

Islamic Correspondence Course (Book 2)

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Lesson 11: Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

Muhammad bin 'Abdullah is the last and final messenger of God. The message he brought from God is known as "al-Islam," and the scripture he was given by God is known as "al-Qur'an."

1. Arabia at the Prophet's Birth

The Arabs prior to Islam were idol-worshippers; they believed that apart from the life of this world there was no other life. It was a society in which respect depended on wealth and family.

Woman was a commodity, counted as wealth of the father, husband and son; and after death she was inherited like the other possessions. It was a disgrace to have a daughter, and in some tribes the family buried this shameful thing with their own hands.

The situation of the poor, women and society was not much different in other parts of the world.

Every human society at that time was sunk in darkness, decline and oppression. Throughout the whole world, no glow or gleam of light met the eyes.

A darkness like a thick heavy cloud in the sky had submerged the daily life of all societies in a deep sleep; and a horrible, powerful obscurity reigned which only the rising of a radiant sun could disperse.

This darkness was more overpowering in Arabia than in any other place, as if they had been invaded to the depths of degradation and debasement. See what Imam 'Ali (a.s.) says about those days:

You people of Arabia followed the worst religion; you dwelt amongst rough stones and poisonous serpents. You drank putrid water and ate filthy food. You shed the blood of one another and paid no heed to relationships. Idols are established among you, and sins cling to you.' (Nahju 'l-Balagha, sermon 26.)

2. The Birth of the Prophet of Islam

Muhammad opened his eyes to the world on the 17th of Rabi'u l-Awwal in the 53rd year before the hijrah (570 AD). His father, 'Abdullah, was from the family of Prophet Isma'il, and had died before he could see his son. His mother was one of the most pious women of that time.

Muhammad was entrusted to a virtuous woman called Halimah, who suckled him and nursed him.

One day, Muhammad (s.a.w.) who had not yet reached the age of four years, asked Halimah if he could go into the desert with the other boys. Halimah said, "I bathed Muhammad and anointed his hair with oil.

I put collyrium on his eyes and hung a Yemenite stone on a string and put it round his neck so that no harm could come to him from the spirits of the desert. But Muhammad tore the stone from his neck and said, 'Don't worry about me. My God is taking care of me!'"

So we see that from childhood he was blessed with God's favour and grace, and was always guided by Divine friendship and help in works that were in their right time and place.

Muhammad's behaviour and speech in childhood were such that everyone's attention was attracted. In his youth, also, he was far from all the evil deeds which tainted those people in its environment.

He took no part in their riotous poetry gatherings. He drank no wine, was an enemy of the idols; he was perfect in his speech and behaviour.

Years before he became a prophet, the people called him as- Sddiq (the truthful) and al-Amin (the trustworthy). He had a pure mind and radiant intellect, and a godly and heavenly character. Every year for one month he went to the cave of Hira and was with God in His mysteries and in prayers. At the end of the month, before returning to his home, he went to the Ka'bah and made seven or more circumambulations.

3. Commencement of the Mission

At the age of forty, while busy in worship in the cave of Hira, he was proclaimed as the Messenger of God.

For three years, the Prophet of Islam received no command to call the people openly to Islam, and during that time only a few people had accepted the message of God brought by Muhammad (s.a.w.).

Among men, the first person who loved and followed him was Imam 'Ali (a.s.j, and among women, Khadijah.¹ Then after three years, he received the command to invite people openly to Islam. First he invited his relatives as guests; about forty of them assembled together.

The food which the Prophet had prepared was no more than enough to satisfy the appetite of one man, but by the power of God that little food filled everyone, and this was the cause of much amazement. Abu Lahab, without thinking what he was saying, cried out: "Muhammad is a magician!" That day the relatives dispersed before the Prophet could speak. So he called them again the next day.

After they had partaken of the food and hospitality, he spoke: "O Sons of 'Abdul Muttalib! No youth has brought to his people better than what I bring to you. I have brought to you the best of this world and of the hereafter.

I have been commanded by God to call you to Him. Which of you will extend his help to me and become my brother and successor?" Apart from 'Ali (a.s.), no one answered. The Prophet placed his hand on 'Ali's shoulder and said, "This is my brother, the executor of my will and my successor among you.

Listen to what he says and obey him."²

One day the Prophet went up on to Mount Safa and called the people around him. He said, "If I told you that an enemy was going to fall on you this morning or this evening, would you trust me?"

All together they replied, "Yes!" He said, "I warn you of a severe torment that is soon to fall on you." Out of fear that the speech of Muhammad (s.a.w.) would take effect in the hearts of those present, Abu Lahab broke the silence and said to him, "Did we assemble here just to listen to this nonsense?"

