

God's Messenger & Message

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Life and Life Giver

Any thing in existence is a sign of its creator and bears a signature of its maker. How can we believe that the dead, unconscious matter could have become alive by itself and without a life - giving source, start living so intelligently, as such inconceivably harmonious beings that our scientists with all their exhaustive research have been able to discover only a few fragments here & there about their hidden harmony and order.

And you can ask yourself: Can you believe a beautiful painting, could have been painted by itself? Can you easily ignore and rule out the need for a creative artist to create that beauty? Can you conceive of poetry with a significant composition of words without a poet!

Or a magnificent edifice without an architect? How can there be music without a musician? A building without a builder and a creation without a creator?

Any creation displays a degree of its creator's power and wisdom. The harmony and integration among the creatures indicates the existence of one unique power

dominating the whole universe. And the uniqueness of each creature is in fact the signature of that Unique Creator. The very "Beginning " of creature's " to be " calls for a " Beginningless Being " to bring them into existence and their mortality is a sign of their creator's immortality. Their weakness and impotence is a sign of His omnipotence and their wants call for His absolute richness.

Looking at this majestic creation [with billions of galaxies and an infinity of stars filling the sky with breathtaking beauty and grandeur, the human body with it's sophisticated structure...] will you accept that our whole existence is meaningless, that life may be aimless?

Let's look at ourselves! Do we not seek a purpose and intention by every thing we do in our daily lives? Don't you always pursue some goal by your thoughts and actions?

While we consider an aimless life, absurd and meaningless how could we conceive that our Wise Creator whose wisdom is evident in each single particle in existence, may have set up this "Edifice of Wonders and Miracles" aimlessly?

If we simply observe people's lives, we will easily find out that each person has a goal and is seeking something near or far away. There is always a goal, a dream, and a desire for them to go on! Without a goal, life is impossible! That's why people have personal objectives. Though many of us are not aware of the ultimate goal and have no idea about the true destiny of our humanity, at least we know that there must be something as an ultimate destination!

Going through history, studying the well-known biographies shed light on the fact that the inferior and ugly lives have been the result of a deep ignorance of the true goal of life.

Now to have a goal and to choose a destination, man has to be created as a conscious being with an ability to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly and a freedom of choice to decide what to do and taste the fruit of his/ her deeds fairly. Indeed God leaves everyone responsible for his/her own acts and does not wrong anyone in anyway, since He doesn't need to do any injustice to His servants. One only wrongs others out of weakness and impotence. And God is omnipotent! He is the richest and therefore the most fair.

But this world has been created with certain limitations wherein there is not enough time and space to see the final result and total consequence of ones acts. The wrongdoer may not receive his complete punishment in this world. And the material world is not vast enough to manifest the endless blessings and infinite abundance God bestows on His righteous servants.

Hence our wise creator created another world beyond this world that begins with the end of this world when all the creatures have lived and died.

God will raise all his creatures back to life on the Day of Resurrection and summon them all to His final judgment. (The Day of Judgment)

But not all the results will be left to the other world. Part of them we may see in this world. This material world is the soil wherein we lay the seeds of our works and the other world is where we harvest the outcome. In other words, we live in this world for a short time with limited provisions in order to start an eternal life with endless provisions and blessings or sufferings - as a consequence of our own works in this world.

The fact that our happiness or unhappiness in the other internal life depends on what we do in this life manifests the significance of our short lives in this world. Knowing that this life may come to an end at any unpredictable moment; shouldn't we live in a way that enables us to face the result of our acts with honor and full responsibility in the other world?

The Right Way of Living

Our Almighty God is also known as the "Lord of the Universe ". That means to Him alone belongs everything in His creation.

The equivalent word for "Lord" in Arabic - the original language of the Holy Quran - is "Rabb" which means; the "Owner" and the "Master". The Master is the one who guides and advises us, who gives us moment-to-moment growth towards the ultimate perfection of his own.

To enable His creatures to reach that ultimate perfection God has determined for each species a certain way of life in accord with their capacity of understanding. For human beings this certain way of life - social or individual - is known as "Religion".

Islam [the way of submission to truth] is the religion approved by God and the way He has chosen to guide us towards the ultimate goal of existence where we can reach the infinite divine blessings in eternal peace and bliss. Hence to reach the eternal happiness – in material and spiritual dimensions - we need to understand the divine religion that guides us towards that ultimate goal.

