

Courtesy to God: Exemplary Methods of the Arch-Prophets

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This article examines the method of the five Arch-Prophets (Ulul Azm), namely Prophet Noah, Prophet Abraham, Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus, and Prophet Muhammad, communicating with God through remembrance (dhikr), supplication (dua), and prayer (salat). Through defining the term ‘model’ and

offering a glimpse into the character traits of these exemplary personalities, the author seeks to analyse the form of address of each of these prophets so as to offer a model for readers to follow.

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Courtesy to God: Exemplary Methods of the Arch-Prophets

Ali Hossein Zadeh¹

Translated by Mahboobeh Morshedian

Abstract

This article examines the method of the five Arch-Prophets (Ulul Azm), namely Prophet Noah, Prophet Abraham, Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus, and Prophet Muhammad, communicating with God through remembrance (dhikr), supplication (dua), and prayer (salat). Through defining the term ‘model’ and offering a glimpse into the character traits of these exemplary personalities, the author seeks to analyse the form of address of each of these prophets so as to offer a model for readers to follow.

Introduction

An effective method of training is to present a model to – and set an example for – others. The roles of prophets in propagation of – and call to – religion went beyond merely conveying God’s message to the people. According to Qur’anic verses, the prophets did not focus only on conveyance of the message; rather, in line with their call, they made the best efforts to modify people’s behaviour. When propagating, Prophet Noah did not consider his duty fulfilled merely by conveying God’s message to people. After tolerating all sufferings inflicted on him without any effect on his people, he asked God for a solution: he requested God for a method by which his call could impress his people. He told God:

“O my Lord! They have disobeyed me, but they follow [men] whose wealth and children give them no increase but only Loss,” (Nuh 71:21).

“O my Lord! What should I do so that my call impresses them, no sin is committed in society, and idols are not worshiped? They have already misled many...” (Nuh 71:24).

“O my Lord! Leave not of the Unbelievers, a single one on earth! For, if You leave [any of] them, they will but mislead Your devotees, and they will breed none but wicked ungrateful ones” (Nuh 71:26–27).

Moreover, all other Arch-Prophets also called for a change in their people. According to Ayatullah Mutahhari:

Some may ask, “Why does the Qur’an consider the Islamic call so difficult?” Not all messages are difficult to deliver, so each one should be examined. At one level, deliverance of the message is limited to the senses, and this kind of deliverance is easy. However, is the duty of the prophets who have manifest deliverance (*balighun mubin*) limited to having people hear their messages? Not at all. Instead, more important than imparting information to the senses (i.e., through people’s hearing and sight), there is imparting knowledge on people’s reason and intellect; the message should be delivered in a way that it permeates one’s intellect.

The door of intellect is closed, and it accepts no message but through reasoning and argumentation, or in the Qur’anic wording, wisdom. Now is it sufficient to impart information to the intellect and reason? No, this is the first phase. Besides intellect, the Divine message should penetrate people’s hearts. That is, it should enter the depth of humankind’s souls and control all their emotions, that is, their entire being. Hence, it is only the prophets who can guide people to the path of truth. In sum, in addition to the deliverance of the Divine message to people’s intellect, prophets embarked on a greater task, namely delivering it to their hearts.²

In this type of deliverance, something more than warning and giving glad tidings is needed. The verse

“...and We did not send you except as a bearer of good news and as a warner” (Israa 17:105)

means that you are not responsible for people’s evil deeds. Thus, some Qur’anic commentators’ analysis³ that *“This verse means ‘We have sent you only to give glad tidings to the believers and warn the disbelievers, so do not grieve over the disbelievers’ not embracing the Islamic faith”*⁴ is incorrect.

Imparting the message to the depth of the people’s hearts so that its effects are manifested in their actions is one of the main aims of delivering message through providence of role models. Role models play an important role in shaping desirable behaviour because people want to practically be exposed to acceptable behaviours to internalize it and actualize their tendencies towards good conduct.

The Word 'Model'

The word 'model' means pattern, example, role model, the followed one, epitome, and exemplar.⁵ Among the above meanings, role model and the followed one are specific to human beings. Both refer to a person who is qualified in terms of his characteristics to be an exemplar for others. Although the word 'model' is not specific to the exemplary man and includes other exemplary creatures, considering the fact that in psychology and education the word 'model' is used for the exemplary man, the word 'model' is used in this article, albeit in its specific meaning, namely 'role model.'

