

Objective & Goal of Muhammad's (SAW) Prophethood (Part One)

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We Muslims believe that the best of all human beings — Muhammad, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him — was much more than just one of the many prophets, as he was Khatam al-nabiyyeen (seal of the prophets); simultaneously, we also believe that he was much more than just one of the numerous messengers of Allah, as he was Aakhir al-rusul (the final Messenger). Prophecy or Prophethood not only ends and comes to a close with the advent of Muhammad (SAW), but it also achieves its final plenitude, consummation and culmination in him. This means that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) represents the completion and climax of all earlier prophetic missions, as well as the fulfillment and full blossoming of all antecedent Divine revelations. Seen in this perspective, it becomes absolutely certain that whereas the objective and aim of Muhammad's prophethood cannot be fundamentally different from those of all other prophets, at the same time it must also reflect the characteristic of completion and full realization. And this by itself confers on him a distinct and special place in the galaxy of noble prophets.

It is, therefore, clear that in order to fully comprehend and appreciate the objective of Muhammad's advent as the final prophet we must first understand, as enunciated by the Holy Qur'an, the general objective of the institution of Prophethood itself. Only then can we attempt to grasp the distinctive and unique nature of the goal of Muhammad's Prophethood, as well as its significance. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him.

THE AXIAL PURPOSE OF PROPHETS

Three Doctrinal Beliefs

It is common knowledge that Islam is based upon three metaphysical beliefs, viz., the faith in Allah as the one Supreme Creator and Sovereign (Tawheed), the belief in the accountability in the life-after-death (Ma'ad), and the faith in the institutions of Prophethood and Revelation (Risalah). However, what is generally not realized is the fact that these three doctrinal beliefs are very deeply connected and logically related, and, taken together, constitute an indivisible organic unity. Let us try to examine very briefly and schematically the real import of these beliefs and the nature of their mutual relationship.

Belief in Allah

Keeping aside philosophical controversies and theological intricacies, the quintessential claim of belief in Allah is as follows. The entire realm of being and the whole cosmic complex is neither eternal nor ever-

lasting; rather, it is both contingent and perishable. In itself, it has no warrant for its own existence and it cannot explain itself. However, there is one such Being as has neither beginning in time nor an end — Allah, the proper name for God. It makes no difference whether one calls Him Allah or Al-Rahman (The Most Beneficent). He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and of man, and, particularly, the giver of guidance for man and the Supreme Judge of his conduct. God's existence can be brought home to those who care to reflect, so that it not only ceases to be an 'irrational' or 'unreasonable' belief but also becomes for them the Master-Truth. He is all-enveloping, literally boundless, and He alone is absolute, eternal, and infinite. Everything else carries in the very texture of its being the hallmark of its finitude and creatureliness. He is the personification of all good attributes, like Power, Majesty, Mercy, Munificence, Knowledge, etc., in the utmost degree. In the very nature of the case, there can be only one God, for whenever one tries to conceive of more than one, only one will be found to emerge as the First. The Holy Qur'an declares:

Do not take two gods (for) He is only One. (Al-Nahl 16:51)

God bears witness that there is no god but He. (Aal-i-Imran 3:18)

Say (O Muhammad) if there were other gods beside Him, as these people assert, they would all (necessarily) seek their way to the (one) Lord of the Throne. (Al-Isra 17:42)

Nobody from amongst the creatures shares His substantial essence, attributes, rights, authority and privileges. God cannot be regarded as an existent among other existents. In the metaphysical realm, there can be no democratic and equal sharing of being between the Original, the Creator, the Self-Necessary on the one hand and the borrowed, the created, the contingent on the other. The Qur'anic condemnation of Shirk (assigning partners to God) has its roots firmly in the metaphysical realm and then issues forth its corollaries in the political and moral fields.