Presenting and Protecting the Divine Religion

To help human beings understand the divine religion and find the way to higher planes of consciousness, God has shown the path of truth to a number of His chosen servants. He has sent down to us the divine teachings as a message through His messengers. These messengers are the ones who know the way to the ultimate truth. The prophets who have come to deliver God's message to us. The first divine messenger was "Adam" and the last was the prophet Muhammad. The most prominent among God's messengers were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad, the prophet of Islam who was chosen to bring the Final Testament (The Holy Quran).

No doubt unless the divine instructions have been correctly practiced the divine mission is not yet totally fulfilled. So to carry the mission through, God has assigned a few among people as the successors of the last prophet to proclaim, protect and observe the practice of the divine religion. These chosen individuals are known as "Imams".

The need for the presence of such individuals as the guardians of religion is justified when we see the evil disbelievers who oppose the truth never stand aside peacefully to allow God's messengers easily fulfill their mission. This is because the very basis of faith in God and the practice of the divine religion do not agree with their egoistic intentions. Hence their constant effort to demolish the divine religion by different means of deception in order to divert people from the right path.

Apart from the spiteful disbelievers there are those who unintentionally weaken and distort the divine religion out of sheer ignorance. Considering these adverse factors threatening the soundness and integrity of Islam [the religion of submission to truth] the necessity of a qualified guardian to protect the divine religion against any distortion or destruction is justified.

Moreover, to learn the original teachings of Islam, people at all times need a teacher with mastery of all dimensions of the religion whose profound knowledge is free from any trace of ignorance. He must be able to answer all questions regarding the religious concepts, trace and remove any possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation of Islamic teachings among people.

Apart from conceptual questions, to find solutions to practical problems, people need a wise and knowledgeable advisor. A true example of a healthy mind and right manners. An embodiment of virtue, who exhorts people to Godly ethics and morality.

In social life too, people require a Leader. A wise person to guide them on a better way of living. Obviously a communities order and discipline depends on its leadership. Therefore a society seeking righteous life needs a Godly governor. Someone who knows the divine precepts and has the capability to put them into effect.

In addition to issuing decrees, it is important how to execute them corwisely. In fact a decree without due execution is useless. That's why the society requires a competent executive to carry out divine decrees. Amongst rectly and the members of a society at times there might come differences and disagreements, which call for a fair and wise judge to bring justice between the two sides of the argument.

In a community seeking Justice in all social and personal dimensions where no one tramples the rights of others, a true guardian is obviously needed.

Therefore, a person who wants his personal and social life to be in accordance with Gods' approval and wishes to remain free from sins has to come under supervision of someone who is a worthy teacher who knows and speaks the Quran and makes infallible judgments. A leader who's every act and word is in

accordance with God's approval; otherwise, the slightest error in his acts and knowledge will lead astray the people following him. In a word he must be truly "Infallible". But since such high qualifications cannot reliably be distinguished and recognized by people, only God the Omniscient, the Wise, decrees the appointment of the Imams. God has chosen and appointed the Imams to meet people's need for "leadership", "justice", "guardianship" of the divine religion and to carry out other duties decreed by God.

A significant fact to be mentioned here is that the divine religion was proclaimed and presented in its most perfect form with the appointment of Muhammad as prophet. That's why no more prophets and religions were needed after the advent of Islam. Thus the mission of all prophets came to its fulfillment and Muhammad was given the title of the " Last Prophet ". But when the prophet's mission as the delivery of the divine message was thoroughly fulfilled, protection of the message against possible distortions and preference of the divine fulfillment was left to the Imams.

The first Imam after the prophet of Islam was Ali- ibne- Abi Talib who was followed by Imam Hassan-Mojtaba, Imam Hossein, Imam Sajjad, Imam Muhammad Baqir, Imam Jafar Sadeq, Imam Musa Kazim, Imam Reza, Imam Javad, Imam Haadi, Imam Hasan Askari and Imam Mahdi the living concealed Imam of all times, ever since.

As a logical conclusion to seek and find:

- "Knowledge free from ignorance"
- "Spiritual, Cultivation free from any deviation or perversion"
- "Expression of truth free from vagueness and obscurity,"
- "Life free from injustice and oppression",

We must consult an infallible Imam appointed by God.

To consult and follow the Imam we have first to know him well. Otherwise a person who doesn't know the Imam of his time may not be able to live a way of life approved by God and will have no share in the blessings and benedictions of Islam. Such a person will die in ignorance. That is what our prophet Muhammad means when he states:

« من مات و لم يعرف امام زمانه مات ميتة جاهليه.»