The Prophet of Islam started his call with the slogan of tawhid and the worship of one God, and established tawhid as the basis of all other beliefs. He made known to men Allah, who is nearer to man than man himself; he

abolished all forms of idol-worshipping, revolutionized the atmosphere of Mecca, and drew people to his religion.

Meanwhile, the Quraysh (the most powerful tribe in Mecca to which the Prophet belonged) were becoming ill at ease with the progress he was making and tried hard to stop his preaching, even once trying to kill him; but with the help and protection of God all their tortures, persecutions and schemes were without effect and came to nothing.

Day by day the call to Islam, and also the acceptance by people, spread, even to those who came from outside Mecca. People rose up with their souls in answer to this Divine invitation.

In the eleventh year of the prophethood, some people from the tribe of Khazraj of Medina came to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. The Prophet invited them to Islam and they accepted, with the promise that when they went back to Medina they would call the people to Muhammad's religion. They went to Medina and spread the invitation of the Prophet.

The next year, twelve Medinese accepted the faith of the Prophet of Islam at Aqaba and resolved: not to associate anything with Allah, not to steal, not to fornicate, not to indulge in infanticide, not to bring malicious accusations against anyone, not to disobey the Prophet in any thing which he indicated.

Then the Prophet sent a man by the name of Mus'ab bin "Umayr with them to teach the Qur'an, and thus a large group in Medina pledged their faith in the Prophet.

4. The Prophet's Migration (Hijrah)

Till the thirteenth year of his mission, the Prophet called the people of Mecca to Islam, and stood firm when faced with the persecutions of the Quraysh. Eventually he got to know that the Quraysh had hatched an incredible plan to kill him, so he put Imam 'Ali (a.s.) to sleep in his bed in his place and left Mecca at night; he hid in a cave, and then migrated from there to Medina.

The hijrah of the Prophet opened an entirely new chapter in the history of Islam from which a stimulating and surprising lead forward was made. For this very reason, the hijrah of Muhammad (s.a.w.) became the beginning of the calendar of the Muslims.

The two tribes of Medina, Aws and Khazraj, were bitter enemies of each other for generations. But with the presence of the Prophet of Islam in Medina, they became brothers for life in the shadow of the teachings of Islam, and blessed sincerity and cordiality was established between them.

The example of Muhammad's behaviour, his spiritual and moral superiority, and the natural aspect of his pure religion, caused the people to come to Islam by the score, and in the end to accept it.

The Prophet of Islam was from the people and with the people, and did not maintain a distance from them. He shared with them in their gains and losses.

He firmly criticised oppression and aggression, which he refrained from and prevented. He set forth all the principles which were, in the light of Islam, effective for the development of the position of women,

and put an end to the tyranny they had been subjected to previously, but he also vehemently fought against their unchastity and licentiousness, for he wanted them to attain real development on the basis of the true principles of Islam.

He defended the rights of slaves, and had comprehensive programmes for their freedom. The Prophet of Islam created a society where black and white, rich and poor, great and small, were all equal and could enjoy the benefits of being human beings.

In such an atmosphere, there could be no question of 'racial discrimination/ for there was a much higher basis in virtue, knowledge, piety, human values and ethical greatness.

Lesson 12: Al-Qur'an The Miracle of Islam

1. Prophets & Miracles

The prophets and messengers of God are given miracles to prove the truth of their claim. However, not all prophets were given the same miracle.

Prophet Musa was given the staff which could turn into a serpent; Prophet Isa was given the ability to cure the blind and the leper, and to bring the dead back to life. Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) was given the Qur'an as a miracle.

The difference between all other miracles and the miracle of the Qur'an is that the other miracles were for those who witnessed them or they ended with the death of the prophets.

For us they are news which may be believed or suspected according to the trend of mind of the hearer. But the Qur'an is in our hands, a book complete in itself; it claims and brings the proof within itself. And its miracles are being unfolded every day.

As long as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, the Qur'an will remain as the final miracle of God.

2. Al-Qur'an - the Everlasting Miracle

The Qur'an is a multi-dimensional miracle: it is a miracle of Arabic language and style; it is a miracle of prophecies; it is a miracle of scientific revelations; it is a miracle of the best code of life.

Not only a miracle, it is a miracle-performer: it caused the transformation of an extremely ignorant and unlettered people into the guardians of knowledge and learning. This has also been realized by non-Muslim scholars.

Hartwing Hirschfeld writes, "We must not be surprised to find the Qur'an the fountainhead of science. Every subject connected with heaven or earth, human life, commerce and various trades is occasionally touched upon, and this gave rise to the production of numerous monographs forming commentaries on parts of the Holy Book.