The whole Sura al-Ikhlās, like many other verses of the Holy Qur'an, most categorically emphasizes the oneness and absoluteness of God Almighty:

Say: He is one God: God the eternal, the Uncaused (Absolute) Cause of all being. He begets not, and neither is He begotten; and there is nothing that could be compared with Him. (Al-Ikhlās 112:1-4)

And say: All praise is to God, who begets no offspring, and has no partner in his dominion, and has no weakness, and therefore no need of any aid, and (thus) extol His limitless greatness. (Al-Isra 17:111)

He allots to no one a share in His dominion and rule. (Al-Kahf 18:26)

Almighty Allah (SWT) has created the universe with a purpose and for a definite period of time. The creation of the universe is a serious affair, not a sport or triviality:

And We have not created the heavens and the earth and what is therein purposelessly — that is the opinion of those who reject (God) or are ungrateful. (Al-Saad 38:27)

The non-ultimacy of nature itself proves its destructibility and the Qur'an tells us that God in His wisdom has created the myriad forms of existence for a finite duration of time, known only to Him. At the pinnacle of God's multi-layered creations appears man whom He endowed with a dual nature: Allah (SWT) created his animal form and then breathed into him out of His own Spirit, and made him His vicegerent on earth. In other words, the Holy Qur'an presents a theomorphic conception of man: he is homo cum Deo. The creation of man represents the acme of Divine creative process, as, according to an authentic tradition of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), God has created man in His own image. The following verses of the Holy Qur'an refers to both aspects of the creation of man:

We have indeed created man in the finest of moulds, then We reversed him to the lowest of the low. (Al-Teen 95: 4,5)

Belief in the Life Hereafter

The core of this Islamic belief lies in the assertion that the present terrestrial existence of man does not constitute his total life; rather, it is a short preamble of the everlasting life in the Hereafter, a very brief preface of the long life-book. Life in this world is merely a trial or examination period, the rewards or punishments of which will be enjoyed or suffered in the Hereafter (Al-Aakhira). Physical death experienced by man in this world does not represent the annihilation of the individual person; rather it is only his transportation from this world to the eternal life in the next world. Immediately after death is the Barzakh, a brief halting station on the way to the Hereafter, and the ever-lasting life will begin after the Day of Judgement (the final accounting of deeds). Resurrection of the dead, final reckoning, weighing of deed-records, torments of the hell-fire and joys of the Paradise — all are essential parts of the Qur'anic eschatology which fully elaborate the Islamic belief in the Hereafter. Al-Aakhira or the 'end' is the moment of truth. Thus "that day man will recall what he had been striving for" (Al-Naaziat 79:35) is a typical statement of this phenomenon. It is an Hour when all veils between the subjective perceptions of man and the objective moral reality will be rent:

You were in deep heedlessness about this (Hour of self-awareness), but now We have rent your veil, so your sight today is keen. (Qaaf 50:22)

Indeed, the essence of the Hereafter (Al-Aakhira) consists in the long-range results or consequences of man's endeavours during his earthly life. Ad-Dunya, or the immediate objectives and the here-and-now of life, on the contrary, represents the lower values, the baser pursuits which appear so tempting that most

men run after them most of the time, at the expense of the higher and long-range ends. The Holy Prophet (SAW) has elaborated this in one of his moving sermons thus:

I swear by Allah that all of you will certainly die, just as you go to sleep at night. Then surely you will all be raised again as you wake up in the morning. Then you will definitely be judged for the deeds you had been doing. You will get rewards for good deeds and punishment for the evil ones; it will either be the everlasting life of Paradise or the endless torment of Hell-fire. (Cf. Sermons of the Holy Prophet, reproduced in Nahjul Balagha)

The Relationship between the Belief in Allah and the Belief in the Hereafter

With a little thoughtful reflection one can realize that the Islamic metaphysical belief in the Divine Creator and the eschatological belief in the Hereafter together constitute the total sapiential knowledge of the whence (mabda) and whither (ma'ad) of man. That is to say, one who upholds these beliefs reflectively and with full consciousness, ipso facto, possesses authentic knowledge both about his source or origin and his ultimate destiny or destination. The Holy Qur'an summarizes this in the following words:

Verily, we are from Allah and unto Him we shall return. (Al-Baqara 2:156)

As a matter of truth, a man without this absolutely essential knowledge of the whence and whither of humanity is like a wayfarer who, due to a mishap during the course of his journey, neither remembers as to wherefrom he started his excursion nor recalls the destination to which he was traveling. One can well imagine the miserable plight and mental anguish of that traveler. This is exactly the situation of a man who, not knowing his ultimate destination or the purpose of his existence, spends his entire life in pursuing this-worldly goals, in accumulating the means of material sustenance and luxuries, and in seeking carnal gratifications. Such a man is so absorbed in his immediate physical concerns and his narrow material gains that he does not heed the higher ideals and values of life. The Holy Qur'an allegorically speaks of this man thus:

But then, is he who goes along prone on his face better guided than he who walks upright on a straight path? (Al-Mulk 67:22)

That is to say, the man who is ignorant of Divine guidance is confined in a narrow single dimension. He therefore sees only what is immediately beneath his feet, and is utterly unaware of the direction his path is taking him to. This is a metaphor of the spiritual obtuseness which prevents a person from caring for anything beyond his proximate worldly concerns.

Or else, this man is like a kite which, its thin cord having been cut, is entirely at the mercy of the ever-changing winds. The winds may carry it wherever they like. The Holy Qur'an expresses this very graphically in these words:

For he who ascribes divine qualities to anything beside God is like one who is hurtling down from the sky, whereupon either the birds snatch him off, or the winds blow him away to a far off place (Al-Hajj 22:31)

The net result of this rejection or ignorance of the Divine guidance in respect of the whence and whither of man is that he becomes enmeshed in metaphysical doubts and uncertainties, ending up with wholesale agnosticism or skepticism. The logical end-point of this epistemological confusion is that some thinkers are led even to the extent of casting doubts on their own objective existence and into total ethical nihilism.

An Important Question

At this juncture a very crucial question arises, the right answer to which can explain the logical relation between the Islamic metaphysical beliefs discussed above — that is, belief in Allah and in the Hereafter — and the doctrine of Prophethood. The question is: on what basis is man to be judged in the Hereafter? Or, in other words, on what grounds is man accountable for his deeds on the Day of Judgement?

The most authentic explanation of this issue, in the light of the Holy Qur'an, can be very succinctly expressed thus:

Primarily (and essentially), a man is accountable for his deeds on the grounds of natural capacities and higher faculties which are bestowed on him by Allah (SWT), viz., the abilities of sight and hearing and reasoning, the faculties of perception and intuition and insight, and a powerful penchant and love for the Creator — that is to say, the three faculties of nafs (self), qalb (heart), and ruh (spirit or soul).

Secondarily, Almighty Allah (SWT) has, in His infinite Mercy, supplemented the above mentioned inherent potentialities of man with heavenly guidance through revelation of Books and sending of His Prophets and Messengers, so that men might have no excuse before God on the Day of Judgement, so that they may not be in a position to plead ignorance. Revelation and Prophethood is thus an additional (and external, so to say) factor that makes man fully answerable to God for his deeds in the Hereafter. This point, however, calls for a little clarification:

Latifa-e-Nafs

Self or ego is the lowest of all the faculties possessed by man. Considered from this standpoint, man no doubt is only a highly evolved animal and belongs to the realm of Creation (Aalam-e-Khalq). A major part of this self is carnal, and its dominant inclination is towards inferior and baser pursuits. The Holy Qur'an calls this self nafs-e-ammarah, i.e., the self which prompts man to worldly and immoral aims. This is an expression for the lowest stage in the spiritual growth of man, the stage where low desires and animal passions rule his personality and he succumbs to them like any other brute. Different aspects of this self were studied and pointed out by Marx, Freud, and Adler. Each of them focused his attention exclusively on one of the urges and desires belonging to the lower human self. Darwin, too, was not entirely wrong in

asserting the human biological evolution which is a fact in respect of the natural development of the earthly or animal part of man.