The psychological terminologies 'modelling', 'observation learning', and 'social learning' are related to the training method discussed in this article. 'Modelling' is a kind of behavioural therapy used to change a person's conduct through perceptual learning and making it possible for him to imitate someone else.

Likewise, 'modelling' has been defined as "the method of choosing some specific behaviour for imitation from among visible physical and verbal behavioural models." Observation learning⁶ is also referred to as a relatively continuous change mostly resulting from observing others' behaviour.⁷

Considering the important role of observation and modelling, the social learning theory was developed a theory based on observation and imitation of observed behaviours.

In the discussion of 'model' in the Qur'an, behaviour, attitudes, and motivations are to be changed or improved. On the other hand, models should be followed correctly and with understanding; men are warned against blind and uninformed imitation. According to what mentioned above, exemplary modelling in the Qur'an can be defined as follows: presenting the desirable behaviour through recounting the story of the people in the past so as to invite people to practically realize their talents. Role models linked to divinity attract others' attention to themselves because of their exceptional talents, striking personality, and praiseworthy character. People automatically follow them due to their eminence in terms of human perfection and moral virtues.

In educational sciences, a very common term is 'behavioural model' or 'behavioural pattern'.⁸ The pattern can refer to a) various plans including training, social, economic or political, or b) it is the objective and real-world examples of a practical, social, economic, moral, or religious plan. In social sciences, 'pattern' means model, type, and norm, and it is formed in a social group to be used as a guideline for social behaviours.⁹

From a functional, psycho-social perspective, patterns are life styles that originate from culture. People naturally deal with those patterns, and their actions conform to them. When human beings are trained in and absorbed into a culture, they acquire a collection of habits and reactions which make them conform to the general pattern of group behaviours.¹⁰

Following an example, imitating, and training are closely linked concepts; all have an important position

in psychology. Following an example is the prerequisite for imitation, and imitation is a mechanism through which one can be trained.

Seeking or admiring heroes is a psychological characteristic in human nature. Humankind always seeks a lost one and searches for a glorious hero and a praiseworthy leader. Henry Mason said, “Hero-worship is basically considered a genuine psychological manifestation that stands out in man’s disposition and nature.”¹¹ The hero is a distinguished person who – in the eyes of the one seeking and searching for him – enjoys special characteristics of an eminent and likable person who deserves to be imitated and followed.

Privilege, peculiarity, perfection, adequacy, and competence of the hero may be manifested in one respect or various ones. The role model is a crucial factor in rectification or corruption of every society. Believers have always regarded the Prophet as the perfect embodiment of the Divine doctrine. In addition, they learned lesson from all prophets, who were considered heroes of all arenas, and people followed their examples. Glancing at the Qur’an, we can find various role models. Prophet Joseph is the epitome of resisting lusts; Prophet Abraham is the embodiment of belief in the Unity of God; Prophet Noah is an example of resistance and persistence; Prophet Jacob is the epitome of patience and tolerance; Prophet Ismail is the example of sacrifice; and Prophet Muhammad is a role model for everyone.

Muhammad Qutb said, “The most practical and successful means of training is to train others by showing them a functional, live example. The example is presented to people so that everybody follows it, depending on his capacity and talent. In Islam, providing an example is the most important method of training.”¹²

Although the area of education and training includes various elements, all of which could set an example, no element can set or ruin an example like a trainer and a teacher. In terms of behaviour, theoretical, and practical guidelines, teachers, educators, and guidance counsellors can form students’ behaviours and thoughts by setting an example. If teachers and trainers knew that the philosophy of desirable training and education which do not rely merely on scientific and theoretical studies, they would understand that moral values are as precious, if not more precious, than sciences.

In fact, no society can continue its social life other than by identifying general human principles and examples that form moral habits and requires itself to chime with those habits.¹³

Imam Sadiq said, *“Invite people [to Islam] by your actions, not your tongues.”*¹⁴ All movements, gestures, and even words of the teacher or the propagator – when he performs his duty – greatly influence children and adolescents. God said in the verse 2 of the chapter Saff,

“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?” (Saff 61:2).

Sayings must conform to actions for actions to have any effect. That is why training through modelling is

more important than any other training. Through setting a practical example, a proper atmosphere replete with understanding should be created in society. Otherwise, when young people see sayings diverge from actions, they quickly become displeased with authorities, and separate from them. As a result, not only do they ignore exemplars that authorities try to support, but also their inclination to the opposite pole is automatically accelerated.