"He who dies not knowing the Imam of his time has died in ignorance "

In spite of such emphatic statements by the prophet of Islam, people did not generally consult the living Imams of their times. Although the prophet time and again had prophetically introduced the Imams that would come after him, that right climate of an Islamic society was never allowed to flourish. Majority of the Muslims did not recognize their Imams and refused to follow them. Hence their social conditions deteriorated day after day to a tragic extent that

the twelfth Imam [Mahdi] could not even live safely in his own place of dwelling.

Therefore by Gods' permission, Imam Mahdi concealed himself from the eyes of people. Hence his presence is not perceived and recognized by anyone except those whom he wishes to see him. God has willed him to live in hiding in this world until they day God orders him to appear, rise and revolt against the oppressive establishments and evil disbelievers. Thus he will bring a universal revolution thereby the true Islamic way of living will be established all over the world.

Ways of Communication between God and His messengers

The holy Quran mentions three ways of contact between God and His messengers, through which they received the divine message.

The first contact is through "*Vahy* "divine revelation or inspiration." "*Vahy* " in Arabic means a secret whisper or talk through codes and indirect indications perceived and understood only by the one who is addressed to. In this way of contact, God conveys His wills and instructions by means of certain secret codes. Such contact is made either during the normal state of waking or while asleep and dreaming.

The second way of contact is through a disguising object i.e., from behind a barrier. For instance when God conversed with Moses through a tree on the Mount Sinai.

And the third way is sending down an angel to deliver God's message to His prophet.

Types of Message to the prophet of Islam

The message conveyed to the prophet of Islam was of two types:

One was that whose meaning and words both came from God.

This type of message formed the divine scripture of the holy Quran.

The second type was that whose meaning came from God but was uttered through the prophet's own statements. This type is what is known as "*Hadith*" (quotations from the prophet Muhammad) or "*Sunna*" (i.e., his actions).

The first type of message i.e., the Quranic scripture includes the main issues and general principles. Details and specific instructions such as the number of *Rakat* (units of prayers), the words of prayer in *Ruku* (Bowing posture) and *Sajdah* (prostration), the number of times pilgrims should go around the "Ka'aba " have

not been mentioned in the Quran. Therefore the prophet had to explain God's instructions regarding such details in his own words.

The mission of delivering the whole Quranic message to people was fulfilled by the last year of the prophet's life. Other specific teachings known as the prophet's "Sunna" are in two parts:

One consists of the teachings that applied to the daily affairs of the Muslims during the prophet's life. The instructions issued to meet people's needs in those days.

The other part comprises the teachings that had not been introduced in the prophet's era since they were not applicable to the practical requirements of the day. In such cases the prophet entrusted God's message (regarding the specific cases) to the Imam succeeding him.

Therefore Imam Ali had the responsibility of introducing those new teachings to the Muslims living in his own time. Other succeeding Imams also had the same responsibility i.e., to carry on with the teachings of Islam regarding the needs of the contemporary Muslim society.

The result is the invaluable collection of the knowledge conveyed to us by the infallible Imams. The importance and significance of those teachings is specifically emphasized by the prophet:

« إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ ! كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَ عِتْرَتِي . إِنْ تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا لَنْ تَضَلُّوا . وَ إِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا حَتَّى يَرْدَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْضَ » .

"I leave you two invaluable treasures, the divine scripture [Quran] and my chosen family members [to consult and follow] for as long as you faithfully cling to them you will never stray from the right path. And the two will remain inseparable till Doomsday when they join me by the side of the pond of "Kawthar " .

Such an emphatic statement clearly advises us to refer to the infallible Imam's exegeses to properly understand the holy Quran and the teachings of Islam.

The Prophet

Our beloved prophet Muhammad was from the tribe of "Bani Haashim"- A tribe well known for their generosity and honesty among the Arabs. To an extent, association with the tribe was a cause for pride and dignity.

In 571 A.D. Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca. His father was "Abdulallah" son of "Abdul Mutallib" and his mother's name was "Amenah" daughter of "Wahb".

Muhammad had lost his father before his birth. So when born, he was in the custody of his grandfather "Abdul - Mutallib". At the early age of six he faced the untimely death of his mother and at the age of eight he lost his grandfather too. Then he was placed in the custody of his paternal uncle "Abu -Tallib".

In his childhood he enjoyed no education and thus was kept away and free from the profane and superstitious training of the so-called teachers of his time. In fact from the very beginning he was directly taught and trained by God's invisible angels. Regarding the prophet's divine upbringing and training Imam Ali has stated:

" ... In fact God had assigned His highest angel to be with Muhammad since the time he was weaned off the milk in order to guide him moment to moment towards honorable manners and to teach him the most beautiful virtues. And I followed him [Muhammad] like a baby camel after it's mother. Thus he showed me each new day a new example of moral beauties and exhorted me to follow ... "

With the most brilliant virtues, sound beliefs and faith in God alone Muhammad lived among ignorant, unscrupulous people who followed superstitions and their own idiotic whims, sunk in bloodshed and plundering, burying their own children alive and performing other cruel acts. In such an era of injustice and such a society ruled by idiocy and blindness, Muhammad opened his eyes and rose like the sun revolting against an overwhelming darkness.