Latifa-e-Ruh

Diametrically opposed to the above mentioned animal self is that component of man which is his soul or spirit. It is a Divine element in man, as Almighty Allah (SWT) has associated it with Himself: "and breathed into him of My Spirit" (Al-Hijr 15:29 & Al-Saad 38:72). This spiritual element of man totally belongs to Aalam-e-Amr, or the realm of Divine directive force: "Say, the spirit is from God's direction" (Al-Asra 17:85). Being strictly of Divine origin, it has an inherent love for, and attraction towards, Almighty Allah (SWT), and, consequently, aspires for a communion with Him. In spiritually mature personalities, however, this dormant tendency becomes very acute and lights up in the form of what is described as a Divine spark.

The Internal Strife of Good and Evil

Being a composite of baser animal ego (nafs) and the Divine spiritual soul (ruh), man can rightly be characterized as a "microcosm" of the whole being — possessing in, and reflecting from, the innermost recesses of his selfhood both evil tendencies and higher spiritual aspirations. He experiences within himself the lowest drives of evil and vice, as well as the noblest urgings for moral righteousness and spiritual excellence. Man's inner personality thus is an arena of a long and perpetual pitched battle between the forces of evil and goodness.

The Basic Grounds for Accountability

Almighty Allah (SWT) has not sent man in this world without giving him any capacity and potential to cope with the inner strife of good and evil. On the contrary, man has been endowed with numerous faculties that help him in fighting out the blind and irrational promptings of evil. Even the lowest element of his personality — the animal self or Latifa-e-Nafs — is equipped not only with the capacities of sight, hearing, and reasoning, but also with an acute moral sense. There is a world of qualitative difference between the sensory and mental operations of human beings and brute animals. Logical reasoning through induction and deduction, abstractions and thoughtful reflections, as well as metaphysical speculations are only the prerogatives of human beings. Moreover, the human self has been equipped by Allah (SWT) with a moral sense that discriminates between virtue and vice, between moral rectitude and immorality. That is why man's own inner moral self, or nafs-i-lawwamah in Qur'anic terminology, is the most authentic judge within. Slightest departure from the path of moral rectitude activates this "self-accusing soul" and the pricks of conscience are immediately experienced by the evil-doer. The following verses of the Holy Qur'an categorically state these truths:

Indeed, We created man from a mixed sperm-drop in order to try him, and therefore We made him capable of hearing and seeing. (Al-Dahr 76:2)

Nay, I call to witness the Day of Resurrection! But nay, I call to witness the accusing voice of man's own conscience (Al-Qiyamah 75:1,2)

And (by the) human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be; then inspired it with its moral failings as well as with its God-consciousness. (Al-Shams 91:7,8)

The connotation of the verb sawwa, used in the Arabic text of the last quotation above, is that Almighty Allah (SWT) has endowed the human self with an inner coherence and with qualities consistent with the functions which it is meant to perform, and thus has adapted it a priori to the exigencies of its terrestrial existence. Moreover, Allah (SWT) has implanted a keen moral sense in him; thus, the fact that man is equally liable to rise to great spiritual heights as well as to fall into utter immorality is an essential and primordial characteristic of human nature as such. In other words, it is this inherent dichotomy of tendencies which gives to every right choice a value, and, thus, endows man with moral free-will.

The Holy Qur'an speaks of three types of human self, or three stages or states of the spiritual development: Nafs-e-ammara (Yousuf 12:53) is prone to evil, and, if unchecked and uncontrolled, leads to perdition and eternal damnation; nafs-e-lawwama (Al-Qiyamah 75:2) which feels conscious of the evil and resists, asks for God's grace and pardon after repentance and tries to amend; nafs-e-mutma'inna (Al-Fajr 89:27), the highest stage of all, when it achieves full peace and satisfaction in obeying Divine commands. According to the Qur'an, a man is always cognizant, because of his inborn moral sense, of the morality or immorality of his actions, irrespective of the rationalizations or excuses that he may offer. Thus, the Qur'an says:

Nay, but man is a witness against himself, even though he may veil himself in excuses. (Al-Qiyamah 75:14,15)

On the Day of Judgement, one's tongue, hands, feet, and skin will bear witness against him as to his actions. It is not what a man will say about himself, or what others say of him, that determines the judgement upon him. It is what he is in himself. His own inner personality will betray him and condemn him.