This indicates that modelling is an effective method of influencing others. If great people only pay lip service to virtues without putting them into practice, the mainstream culture shaping people's thought and behaviour will be merely paying lip service to virtues as well.

We now turn to training through modelling as examined in the Arch-Prophets' courtesy to God in the Qur'an. Courtesy is an admirable and desirable quality every believer – by his nature and taste – considers worthy to have.

1. The Courtesy of Prophet Noah

A polite manner of Prophet Noah when talking to his people was his courtesy in praising God, and this is an instance of practical propagation. It is not only as valuable as propagation in words, but also more effective than that.¹⁵ God recounts the conversations between Prophet Noah and his people as follows:

They said, 'O Noah, you have disputed with us already, and you have disputed with us exceedingly. Now bring us what you threaten us with should you be truthful. He said, 'Allah will indeed bring it on you if He wishes, and you cannot thwart [Him]. My exhorting will not benefit you, much as I may seek to exhort you, if Allah desires to consign you to perversity. He is your Lord, and to Him you shall be brought back.' (Hud 11:32–34).

In the above conversation, in response to those who thought Prophet Noah would bring punishment on them and those who invited him to do so to render him incapable in public, he denied that punishment was in his hands and instead attributed them to His Lord.

By leaving the issue to the Divine Providence, saying “إِنْ يَشَاءُ – if He pleases” and considering God great by saying “and you will not be able to frustrate [Him]”, he perfected his courtesy before God. Prophet Noah talked of God using the word “Allah” and not using the phrase “my Lord” here because the word “Allah” refers to the One to Whom all beauty and majesty lead to.

He informed them that God is the pivot around which everything turns. He not only negated his own power and proved God's power but also added that if God did not will, his advice would not profit them. In addition, by saying “He is your Lord, and to Him shall you return,” he brought a reason for this negation.¹⁶ By showing absolute poverty of the servants and creatures of God, he proved to his addressees that he was the example of dependence on God in all his plans.

Through his behaviour, he also explained this sentence,

“you are they who stand in need of Allah” (Fatir 35: 15).

Among other polite manners of Prophet Noah in the story of his son in which God spoke of in the Qur’an,

“And Nuh cried out to his Lord and said: My Lord! Surely my son is of my family, and your promise is surely true, and you are the most just of the judges” (Hud 11:45).

His politeness in the above statement lies in that he told what was in his mind but never asked for something that might not be in his interests. It seems that Prophet Noah prayed that his son would be saved from drowning, but by pondering on the verses of this story, we discover that it actually connotes something different from what it denotes.

On the one hand, God had ordered him to have his family and believers board the ship and had promised them their rescue. God had also excluded those who would be surely punished including his wife from boarding, but his son disobeyed the father by boarding the ship. It is not certain that he disbelieved in his father’s call and rejected it.

Thus, he might be one of those who were possibly saved. On the other hand, the revelation had been sent down on Prophet Noah, and the definite verdict had been given:

“And make the ark before Our eyes and [according to] Our revelation, and do not speak to Me in respect of those who are unjust; surely they shall be drowned” (Hud 11:37).

Now the question is: “Does ‘those who are unjust’ refer to the ones who disbelieved in Prophet Noah’s call or generally to all oppressors?” This is an open question. It seems that this ambiguity made Prophet Noah doubt his son, and it was because of this doubt that Prophet Noah did not dare to ask for the rescue of his son decisively; rather, he requested it irresolutely because he knew some factors regarding his son’s destiny.

One of the etiquettes of servitude is that God’s servant does not go beyond his knowledge by asking his Lord for the things that may be evil or good because he or she knows it is an issue beyond his knowledge. Prophet Noah only mentioned what he knew and believed in. He only talked of the Divine promise and did not add to it. Due to this etiquette, God kept him immune from any wrong-doing at that moment, and the Lord had interpreted His word “your family” which meant “righteous family members,” and not any relative; that is, ‘and your son is not virtuous’.

When Prophet Noah heard the reply of God, the Beneficent, he repented politely, in complete gratitude to God for disciplining him before he made his request, and said,

“I seek refuge in You from asking You that of which I have no knowledge,” (Hud 11:47).

This manner of Prophet Noah shows that under all circumstances, people should seek refuge to God. Prophet Noah finished his words as follows,

“My Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and whoever enters my house in faith, and the faithful men and women, and do not increase the wrongdoers in anything except ruin.” (Nuh 71:28).