He spends his childhood being a shepherd and when reached the age of a young man "Muhammad" worked as a merchant and as a business agent of a wealthy woman named "Khadija". Returning home once from an important business journey to Damascus, Muhammad married Khadija.

Regarding the prophet's biographically important journey to Damascus Imam Haadi has stated:

"When the prophet got through with his business journey to Damascus, he donated the profits gained in the cause of God."

From then on every dawn Muhammad, the young man would climb up to the peak of the mount "*Hera*" where he sat watching the majestic scenes and signs of God's creation in deep prayer and meditation.

He continued to be in such spiritual state till the mature age of forty when God found his heart most open, most humble and obedient before Himself and let the heavenly gates of the divine mysteries open for him and the angels descend upon him with blessings from the Lord of the universe and "Gabriel" to inspire and encourage him to rise, when he called:

- Read! (O Muhammad)

- What to read? [Asked the prophet in amazement]

« إقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق. خلق الإنسان من علق. إقرأ وربك الأكرم. الذي علم بالقلم. علم الإنسان ما لم يعلم. »

“Read in the name of your Lord who created (1) who created man? From an embryo (2) Read and your Lord, Most exalted (3) Teaches by Means of the pen (4) He teaches man what he never knew (5) ...”

Thus *Gabriel* recited the first revelations to the prophet and flew back to heaven. Overwhelmed by such manifestation of God's glory and majesty, Muhammad climbed down the mount, shivering with awe, in a state of fever and chill like a sick man. What filled him with fear and anxiety was the thought of people's denial of his mission who would call him "crazy" "bewitched" or "inspired by Satan"!

But his past life had proved him the wisest, most obedient and blessed by God among people. A man who had always kept away from the devil's temptations. Therefore to fill his heart with courage and strength against the obstinate disbelievers, God ordered the rocks and mountains around to speak to the prophet and call:

« السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا مُحَمَّدَ السَّلَامِ عَلَيْكَ يَا وَدِيَّ اللَّهِ, السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ. »

“O, Muhammad, O messenger of God, peace and blessing be upon you! Good news for you O' messenger; that your Lord has bestowed beauties and blessings upon you more than anyone before and after you; therefore, do not despair if people call you crazy.”

Describing the early days of Islam, Imam Ali* says:

“ ... In those days, the only home greened and purified with Islam

Was the one in which dwelled the prophet, Khadijah [his wife] and myself?

I could well see the brightness of divine inspiration in the prophet's visage and smell the fragrance of God's blessings in his presence.

No doubt I heard Satan moaning when the first divine revelations came to the prophet. Therefore I asked: O messengers what is this

Cry of moan that I hear? And he answered: "It's the devil moaning with grief and despair, for not being worshiped."

Then he added: O Ali, you can hear what I hear and can see what I see except that you are not a prophet and you are only my assistant who doesn't deviate from the right path."

In 610 A.D. at the age of forty, Muhammad was appointed by God as the messenger of Islam. For as long as three years, he did not proclaim his invitation to Islam in public and kept his mission a secret among a few, until the third year when God ordered him to invite his near ones to believe in Islam. [The religion of submission to God] It was the time when the revelation came as:

« و أنذر عشيرتك الاقربين» .

"Now preach to your close relations"

[Sura 26 - verse, 214]

Inviting the near ones

The way the prophet invited his relatives to Islam was both interesting and mysterious (though its mystery came to be known later). Regarding the invitation of close relatives the Islamic historians and exegetists write:

God ordered the prophet to invite his relatives to the new religion.

So after considering the mission from different aspects the prophet told Ali (who was then only fifteen) to prepare a meal and some milk for the guests. Then he invited 45 men of his tribe "Bani Haashim" to the feast. These were the important chief members of the tribe. The prophet intended to announce his mission after the meal was served. But unfortunately Abu -Lahab (one of the prophet's uncle) with his frivolous out-of-place words talkatively ruined and spoiled the whole situation. Seeing this, the prophet postponed his plan to a later date.