The above cited Qur'anic verses and the brief explanatory notes make the truth crystal clear that man is not, like animals, merely a sentient or instinctive being; rather, he has been made by the Creator into a full-fledged human person — a human being capable of discerning between right and wrong and thus of choosing his way of life. On the basis of this ingrained moral sense, every human being as such is answerable on the Day of Final Reckoning, and is fully liable to punishment or reward. Every individual will have to account for his own deeds personally, and face the trial and the judgement himself. The Holy Qur'an make clear this point thus:

(Be conscious, then, of) the Day every human being shall come to plead for himself (alone), and every human being shall be repaid in full for whatever he has done, and none shall be wronged. (Al-Nahl 16:111)

The Holy Qur'an categorically refutes the Christian doctrine of vicarious redemption as well as the Jewish idea that "the chosen people" — as the Jews consider themselves — would be exempt from punishment on the Day of Judgement. On that day, nobody would be able to help another, nor will there be any possibility of ransom or intercession, as the Qur'an says:

And remain conscious of (the coming of) a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom taken from them, and none shall be succoured (Al-Baqara 2:48)

Latifa-e-Qalb

In addition to the above mentioned faculties of sight, hearing, reasoning, and moral acumen, Almighty Allah (SWT) has also endowed man with the heart (qalb), i.e., the faculty of contemplative intuition and the seat or organ of numinous apprehension. The heart is indeed ablaze with the light of love and gnosis of Almighty Allah (SWT). It reflects within itself all the transcendental truths and the reality of all true existence.

The heart is, so to say, a microcosmic reality which contains within itself the reflection of the entire supersensible Macrocosm. Whereas *latifa-e-nafs* has been bestowed with the faculties of receiving and interpreting sense data — which is the foundation of all physical and theoretical sciences — *latifa-e-qalb* has been given the power of direct perception of spiritual verities. Heart, in Qur'anic epistemology, is the seat of the true self or the repository of soul, of which we may be conscious or ignorant, but which is our true existential and intellectual — and therefore universal — center. Knowledge afforded by the heart is qualitatively different from that which is acquired at the level of *latifa-i-nafs* through external senses and ordinary channels of ratiocination. The heart is, as it were, immersed in the immutability of Being and is, thus, an organ of *ilm-i-ladunni*, which is knowledge imparted directly by God through intuition and inner perception. It is a supersensory organ of cognition in which the knowledge of esoteric truths transpires through *tafaqquh*, i.e., meditative reflection, where contemplativity is stressed more than the sharpness of intelligence. By bestowing upon man the subtle and luminous cognitive faculty of heart, Almighty Allah (SWT) has conclusively rendered him responsible and accountable for his deeds in the Life-after-death.

Muslim poets in general and the mystic poets of the Indo-Persia in particular have, in their lyrical compositions, lauded the role of the heart in attaining veridical knowledge. They have done so quite rightly, and with hardly any fanciful exaggeration, since the paramount importance of the heart was emphatically pointed out by the Holy Prophet himself (SAW). For instance, according to one of his oft-quoted sayings, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, "Verily, just like pieces of iron which get rusty if water touches them, hearts also become rusty." Thereupon his Companions asked, "We do polish rusty objects, but how can we polish rusty hearts?" He answered that hearts are polished "through frequent remembering of death and reading of the Holy Qur'an."