This is Prophet Noah’s courtesy to God: he did not disregard his parents and those who believed in him and asked the good of this world and the hereafter for them. So why did Prophet Noah first pray for himself, saying, *“My Lord! Forgive me”*? Does not such a request imply some selfishness and discourtesy? In response, Prophet Noah prayed for himself first because prayer for the leader is equal to praying for the people.”¹⁷

Thus, this order of prayers was planned and deliberate. He modelled prayer with specific phrasings.

2. The Courtesy of Prophet Abraham

Among the acts of courtesy which Prophet Abraham performed before God, the Almighty, is what God referred to as follows: Prophet Abraham said,

“They are indeed hateful to me, but the Lord of all the worlds,” (Shu’ara’ 26:77).

Then, describing God’s attributes, he added:

“Who created me, it is He who guides me, and provides me with food and drink, and when I get sick, it is He who cures me; who will make me die, then He will bring me to life, and who, I hope, will forgive me my iniquities on the Day of Retribution.” (Shu’ara’ 26:78–82).

In the above words, Prophet Abraham first praised God magnificently according to courtesy which servitude to Him necessitates. This is the first detailed eulogy that God recounted from him. He took into account his Lord’s favour from his birth to his return to Him and considered himself absolutely poor and needy before Him such that he regarded himself unable to do anything.

Another instance is that he attributed his sickness to himself, saying,

“and when I get sick, it is He who cures me.” (Shu’ara’ 26:80).

Although sickness is an event, it is not unrelated to God; apparently he wanted to say that God, the Beautiful, does not perform an act which the servant may mistakenly regard as negative. Moreover, in the Qur’an, there are some prayers which Prophet Abraham offered in the old age:

When Abraham said, ‘My Lord! Make this city a sanctuary, and save me and my children from worshipping idols. My Lord! Indeed they have misled many people. So whoever follows me indeed belongs to me, and as for someone who disobeys me, well, You are indeed all-forgiving, all-merciful. Our Lord! I have settled part of my descendants in a barren valley, by Your sacred House, our Lord, that they may maintain the prayer. So make the hearts of a part of the people fond of them, and provide them with fruits, so that they may give thanks. Our Lord! Indeed You

know whatever we hide and whatever we disclose, and nothing is hidden from Allah on the earth or in the sky. All praise belongs to Allah, who, despite [my] old age, gave me Ishmael and Isaac. Indeed my Lord hears all supplications. My Lord! Make me a maintainer of the prayer, and my descendants [too]. Our Lord, accept my supplication. Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents, and all the faithful, on the day when the reckoning is held.' (Ibrahim 14:35–41).

In talking about his requests, Prophet Abraham began his supplication revealing the great extent of his hope in God's mercy. For example, after he said,

“and save me and my children from worshiping idols,” (Ibrahim 14:35)

he expressed his requests as follows:

“My Lord! Surely they have led many people astray.” (Ibrahim 14:36)

By this prayer, Prophet Abraham meant that he was waiting for God's instructions and orders, and he considered himself obliged to wait for them. He also expressed his readiness for God's purpose, that is, guiding the people. Likewise, after Prophet Abraham said,

O our Lord! Surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Your Sacred House, our Lord! That they may keep up prayer; therefore, make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits, (Ibrahim 14:37).

he mentioned his purpose as follows, *“that they may be grateful.”* Referring to a sacred and great goal for any request indicates the courtesy of the one who prays.

Prophet Abraham also showed courtesy to God whenever he asked for something, mentioning a Divine name such as “Forgiving”, “Merciful”, and the “Hearer of prayer”. He repeated the name (ﷻ) *“My Lord”* in every prayer, because Lordship of God is the means of a servant's connection to Him and is an opening for every prayer. Another instance of Prophet Abraham's courtesy to God is that he said, “And whoever disobeys me, You surely are Forgiving, Merciful.”

In other words, he did not curse them; rather, he finished his words with two names of God, a means of showering men with blessings and salvation because he wanted his people to be saved and God's generosity to increase.

After praising God, Prophet Abraham said in his supplication:

My Lord: Grant me wisdom, and make me join the righteous. And ordain for me a goodly mention among posterity. And make me of the heirs of the Garden of Bliss. And forgive my father, for surely he is of those who have gone astray. And do not disgrace me on the day when all are raised (Shu'ara' 26:83–87).