The next day he again invited the guests to another feast and began his speech *In the name of God* with praise and glorification for the Lord of the universe. Then the prophet continued:

"Indeed a true guide will never mislead his followers. By God the one Lord of the universe I'm his sent messenger to you and the whole world. O my relatives, you will die like falling asleep at night and rise, like waking up in the morning on the Day of Resurrection when you receive the just reward and punishment for your works. There will be the Paradise for the righteous and the Hellfire for the evil - doers".

Then the prophet added: *"Nobody ever has brought his people a treasure more valuable than what I've brought to you. Happiness in this world and in the Hereafter is the gift I bring to you. God has ordered me to invite you to His*

kingdom. Now who among you will give me support and be my brother and successor?"

When the prophet's statements came to this point a great wave of silence spread all over the atmosphere with every one struck by the divinely assertive statements of the prophet .At this moment, "Ali " who was only a teenager unexpectedly broke that silence. He stood up and said:

"O, Messenger, I'm ready to support you!" but the prophet told him to sit down and then repeated his last question three times! Again nobody uttered a word in reply except Ali who unashamedly stood up again and asserted his commitment. Seeing this the prophet concluded with the historic statement:

"O my people, this young man [Ali] is my brother, assistant and my successor among you. You shall listen to him and follow him!"

Prophethood and Imamate: Inseparable!

The announcement of Ali's appointment as the first Imam succeeding God's messenger in the early days of the prophet's mission in public simply proves that prophethood and Imamate are inseparable!

The introducing of the divine messenger and his succeeding Imam to the people occurred on the same day! The logical inference is that prophethood and Imamate are both based on a same foundation.

The story also implies the courage and intrepidity of Ali as the first Imam. The question is that how a teenager among the learned elderly chiefs of the tribe could stand up alone and announces his commitment to support a risky cause regardless of political and security considerations. The prophet of Islam because Ali had lived with the prophet and developed the capacity to understand and absorb the truth of the divine religion presented this while the learned elderly men were hesitant to accept the truth they heard for the first time.

Public Invitation

After inviting the relatives, the prophet was ordered by God to publicize his invitation and let everyone know "Islam" as the divine religion of submission to God Alone.

But the Arabs' reaction to this gentle public invitation to Islam was very hostile. The idiotic disbelievers spitefully showed an unreasonably, violent and cruel response to the prophet's sincere invitation. They called the messenger of God "Sorcerer "," Crazy poet "etc and mocked him all the time. When he was preaching or praying they would make stupid noises, throw dust and trash over his head from the roofs, cast stones or swear at him.

At other times they would try to bribe him out of his way by offering him political posts and positions or money. But the prophet backwards took not a single step nor did he hesitate to move forwards though at times he felt depressed and sad for the degree of ignorance and obstinacy of his people.

Therefore, times and times God consoled the prophet through Quranic revelations and enjoined him to refrain from slightest tendency towards the wishes of the disbelievers.

The ruthless tyrants Mecca would arrest and torture to death anyone who converted to Islam and followed the prophet. Suffering such unbearable cruelties the new Muslims would persistently ask the prophet for permission to rise in a bloody revolt against them. But in reply the messenger would say:

*"I have not yet received any instructions from God regarding the issue
Therefore we must keep our patience and wait!"*

Under the pressure of such torturing circumstances some Muslims moved with their families out of the city of Mecca. The brutal disbelievers continued their killing of Muslims until they decided to put an end to the whole movement by murdering the prophet himself. Informed of this intrigue, the prophet was ordered by God the Omniscient to leave Mecca over night.

The Historic migration (Hijrat)

Thus God informed His messenger about the disbeliever's scheme and ordered him to migrate to the city of " Medina ". So the prophet asked his cousin "Ali - Ibne-Abi Talib " to stay in his place and left Mecca in the dark of the night passing through the siege of the murderers around his house. On the way out of Mecca he came across "Abu - Bakr" who accompanied him on the journey. They took shelter in a mountain cave near Mecca where they stayed for three days till the disbelievers lost all hopes of finding them. Then together they set out on their journey to Medina. The people of Medina whose chief members had already converted to Islam with their relations, reverently welcomed the migrant prophet. They sincerely devoted their lives and possessions to the promotion of Islam.

Thus the religion of submission to God expanded its realm among the people. The Muslims under the persecution of the Meccan disbelievers gradually left their homes and migrated to Medina with their families. After a while the divine decree for armed battle against the hostile disbelievers was finally issued through Quranic revelations. Therefore the Muslims prepared for the "Holy Battle" [*Jihaad*] against the disbelievers but refrained from initiating the war.