Men who do not use their God-given cognitive faculties can only be called worse than cattle, inasmuch as animals follow only their instincts and natural urges and are not conscious of either the possibility or the necessity of higher knowledge or moral choice. Animals do see physical objects, but they lack the capacity to perceive them meaningfully as items of articulated and theory-loaded knowledge. If a human being similarly fails to attain the metaphysical knowledge of the Really Real — despite possessing all the faculties to do so — then he is not just like animals, he is worse than them.

... they have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle; nay, they are farther astray. (Al-Aa'raf 7:179)

Though these people apparently have all the faculties of reason and perception, yet they have so deadened them that those faculties do not work in the real sense; as a result they remain misguided throughout their lives and go headlong into Hell.

The External Prompter of Good and Evil

As explained above from the Qur'anic point of view, the inner denizen of man's self is an arena of ceaseless struggle between good and evil tendencies. It is this deep-seated moral fact that constitutes the eternal challenge for man and renders his life an unceasing moral struggle. Man is squarely charged with his efforts to overcome evil because he is unique in the order of creation, and has been endowed with the highest faculties of intellect and intuition in order to fulfill his mission as God's vicegerent on earth.

In addition to the inner impulses mentioned above, man also encounters some external agents and prompters, both on the side of good and of evil. However, the truth that must be appreciated deeply here is that, ultimately, the decisive role in this respect is played by man's own inner preference and choice. That is to say, the real nucleus of initiation and volition is the subjective-self itself. External forces can only partly instigate and encourage either in the direction of virtue and moral probity or in the direction of sin and immorality. Even Iblees (or Satan), the greatest instigator of evil, has no power to force a man to perform an evil deed. Although Satan waylays man from all sides, his machinations fail against really virtuous persons. To be sure, no man is immune from the Devil's temptations — not even the prophets — yet it is within the reach of any man of true faith and will to resist and overcome these enticements. Thus the Qur'an states:

Verily, you shall have no power over My servants — unless it be such as are (already) lost in grievous error and follow you of their own will. (Al-Hijr 15:42)

Behold, he (Satan, the accursed) has no power over those who attained to faith and who put their trust in their Lord. (Al-Nahl 16:99)

These and some other verses of the Holy Qur'an clearly assert that Satan cannot force men to commit sin, and will address his erstwhile followers on the Day of Judgement thus:

I had no power at all over you; but I called you, and you responded unto me. (Ibrahim 14:22)

This shows that the real evil emanates from man's own complex of desires, for Satan makes it clear that it is only by means of suggestions and insinuations (wasawis) that he was able to reach the sinner's self; and had it not been for an already-existing evil disposition due to lust, anger, superstition or fanciful ideas, these temptations would have had no effect whatsoever. This, in effect, means that Satan never forces, nor can force, anyone to do evil but he only tries to entice or allure his potential victim. His enticement consists in presenting the immediate and superficial gains or pleasures of this worldly life, so that many people fall victim to these temptations, most of them temporarily but many permanently. The latter are termed by the Holy Qur'an the "friends" or the "party" of the Devil. Thus, Iblees is far more cunning and artful than strong, more sly and contriving than forthrightly challenging.

Similarly, on the other side, no preacher or instigator of faith and virtue — not even Prophet Muhammad (SAAWS) — could ever convert any person to the right path. And, surely, we cannot possibly imagine a better and more sincere preacher than our beloved Holy Prophet (SAAWS). Therefore, we read in the Qur'an:

(O Prophet!) you cannot give guidance to whom you please, but it is Allah who guides whomever He wills; and He is fully aware of all those who would let themselves be guided. (Al-Qassas 28:56)

According to several authentic traditions, the above verse relates to the Prophet's inability to induce his dying uncle Abu Talib — whom he loved dearly and who had loved and protected his nephew from the leaders of Quraysh — to renounce the pagan beliefs of his ancestors and to profess faith in God's unity. The Qur'anic statement " you cannot give guidance to whom you please" has undoubtedly a timeless import as well; it stresses the inadequacy and inability of all human endeavours to "convert" any other person, however loving and loved, to one's own beliefs, or to prevent him from falling into what one regards as error and sin, unless that person wills to be so guided.