Prophet Abraham's politeness is revealed in the above supplication with the name "My Lord" (رب). This shows that the Manager of the universe is God. Then, he only asked for true and lasting blessings, the best of which were "wisdom," joining the righteous, and a good reputation in the future. This kind of politeness indicates that one should not ask great people for trivial things.

In his other prayer,

"My Lord! Grant me of the righteous," (Saffat 37:100),

Prophet Abraham considered several issues. First, he asked for a child. Second, he sought refuge in God from having a vicious child. Third, he changed his prayer from a worldly one to a spiritual one, hence, he offered a prayer which God approved of. 18

Moreover, his method of prayer teaches people the language of prayer as well as the type of requests we should have so that worldly requests are granted, that include otherworldly outcomes.

3. Courtesy of Prophet Moses

In various instances, the Qur'an recounts Prophet Moses' conflicts with others. When he was in Egypt, he killed that Coptic Egyptian man, striking him a blow, though of course, he was justified in doing so. Nonetheless, when he examined the ways of confronting immoral behaviour and discovered there were better solutions, he accepted the responsibility for his action, telling God,

"My Lord! Surely I have done wrong to myself, so You forgive me. So [Allah] forgave him; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful," (Qasas 28:16).

The etiquette of servitude requires man to take notice of his fault more even though his action is permissible.

The etiquette of praying to God requires that the servant only expresses his need and does not utter words that can be interpreted as him guiding God on how to grant his request. Hence, when he left Egypt and entered Midian, he drew water from the well for Prophet Jethro's daughter and rested while hungry under a tree in the shade.

Expressing his need, he said,

"My Lord! I am indeed in need of any good You may send down to me!" (Qasas 28:24).

Another prayer was said on the first day of his prophethood when he received Divine revelation:

"[Moses] said: 'He said, 'My Lord! Open my breast for me. Make my affair easy for me. Remove the hitch from my tongue, [so that] they may understand my discourse.'" (Ta-ha 20:25-28).

Then, in order to emphasize he did not pray in his personal interests but in the public interest, he added,

“So that we glorify You much,” (Qasas 28:33).

The purpose of my prayer is that all Your servants and I glorify and remember You a great deal.

In addition, explaining all the crimes of a person and elaborating them is considered an indifference and disrespect for the addressee’s status. Polite people do not regard recounting all events for a superior as appropriate, and sometimes when there is no way but relating the events, they apologize to the superior. Hence, when Prophet Moses was disappointed with his people, he did not curse them from the onset, or elaborate the crimes of Pharaoh’s people. Instead, he briefly said: *“O’ God! These people misguide Your servants, so takes away Your blessings and do not give them the opportunity for mischief.”*

Of course, only after he had found out that destruction of Pharaoh’s people was in the interest of the believers and good for the Divine religion, he cursed them. He did not resort to speculation and surmise, and this is the necessary etiquette of talking with God.

Moses said, ‘Our Lord! You have given Pharaoh and his elite glamour and wealth in the life of this world, our Lord, that they may lead [people] astray from Your way! Our Lord! Blot out their wealth and harden their hearts so that they do not believe until they sight the painful punishment.’

(Yunus 10:88).

Another act of courtesy by Prophet Moses was that although this curse was phrased briefly, he earnestly beseeched God and fervently prayed to Him while repeating “Our Lord”.

Also, after Prophet Moses chose seventy people for the place of meeting, and they were killed by thunderbolt, he wished they became alive. Although he did not express his wish, from his tone it can be concluded that he wanted them to survive. To change God’s wrath to compassion, he sought God for forgiveness:

Moses chose seventy men from his people for Our tryst, and when the earthquake seized them, he said, ‘My Lord, had You wished, You would have destroyed them and me before. Will You destroy us because of what the fools amongst us have done? It is only Your test by which You lead astray whomever You wish and guide whomever You wish. You are our master, so forgive us and have mercy on us, for You are the best of those who forgive. (Araf 7: 155).

Prophet Moses began with “forgive us” and appeased the Divine wrath with the hope that he might pave the way for the Divine blessing to continue. Through his courtesy, his request was granted while he had not expressed his need and had not explicitly asked for his people being resurrected after their destruction. Likewise, after he had angrily returned from the place of meeting and protested severely to his brother, he told God, admitting his fault,

“He said, ‘My Lord, forgive me and my brother, and admit us into Your mercy, for You are the

most merciful of the merciful.” (Araf 7:151).

When his people disobeyed him and did not enter the sacred land, he told God, He said,

“My Lord! I have no power over [anyone] except myself and my brother, so part us from the transgressing lot” (Ma’idah 5:25).