The prophet took over the Muslim's affairs in Medina and the surrounding territories. He concluded agreements and signed peace treaties with the Jewish tribes inside and around Medina and also with the idol worshipping Beduin tribes in the surrounding desserts and thus promoted peace and justice among the friendly Arab tribes.

Battles and Triumph

In the second year after the prophet's migration to Medina a tough war broke out between the Muslims of Medina and the Meccan hostile disbelievers in "*Badr*" a dessert area between Mecca and Medina. The war miraculously ended with the Muslim's victory, though they numbered three times less than the enemy, whose warrior's equipment was far superior to that of the Muslims. But with God's invisible help they gained victory over the disbelievers who fled to Mecca suffering great losses of lives and soldiers surrendered to the Muslim forces.

But after a year, the Meccan hostile disbelievers with an army of 3000 warriors (or ' 5000 according to some historians) galloped to Medina to take their revenge. They faced the Muslim army outside the city of Medina.

In this war known as the war of "*Uhud* ", the Muslim army at first almost defeated the disbeliever but then due to a neglectful mistake of a few Muslim soldiers, the situation overturned and the Muslims were defeated and suffered great losses. The prophet was wounded in the face but Imam Ali the great warrior of Islam guarded the messenger of God to the end. Finally the dispersed Muslim soldiers gathered around the prophet and the exhausted army of the disbelievers turned around and headed for Mecca dissatisfied with the result.

Following these two Battles, the prophet fought in many other wars -adding up to 84 wars - against the disbelieving Arabs and some Jewish tribes .The most well known among these 84 wars were the wars of "*Khandaq*", "*Kheybar* " and "*Hunneyn* " .

In all these wars the migrants and the prophets comrade's known as "*Ansar*" made great sacrifices for the promotion of Islam. According to a general consensus of reliable historians Ali-Ibne-Abi Talib [the first Imam] was the Leading warrior of "Islam "in all the wars during the prophet's era. For the Muslim army Ali's tempered sword was the key to victory!

In the sixth year after the prophet's migration (to Medina) the messenger of Islam sent messages of invitation to the kings and rulers of the neighbouring nations; the Roman Caesar, the rulers of Egypt and Abyssinia (today called Ethiopia) and the king of Persia (Iran).

Two years later - the eighth year after the prophet's migration - as previously promised by Almighty God the city of Mecca was conquered by the prophet's army without a single drop of blood shed on the Holy Land. Thus collapsed the center of corruption and conspiracy in the Arabian heartland of "Hijaz ". In a short time the city of "*Taa, if* " was conquered by the Muslim army and the dominion of Islam spread all over the Arabian Peninsula.

In the tenth year after the prophet's migration, he made his last pilgrimage of *Hajj* to Mecca. On this "Farewell pilgrimage" after performing the ceremony of *Hajj*, the prophet preached his last teachings to the Muslims.

On the way back from the pilgrimage, the prophet announced the appointment of Ali-Ibne-Abi Talib as the first Imam and guardian of the Muslim community,

before a gathering of 70,000 (or 120,000 according to some historians) Muslims in Ghadeer-*Khom*. Not long after his return to Medina the prophet passed away. God's peace and blessings be upon his soul!

The Message

As explained before, the divine messengers have come to teach, civilize and purify humanity in all social and personal dimensions. Achievement of this goal requires the divine teachers themselves to have been taught and purified by God. These messengers must have the divine knowledge and power to guide and help people on the way to God. They must have certain qualifications.

Therefore, the best way to recognize the divine messengers is to distinguish their eminent qualities. But not all the people have the capability to appreciate the relevant criteria or to verify their authenticity. Hence each divine messenger needs to carry some proof perceptible, appreciable and comprehensible to all the people, as a sign of his truthfulness. And "*Miracle*" is the proof!

Every divine messenger has presented certain miracles to his people. Moses for example, had nine miracles one of which was turning his staff into a serpent! Jesus raised dead people back to life healed the crippled and the sick by Gods' permission.... and other such miracles.

Quran, the Miraculous Proof

The greatest and most overwhelming proof of Muhammad's divine mission is the Quran. Thus, the prophet challenges the disbelievers to produce a scripture as beautiful, significant, and overwhelming as the Holy Quran. The challenge is issued in three lightening stages:

In the first stage God orders the prophet through the Quranic verse:

« قُلْ لَنْ يَجْتَمِعَ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَيَّ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيراً.»

"[O Messenger] say," If all the humans and all the jinns joined hands together to produce a Quran like this, they could never produce anything like it, no matter how much assistance they lent one another "

[Sura 17- Verse 88]

In this stage of the divine challenge, the prophet challenges the Arabs to produce a book of scriptures like the Quran. Then in the second stage, he lightens the challenge by asking them to create ten *suras* like those of the Quran. That is when the divine revelations comes as:

« أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَاتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُوْرٍ مِثْلِهِ مَفْتِرَاتٍ وَادْعُوا مَنْ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ.»

