigating microbes, has watched their multiplication under a microscope, and has witnessed the fate of those who were infected by them can never neglect microbes and their dangers.

Thus, the ignorant person proceeds to drink water contaminated with microbes and has no worry, whereas the doctor would never be prepared to drink such water and would never even entertain the idea.

The only motive for refraining from drinking is the knowledge and information, which this doctor has concerning the bad effects of microbes. An illiterate and ignorant person would keep himself away from eating something filthy, for, in this case, he is aware of its impurity and harmful effects. But a child into whose reach a filthy thing may fall would probably put it into his mouth.

Some people who attach little importance to incremental harm, although they fear sudden, unexpected dangers and avoid them. Someone may be rather lazy about extracting a decayed tooth and may procrastinate about consulting a dentist, till his other teeth also become affected, and a great deal more discomfort comes his way. He is now affected by very serious ailments. However, the very same person, as soon as the pain of appendicitis appears and there is a possibility of real danger, will entrust himself to the hands of a surgeon with all haste.

If knowledgeable doctor becomes addicted to alcohol, it can only be because he is not fully informed of the damage of alcohol to the spirit and the soul, and because its accumulative harm becomes obscured through his appetite and his desire to gratify himself.

Ordinary people take a superficial view of evil, and do not take sufficient note of its physical and spiritual, bodily and psychic effects.

However, the prophets, who, with the help of a higher power, have supremacy in their vision and knowledge over the rest of mankind who have a profound and perfect insight into all the effects of evil,

and who, by a secret witnessing, see even those effects of evil which will materialize in the next world, will never come under the influence of their own bodily desires and soil their hands with the contamination of sin; even the thought of it will never enter their hearts.

The prophets saw the effects of sin in the intermediary and next worlds, and gave an account of them to people, and many hadith, reports have been recorded from the great Prophet of Islam on this subject of which the followings are a few:

“Amir al-mu'minin, 'Ali (A.S.) said, “I and Fatimah (A.S.) went to the Prophet. We saw that he was weeping excessively. I said, “may God take my father and mother’s souls in service to protect you from hardships, why are you weeping?” He said, “The night they took me ton mi'raj, I saw a group of women from my followers in severe torment. One woman I saw hung up by her hair, and the brain in her head was boiling from the intensity of the heat. Another was strung up by her tongue, and they were pouring caustic water into her throat.

Another was eating the flesh of her body and fire was burning under her feet. Another one had her hands and feet bound, and the snakes and scorpions of Hell were crawling over her. Another one, the flesh of her body was being cut up with flaming scissors. Another one had grown the face of a dog and fire was entering her from underneath and coming out of her mouth, and the angels of punishment were striking her with heated clubs on her head and her body.” Fatimah (A.S.), the daughter of the Prophet (S), asked, “What had these women done that Allah punished them in this way?’

“The great Prophet (S) replied, “The one who was hung up by her hair had not, in this world, concealed her hair from strangers, and the one who was strung up by her tongue had tormented her husband, and the one who was eating flesh of her own body had beautified herself for strangers, and the one whose hands and feet were bound and over whom snakes and scorpions crawled had given no importance to wudu and the purity of her clothes, nor to ghusl, (taking shower) after sexual impurity and ghusl after menstruation, and had counted her prayers as nothing, but the one whose flesh was cut by scissors was a woman who had given herself to the will of unfamiliar and strange men, and the one who had grown the face of a dog and whom fire entered from underneath and came out of her mouth had been a singer of falsehood. Then the holy Prophet said, “Woe to that woman who made her husband angry and how good it is for the case of that woman whose husband is happy because of her.”⁴

Questions

1. What kinds of characteristics does Allah want man to have?
2. Why did Allah bring up the Prophets as infallible people?
3. Why does Allah send immaculate Prophets?
4. What is the purpose of the prophets?

5. What can the habits of teachers do to the students?
6. Can speech alone be more affective or habit and speech together?
7. Can a transgressor be a good teacher?
8. Can a sin be attractive to an infallible person?
9. Can people have more trust in truthful persons, or in a not so truthful person?
10. What affect did the purity of the character of the prophet produce?
11. What has love of God to do with their infallibility?
12. Why could the prophet endure so much suffering for the cause of God?
13. The presence of what fact in every corner of one's soul prevents one from displeasing God?
14. What does sermon 115 of Nahjul Balagha say about the Holy Prophet?
15. Do the ignorant people make more mistakes or the wise and learned ones?
16. Can people of knowledge, wisdom, and vision be better off against sins or the illiterate lazy and pleasure seeking ones?
17. What was happening to who the prophet saw in mi'raj by her hair and why?
18. What was happening to the women strung up by her tongue and why?
19. What was happening to the women whose hand and feet were bound and why?
20. Was happening to the women whose flesh was being cut and why?
21. What had happened to the lady whose face grew into a dog and why?

1. Nur ath-Thaqalayn,, vol. 3, p. 367.

2. Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 115.

3. Tarikh Tabari, vol. 5, p. 2269–71.

4. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar; vol. 18, p. 351.