The act of courtesy referred to in the above verse is that although he intended to talk about his people’s reprehensible opposition and shameful disobedience to him, he did not declare his intention explicitly; it was indirect: “I have power only over myself and my brother.” This referred to Prophet Moses’ people disobedience to him. To understand his difficult situation in this story, we must have complete knowledge of the event:

Thereupon Moses returned to his people, indignant and grieved. He said, ‘O my people! Did not your Lord give you a true promise? Did the period [of my absence] seem too long to you? Or did you desire that your Lord’s wrath should descend on you and so you failed your tryst with me?’ (Taha 20:86).

From the context, it can be understood that when he returned from Mount Tur to his people, although he was full of rage, he politely attracted their attention to God because he said, “Has not your Lord promised you?” He used the word “Lord” referring to God because using the pronoun under such circumstances is discourteous.

In this story, Prophet Moses’ people committed a great wrong–doing and perished as a result of a powerful earthquake because they had wanted to see God and were not content with hearing His voice. Verse 55 of the chapter al–Baqarah reported their words,

“And remember you said: O Moses! We shall never believe in you until we see Allah manifestly.” (Baqarah 2:55)

Prophet Moses knew if he had returned to his people alone, telling them of his entourage’s death, they would have accused him of murder and eventually disbelieve in him, resulting in the fruitlessness of his call to God; thus, he wanted the dead ones by the earthquake alive. However, due to his situation and position, he could not explicitly express his intention, and he considered his entourage who gravely sinned and earned Divine wrath as deserving the Divine favour once again and return to this world.

He wanted not to utter his request explicitly, so as to make God’s mercy overshadow His wrath and arouse His kindness, he said,

“O Lord! You could have destroyed them long before,” (Araf 7:155).

In other words, if this had happened before, I would not be accused of killing my entourage. In order to be courteous, he said in question form: It does not befit You and Your mercy to rebuke some people

because of fools among them,

“Would You destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us?” (Araf 7:155).

Afterwards, he still did not make his request explicitly, but humbly said,

“You are our Wali (Protector): so forgive us and give us Your mercy; for You are the best of those who forgive” (Araf 7:155).

Prophet Moses put his request and prayer between two attributes of God, namely His wilayah and forgiveness. Then he made his request, saying, “Forgive us and give us Your mercy.” Prophet Moses considered referring to these two attributes as enough and avoided specifying his main request – his entourage’s restoration to life because he wanted to express his humbleness and shamefulness.

Otherwise, undoubtedly by this sentence he meant making his request, even though he did not specify it. Eventually, God restored Prophet Moses’ entourage to life:

“Then We raised you up after your death that you may give thanks,” (al-Baqarah 2:56).

No doubt if it had not been for his prayer granted, God would have not raised up those who He had destroyed by His punishment.¹⁹ Prophet Moses made his request indirectly, and this was both a courtesy and a method that urges the addressee to grant the request.

Some do not admit committing sins and flaws and seek to justify their wrong behaviour throughout their lives. In the case with Prophet Moses, whenever he had a flaw, he admitted it. When he went to Pharaoh with his brother, Aaron, on God’s orders, he said,

“Surely we are the messengers of the Lord of the worlds. Then send with us the children of Israel” (Shu’ara’ 26:16–17)

and stop enslaving them.

“Pharaoh said: Did we not bring you up as a child among us, and you stayed among us for [many] years of your life? And you did [that] deed of yours which you did, and you are one of the ungrateful,” (Shu’ara’ 26:18–19).

This word is considered Pharaoh’s objection to Prophet Moses. Pharaoh meant, “Do you think we do not know you? Are not you the child we brought up? We know you and remember your actions; why do you suddenly speak of prophethood? And you have a corrupt past record, so how do you claim to be a prophet?” In response, Prophet Moses said:

He said, ‘I did that when I was astray. So I fled from you, as I was afraid of you. Then my Lord gave me judgement and made me one of the apostles. As for that favour, you remind me of it reproachfully because you have enslaved the Children of Israel.’ (Shu’ara’ 26:20–22)

Prophet Moses first admitted the action they had attributed to him even though this was not the first issue referred to by Pharaoh, which was that of bringing up Prophet Moses and their surprise with his prophethood. These three verses include Prophet Moses' response to Pharaoh's objection. From comparing this response to Pharaoh's objection, it can be concluded that he analysed the objection, inferred three issues from it, and responded to them. First, Pharaoh considered his prophethood unlikely and said that it was improbable that a person whose past record we knew about would become a prophet, and the verse,