If they say: He (the prophet) fabricated the Quran, tell them, " Then produce ten suras like these, fabricated, and ask anyone for help other than God, if you are truthful.

With no real response to the first and second challenges, the prophet lightens the challenge even more when the revelation comes as:

« و إن كنتم في ريب مما نزلنا على عبدنا فاتوا بسوره من مثله و ادعوا شهدائكم من دون الله إن كنتم صادقين فان لم تفعلوا و لن تفعلوا فاتقوا النار التي و قودها الناس و الحجاره اعدت للكافرين.»

" If you have any doubt regarding what we revealed to our servant then produce only one sura like these* and call upon your own witnesses against God, if you are truthful. If you cannot do this- and you can never do this - then beware of the hellfire whose fuel is rocks and disbelievers."

[Sura, 2 - Verse 24]

But as we look back on the Arab history not a single linguist or poet has been able to overcome the Quranic challenge. Otherwise, the fanatical disbelievers would not have missed such an opportunity to save themselves all those costly and bloody wars and the loss of their irreplaceable warriors.

Thus the Quran clearly and explicitly rejects and disproves any attribution to the prophet, Muhammad or any other human beings, by arguing that, if the disbelievers say these are fabricated scriptures, then they, themselves must be able to fabricate something like the Quran with the help of all the knowledgeable scholars!

But if they fail to do so then they must know that these are the words of God the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, not a human poetic invention! *

The miraculous mathematical composition of the Quran beyond human capabilities reveals the significance of this challenge even more!

The Quran argues that if you think that these are the words of Muhammad himself then find someone like him, an uneducated orphan who has lived and grown up in an era of darkness and ignorance and ask him to produce a book of scriptures like the Quran or a least a single sura of it (Sura 2, verse 23)

In sura 4, verse 82, the Quran asks the rejecters, why don't you reflect on the consistent style and significance of the Quranic suras which have been revealed and written down in 23 years without the slightest change of tone or meaning due to human naturally changeable moods and tempers.

Such characteristics do not match with the idea of human authorship. The Quran is evidently the word of God!

Familiarity with the Quran

To know the holy Quran better and deeper, we preferably refer to the Quran itself the prophet and Imams of Islam who know and understand the word of God better than anyone else

Considering the attributive names given to the word of God in the divinely delivered message of Quran we can describe it in it's own authentic words as:

.... Honorable (1), revelation from the Lord of the universe (2), free from any falsehood (3), sacred and blessed (4), scripture perfected and elucidated (5), presenting the best maxims (6), full of light (7), and guidance (8), that heals the hearts (9), A blessing from God (10), a profound scripture (11) in Arabic without any ambiguity (12), that clarifies the distinction between right and wrong (13), Provides explanations for everything (14) to point out what people dispute (15), through it's indisputable guidance free of contradictions (16). This glorious Quran (17) is easy to learn for anyone who wishes to learn (18). It is the saving rope of God (19) to rescue us from the depth of darkness and animosity leading us to union and friendliness. It gives a new life to those who believe in it (20) and grant the righteous believers happiness in this world and the hereafter (21).

The references:

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|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 . Quran , [sura 56 , verse 77] | 2 . Quran , [sura 26 , verse 192] |
| 3 . Quran , [sura 41 , verse (41,42)] | 4 . Quran , [sura 38 , verse 29] |
| 5 . Quran , [// 11 , // 1] | 6 . // , [39 - 23] |
| 7 . // , [4 - 174] | 8 . // , [45 - 20] |
| 9 . // , [10 - 57] | 10. // , [2 - 231] |
| 11. // , [5 - 15] & [12 - 1] | 12. // , [39 - 28] |
| 13. // , [25 - 1] | 14. // , [16 - 89] |
| 15. // , [16 - 64] & [2- 213] | 16. // , [4 - 82] |
| 17. // , [54 - 17] | 18. // , [50 - 1] & [85 - 21] |
| 19. // , [3 - 103] | 20. // , [8 - 24] |
| 21. // , [16 - 97] | |

Islam According to Imam Ali

Describing the divine religion of Islam, Imam Ali, the first true Khalifa and successor of God's messenger, informs us:

Islam is the religion of [submission to] God who has chosen and developed it. Then He ordered his best servant to introduce it to humanity. He founded it's pillars on his compassion... destroyed the pillars of ignorance and superstition with it's enlightening wisdom and quenched the thirsty seekers with the water of it's springs.... It's the religion whose tree is forever green, which cannot be uprooted. Neither will come a prophet to abolish it nor will the knowledgeable find a flaw in its authentic teachings.