With regard to external tempters and motivators of evil, we all know that they are the friends and progeny of Iblees, from amongst both men and jinns. The Qur'an explicitly states:

Indeed, he (Satan) and his tribe (ilk) see you from where you cannot see them. (Al-Aaraf 7:27)

A tradition of the Holy Prophet (SAW), reported by Imam Bukhari (RA), also tells us that Satan so vigorously influences a man that he, as it were, penetrates his entire inner being just like blood that circulates in the whole body. In contrast with the all too common knowledge of external agents and motivators of evil, however, what is generally less appreciated is the truth that angels help and provide

strength, tenacity and moral firmness to the true believers in this worldly life. Just like the hordes of Satan who, through their beguiling activity, tempt a man towards evil, the pure and holy angels provide inner peace and perseverance to believers in following the straight path of Islam and in the arduous task of establishing the sovereignty of Allah (SWT), i.e., in establishing the socio-political order of Islam. Both Almighty Allah (SWT) and His angels bless and give glad tidings to them, as is borne out by the following verses:

And remember when your Lord commanded the angels: I am with you; so give firmness unto those who have attained to faith (with these words from Me) I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth ... (Al-Anfal 8:12)

(But) behold, as for those who say, "Our Sustainer is Allah" and then stand firm, upon them angels descend (saying): "Fear not and grieve not, but receive the good news of that Paradise which has been promised to you. We are your companions in the life of this world and (will be so) in the life to come. (Haa Meem Al-Sajda 41:30, 31)

Peremptory Factor or Argument for Islam (Itmam Al-Hujjah)

Now, we can easily discuss and expound the last point of the first portion of the subject under discussion. We have observed that although the basic internal motivators of evil and good are already given to man in the form of *latifa-e-nafs* and *latifa-e-ruh*, the really decisive grounds for moral and virtuous conduct are the cognitive faculties of the *nafs*, the inherent moral sense, and the power of spiritual apprehension. On the other hand, with regard to the external and objective impelling factors for evil and good, there are respectively the Devil (including all Satanic agents) and the angels (including all the angelic forces). But here again the decisive and peremptory role is played by Divine revelations, God's messengers, and His revealed Books. Together, they constitute a peremptory argument from Almighty Allah (SWT) for man's accountability, and leave for him no ground for excuse or ignorance on the Day of Judgement. The affirmation of all these doctrines is known as the belief in Prophethood (*Iman bil-Risalah*). We read in the Qur'an:

(We sent all) Prophets as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, so that men might have no excuse before God after the coming of these Prophets; and God is indeed Almighty, Wise. (Al-Nisa 4:65)

O People of the Book! Now (after a long time during which no messenger has come) there has come unto you (this) messenger of ours to make the truth clear to you, lest you say, "No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us, nor any warner," for now there has come unto you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. And Allah has the power to will anything. (Al-Ma'ida 5:19)

From these two Qur'anic verses it becomes clear that the real purpose and objective of the advent of God's messengers (or envoys) has been to establish conclusively and finally man's responsibility to act as God's vicegerent on earth and to follow His guidance in this life, and to leave no scope for excuses on the Day of Judgement. All excuses offered by man for his misdemeanor will be lame and of no avail.

The truth may be recalled here once again that just as the external motivators and instigators of good and evil have no real power or authority over a human being — they only motivate and inspire or tempt and seduce — the institution of Prophethood also works only as an agent of advice and exhortation. That is the reason why at most places in the Qur'an the function of prophets and messengers of God has been described as "heralds of glad tidings" and "warners" (Cf. e.g., Al-Kahf 18:56). And the oft-used expression employed for revelation and the Holy Book are zikr, zikra, and tazkira, all derivatives of the root z-k-r, meaning to recall or to remind (a forgotten truth). The following six quotations from the Holy Qur'an bear this out:

Behold! It is We who have revealed this Reminder, and, behold! It is We who shall truly guard it (from all corruption). (Al-Hijr 15:9)