“Did we not bring you up as a child among us, and you stayed among us for [many] years of your life?” (Shu'ara' 26: 18)

entails the above assumption of Pharaoh. Second, Pharaoh considered Prophet Moses' deeds evil and called him a corrupt criminal, and the verse,

“And you did [that] deed of yours which you did,” (Shu'ara' 26: 19)

entails this meaning. Third, Pharaoh considered his enslaving Prophet Moses a favour to him, and the verse,

“and you are one of the ungrateful,” (Shu'ara' 26: 19)

involves this issue. Naturally, Prophet Moses should have answered the second objection first, and then the first and third ones and he did so. Thus, the verse,

“I did it then while I was of those unable to see the right course,” (Shu'ara' 26:20)

is his answer to Pharaoh's second objection that he was a criminal. However, in order not to infuriate the Coptic's present there, he did not refer to murder directly.²⁰

When making a mistake in applying general rules to instances, ones' confessing to faults and errs, not only is it not considered a demerit, but it is also necessitated by wisdom. Acknowledging one's fault before the people paves the way for admitting errs before God because this way, God is regarded as the real and absolute rightful owner. From Prophet Moses' biography, it can be concluded that in order to be courteous to God, one should use words such as “Lord” and take the public interests into account when praying to God.

Also, when an issue may deface others, it should be mentioned very briefly, and no matter how small one's request is, it should be made humbly and modestly. Sometimes it is necessary to offer prayer indirectly in order to be courteous. Under all circumstances, even when one is truly upset, God's names should be used carefully, and one should admit his errs and slips.

4. The courtesy of Prophet Jesus

After birth, Prophet Jesus started to talk in order to calm her mother down and absolve her of blames. His first words were *“Surely I am the servant of Allah.”* According to Abul-Mahasin, “When Mary pointed to Jesus, meaning: ‘Ask him about this,’ her people were ready to stone him. When Jesus started to speak, they said, ‘This is so surprising,’ and asked him, ‘O boy! Who are you?’ but he turned away his head.

Then, Zachariah said, ‘O boy! If you are ordered to speak, tell me who you are.’ Jesus said, ‘Surely I am the servant of Allah.’”²¹ This portrays the pride he took in servitude to God. Not only was he adorned with this acknowledgement, but he also ordered others to be adorned with it. There he said,

“Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord” (Ma’idah 5:72).

In Prophet Jesus’ doctrine, the pillar of life is worship of – and servitude to – God. His words were a model for others to follow. There are some Qur’anic verses containing Prophet Jesus’ communication with God. According to the Holy Qur’an:

And when Allah said: O Isa son of Maryam! Did you say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah, he said: Glory be to You, it did not befit me that I say what I had no right to [say]; if I had said it, You would indeed have known it; You know what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Your mind, surely You are the great Knower of the unseen things. I did not say to them anything save what You did enjoin me with: That worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord, and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when You did cause me to die, You were the watcher over them, and You are witness of all things. If You should chastise them, then surely they are You servants; and if You should forgive them, then surely You are the Mighty, the Wise (Ma’idah 5:116–118).

In the above verses, Prophet Jesus showed courtesy to God when:

1. He considered God exempt from what is below His dignity, and before he regarded himself exempt from what they attributed to him, he regarded God exempt from what they attributed to Him.²²
2. Instead of saying, “I have not said so,” he said, “I am not entitled to say something so that I may deny later. It does not befit me that I say what I have no right to say.”
3. He considered God great by saying: “Is it possible that one says something outside the knowledge of God, Who knows the Unseen?” Hence, he said, “If I had said so, God would have known it first. God knows what is in our hearts, and we do not know His intention.”
4. He said, “I am completely obedient to God and have done what He ordered, that is, servitude to Him.”

5. According to Prophet Jesus, wilayah and order are exclusive to God, and so far, He has ordered Jesus to stay among them, and Jesus has been obedient to him. Now Jesus also obeys what He orders. Elsewhere, when the disciples asked for food insistently and put pressure on him to request it from God, he said,

“O Allah, our Lord! Send down to us food from Heaven which should be to us a solemn festival, to the first of us and to the last of us, and a sign from You, and grant us means of subsistence, and You are the best of the Providers” (Ma'idah 5:114).