It's the religion whose wide path never narrows, nor will it go astray. It's sweetness will not turn sour. It's lights will never go out. For it is founded by Almighty God on truth. No falsehood can crack it's soundness It is a beacon to guide the wayfarers. It 's reasoning can be relied on by the

intellectual. Its oceanic richness will never be exhausted or diminished by its drinkers who will be happy in this world and in the hereafter....

Therefore reverence this religion of truth and faithfully follow its instructions and do not transgress against its prohibitions nor shall you distort or alter any of its commandments ... And there are no commandments other than, those of the Holy Quran....

[Cited from: Nahjul Balagha by Imam Ali]

Now is it not wise to listen to the Quran when advising us to:

« فاقْرؤا ما تيسر من القرآن ».

“Read what you can of the Quran (every day and night) “[73: 20]

« خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ يَقُوهُ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ».

“Uphold what we have given you strongly and remember its contents, that you may be saved!”

[7: 171]

Or when the Quran questions us:

« أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا ».

“Why do they not study the Quran carefully? Do they have locks on their hearts and minds?”

[47 - 24]

We should beware of the day when the negligent get rebuked before God and the messenger complains:

« وَ قَالَ الرَّسُولُ يَا رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا ».

“My Lord, My people have deserted this Quran ” [25 - 30]

The importance of reading the Quran as a divine exhortation gets more evident when we remember that God in His first revelations orders the messenger to:

« إقرأ باسم ربك ».

“Read in the Name of your Lord”

Now the Question is what it really means to read in the Name of your Lord! That's the only way to reach the hidden treasures of the Holy Quran.

The Quran; Specifications

The contents of the divine scripture of Islam are presented in different units:

A. The smallest Quranic units are its verses known as "Ayah" that in Arabic means

"Sign", " Wonder " and "Group". It can be

Explained that an "Ayah" (a verse) is a Group of words as a sign of God to guide people. A sign of God's glory that fills us with " Wonder "! The Quran consists of 6236 verses.

B. 114 Suras (chapters) constitute the Quran scripture. Each has a significant title and consists of different number of verses (Ayah). The longest Sura "Baqarah" (The Heifer) has 286 verses and the smallest Sura "Kawthar" (Bounty) consists of only 3 verses. The word Sura has different meanings like: "Power", "Group", "elevation" and "position".

It can be explained that a Sura is a group of verses having well-calculated connection among them. The overwhelming literary "power "of Sura and its elevation and position makes it the word of God.

C. The holy Quran is composed of 30 sections each called a "Joze" that is divided into 4 parts each called a "Hezb"

D. The division of verses, suras and their titles have been defined and determined by the prophet according to God's instructions.

E. The suras and verses that descended before the prophet's migration to Medina are known as "Meccan" and the ones revealed thereafter are called "Medinan".

F. Some verses contain general teachings and precepts of Islam while others have been revealed to give specific instructions on certain occasions. These instructions have been issued to deal with the contemporary events and the Muslim affairs of the prophet's era. Such revelations are often explained and interpreted, considering the circumstances in which they were revealed to the prophet.

How to read the Quran

The holy Quran itself gives the necessary instructions as to how to read the divine scripture:

« لا يمسه إلّا المطهرون ».

1. " None can grasp it except the purified"

[56 - 79]

Therefore we should purify ourselves before starting to read the Quran and perform the meditative ablution of "Wuzu".

« فاذا قرأت القرآن فاستعذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم. »

2. *"When you read the Quran, you shall seek refuge in God from Satan the rejected."*

[16 - 98]

So, to start reading the Quran we should purge our minds from pre-occupations and evil presumptions and avoid egoistic interpretations of the word of God.

3. While reading the Quran we should know that *God* is speaking to us. In other words, the Lord of the universe is addressing us.

So we should pay heed to the significance of the revelations, which are not only to be memorized and repeated parrot-fashion!!

4. We should read the Quran with a proper tone of voice and correct pronunciation without the least haste.

5. We should meditate on the meanings of the Quranic revelations and not only move our lips and make noises!

The Quran itself criticizes those who do not study the Quran deeply:

« أفلا يتدبرون القرآن. »

"Why do they not contemplate the Quran?"

[4 - 82]

6. We should refer to the genuine exegeses and interpretations of the Infallible Imams to properly grasp the profound Quranic meanings and avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of God's message to humanity.

The End

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