Ta Ha; We did not send down the Qur'an to you to make you unhappy (or unsuccessful), but only as an Exhortation to all who stand in awe of God. (Ta Ha 20:1-3)

Nay, verily, these (revealed messages) are but a reminder (Abas 80:11)

Thus offering an Insight and a Reminder unto every human being who willingly turns unto God (Qaf 50:8)

In this, indeed, there is a Reminder for anyone who has a (wide-awake) heart, or who gives ear and listens with attention (i.e., who listens with a conscious mind). (Qaf 50:37)

And so, (O Prophet) exhort them; your task is only to exhort, you cannot compel them (to believe). (Al-Ghashia 88:21,22)

Tazakkur and its derivatives are very significant Qur'anic terms which mean recalling to mind the fundamental truths intuitively recognized and apprehended by the primordial human nature (fitrah). In essence, tazakkur pertains to the first stage in the comprehension of Divine realities and meanings. It also alludes to the fact that the Qur'anic teachings are not extraneous or alien to human nature. They actually reflect the experiences of man's true inner self and are meant to awaken reminiscences of something already apprehended but forgotten, rather than to import something altogether new. God, in His infinite mercy, has sent His messengers and Books in order to reinvigorate the innate ethical perception of mankind and to facilitate moral choice and motivation.

The Holy Qur'an appeals to all thoughtful persons and men of discernment and comprehension to think and ponder over the outer universe of matter as well as the inner realm of the spirit, as both are replete with the unmistakable signs of the Almighty Creator. Along with these, it invites them to deliberate over the Divinely inspired verses or ayaat (literally meaning the "signs of God", because they too turn man's mind to the Almighty). In effect, this means that with the aid of the Qur'an, full and intense awareness of the

Absolute Reality springs up to man's consciousness, just as a forgotten piece of memory rises up from the depths of the psyche to the surface of conscious awareness. The upshot of the ideas expressed in the above lines is that, through the advent of prophets and revelation of Books, an external witness for or against man has been established by Almighty God. On the Day of Judgement, prophets and messengers — who were sent to guide various communities or nations — will be brought forth as prosecution witnesses against their own people.

(O Muhammad, warn them of) the Day when We shall raise up a witness from among every community to testify against it, and We shall call you to testify against these people.... (Al-Nahl 16:89)

We have sent unto you a messenger to be a witness over you, just as We had sent a messenger to the Pharaoh. (Al-Muzzammil 73:15)

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is told by the Almighty that he is only a "warner" or a "reminder", and therefore "your task is only to preach", and "you are not a warden over them." The vocation of Prophethood, according to the Qur'an, is bearing witness to the Truth before men, in this world as well as in the world-to-come. The following Qur'anic verse substantiates it fully:

He has chosen you....so that the Messenger may be a witness (to Truth) before you and you might bear witness (to it) before all mankind. (Al-Hajj 22:78)

To sum up, the real mission and purpose of Prophethood is that, through preaching, admonition, advice, greeting and warning, God's chosen messengers may establish a peremptory hujjah (or argument) for man's accountability. The cover term for the entire prophetic activities is called shahada ala al-naas, i.e., bearing witness to the Truth before mankind. And that was, therefore, the foremost and the primary purpose of the advent of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), who is addressed thus in the Qur'an:

O Prophet, We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of good news and a warner, and as one who summons (all men) to God by His leave, and as a luminous lamp. (Al-Ahzab 33:45,46)

This means that, like all other prophets and messengers of God, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was also a preacher, a moral and spiritual mentor, a teacher, a warner, a bearer of glad tidings and a witness of Truth. Even though each prophet of Almighty Allah (SWT) had his own mark of distinction with regard to one or the other of these numerous aspects of the prophetic call, the truth of the matter is that the loftiest and most distinguished position among all the prophets is occupied by Prophet Muhammad (SAW). However, with regard to his position as the last and the final messenger of Almighty Allah (SWT), the splendour and magnificence of the prophetic mission of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is particularly distinct and unique, as will be made clear in the following section.

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