Examining his words, we can see the remarkable difference between the disciples' words and his. First, he considered this food “a solemn festival” belonging to him and his people. Second, he summarized the disciples' long word about the benefits of its descent, such as their reassurance and knowledge about his veracity, and their testifying the food into “a sign from You.” Brevity before God is also considered a courtesy.²³

Third, as it was difficult for him to make this request as he was under pressure, he started his prayer with “O Allah, our Lord!” combined, while other prophets used to start their prayer with “O Lord!” This addition to his prayer resulted from his courtesy because of his difficult situation.

Fourth, he mentioned “eating,” in which the disciples had preferred to their other purposes last, thus adorning it. After he said, “And grant us means of subsistence,” he added, “You are the best of the Providers,” so that it can be considered praise of God.²⁴ This way, he modelled courtesy to God for his people using appropriate titles for Him and offering grand requests with reference to spiritual matters.

5. The Courtesy of Prophet Muhammad

As Prophet Muhammad was very polite and observant of all moral etiquettes, he put God's orders perfectly into practice. The Qur'anic instructions in practice constitute his practical courtesy. In the Qur'an, God reveals two points regarding Prophet Muhammad's prayer. Addressing Prophet Muhammad, God said,

“And say: My Lord! Make me to enter a goodly entering [Medina], and cause me to go forth a goodly going forth [from Mecca], and grant me from Your power to assist [me against enemies]” (Israa 17:80).

To pray to God in a good form, show your dependence on Him and make it clear to everyone that God's competent hands manage all your affairs. Then, in terms of content, refer to the main secrets of victory. The correct method is as follows:

1. One's thoughts, sayings and actions should be cleansed of fraud, deception, guile and anything against honesty and truthfulness.

2. This honesty must be preserved not only at the beginning, but also in the middle and end of the course of action.

3. One must admit that he or she cannot do anything alone, that is, a person cannot overcome all problems relying on his or her own power, telling Him: “O God! Help me, provide me with some friends, and grant me sound reason, self-sacrificing friends, willpower, and wisdom to help me on this path.”

According to Khajeh Abdullah Ansari, Some Qur’anic commentators considered this verse as related to Prophet Muhammad’s leaving Mecca and entering Medina. Others thought it to relate to the conquest of Mecca and entering, then leaving Mecca. Still others believed the verse meant entering and leaving prophethood. Other commentators referred to various aspects.²⁵

Any entry and exit must be accompanied by the three above factors. Although Qur’anic commentators mentioned many issues as occasions of revelation of this verse, no issue is specific and an exception to others. This prayer with its flawless structure and content is granted only before the time of keeping vigil and morning call to prayer. God kept Prophet Muhammad immune from dangers through this prayer. Hence, obeying this order, he taught people how to pray and demonstrated a model behaviour to his Ummah.

Conclusion

In general, the method of Arch-Prophets for praying to God was to address God as “Lord” and then to make their requests. The relationship between requests being granted and politeness when talking to God lies in expressing servitude to and accepting God’s Lordship.

Perhaps it can be said that this unity is of a higher rank compared to Unity in Divine Creation and the like, and that the entire universe is God. Lordship of God is the means of man’s relationship with God and the opening to prayer. This is so significant that the major claim of polytheists is polytheism in Lordship. This fact can be inferred from several Qur’anic verses and the history of prophets and their peoples.

Another act of courtesy is that man asks God only for true and lasting blessings, the most prominent one is “*hukm*,” that is, shari’ah and joining the righteous and having a good reputation among those who would come in future because if prayers are limited to issues of low value, the status of the addressee is also represented proportionately low.

Another instance of politeness is that man only expresses the reality in his mind and does not request God for something whose merits and demerits he does not know of. Thus, when he asks God for something, either he must know that it is absolutely desirable, or if it may not be in his interests, he should ask God to grant his prayer, taking his interests into account. No servant must exceed his knowledge and ask God whose merits and demerits are unknown.

Still another polite behaviour is that although all affairs are in God's hands, one must attribute undesirable states such as sickness and poverty to himself and the desirable ones to God, the same way Prophet Abraham practiced this act of courtesy and attributed his sickness to himself and said, "When I get sick, He heals me," in order to demonstrate that nothing but beautiful acts are performed by God.

The last act of politeness is that along with every request, one should mention a name from among the beautiful names of God in accordance with his request, for example, the "Forgiving", "Merciful", and "All-hearing". He should also repeat the word "Lord" in all prayers and requests.

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