In this way, the Qur'an was responsible for great discussions, and to it was indirectly due the marvelous development of all branches of science in the Muslim world...This again not only affected the Arabs but also induced Jewish philosophers to treat metaphysical and religious questions after the Arabs' methods.

Finally, the way in which Christian scholasticism was fertilised by Arabian theosophy need not be further discussed...

In the same manner, the Qur'an gave an impetus to medical studies and recommended the contemplation and study of nature in general." (New Researches into the Composition & Exegesis of the Qur'an [London, 1902] p. 9)

Such contributions are quite apart from the religious subjects which were initiated because of the Qur'an: the development of literature, the codification of grammar and other related subjects which were founded because of the Qur'an.

In fact, all Islamic subjects, all subjects connected with Arabic literature and all subjects related to philosophy and theology came to the Arabs through the Qur'an.

Below, we shall study some of the miraculous aspects of the Qur'an.

(A) THE ELOQUENCE OF THE QUR'AN

The language of the Qur'an is of such high standard that nobody could meet its challenge. Arabs of the time of the Prophet were proud of their language since it was a very rich and sophisticated one. Poets and eloquent speakers were almost idols of their tribes.

Poems were learned and read on every occasion, and yearly competitions were held for the best pieces of poetry in a place called Suq Ukadh. Thus language and literature was the best art the Arabs had mastered very well.

The Qur'an came and its miracle, to the Arabs' surprise, was its language and style. The Qur'an was the challenge; God asked them to produce a similar Qur'an: "Say: If the whole of mankind and jinn gathered together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it, even if they helped each other." (17:89)

Then the challenge was reduced to ten chapters (surahs), to show them their weakness: "Do they say that "He has forged it"? Say: Then you bring ten surahs like it, forged and call (to your aid) whomsoever you can--other than God-- if you speak the truth," (11:14)

Again the Arabs could not answer the challenge of the Qur'an. The challenge was then reduced to one surah only. One surah may be only one line. Still the proud eloquent Arabs could not face the challenge: "Do they say *He forged it'?

Say: Then bring one surah like it and call to your aid anyone you can -- other than God- if you speak the truth," (10:39) You can see the logical reasoning and rational approach to convince the Arabs of its miraculous quality. A surah may be only one line but the Arabs (and non-Arabs too) could not succeed in their attempts to meet the standing challenge.

The beauty of the Qur'an, the strength of its conviction, its logic and simplicity, and its depth and wisdom was far above what the Arabs or non-Arabs know or conceive. When the Qur'an was read, the idolaters used to close their ears; some used to make noise, whistling and chanting, so that they may not hear the Qur'an and be "bewitched".

The non-believers could not give any reasonable explanation to this irresistible beauty and power of the Qur'an. However, they had to find some excuse to put people off and to justify their opposition. They invented lies and said, The Qur'an is nothing but poetry or magic. God refuted their statement: "Therefore proclaim you the praises of your Lord, for by the grace of your Lord you are no soothsayer, nor are you one possessed."

The Arabs waged war after war to silence the Prophet of Islam. But the easiest way would have been to produce a short surah (like al-Kawthar) of equal standard and the claim of the Prophet would have been refuted.

No sane person would use a sword when a few words could serve his purpose in a more effective way. But the Arabs preferred war and it proves that they found the Qur'an unanswerable.

To discover the Qur'an's eloquence, non-Arab speakers can turn to the sayings of those Arabs who were experts in the language of those days and which are recorded in history, and also to the present day authors who write on this subject.

From the days of the Prophet till now, all specialists in the art of Arabic eloquence have confessed to the unparalleled eloquence of the Qur'an and have been overwhelmed in the face of it. For example, the famous contemporary writer Abdul Fattah Tabari writes, "Arab history tells us of many famous men, knowledgeable in the best poetry and prose, like Ibn al-Muqaffa,

Jahiz, Ibn "Amid, Farazdaq, Bashshar, Abu Nuwas, Abu Tammam and so forth, but all of them have shown humility when faced with the Qur'an, and have of necessity confessed that the great Qur'an is not the word of man, but a Divine revelation."

Dr. Taha Husayn, the famous contemporary Egyptian writer, said, "The Qur'an transcends the limits of prose and poetry, because it has special qualities which cannot be found in any poem or prose. So the Qur'an cannot be called poetry or prose, rather it should be said, "It is the Qur'an, that is all."

(B) HARMONISATION OF ITS THEMES

The Qur'an is a book which covers many subjects and events. The discussions of its topics are not separated as is the case with normal books. It discusses many topics in one page at times, but without losing purpose and without going away from the main aim.

Considering the range of the topics the Qur'an comments on, the repetition of some stories, the non-classification of the topics, it is hard to find such a book without contradictions and errors.

By human standard, practically no book -of any subject-- is without errors and mistakes. But here is a book which was not written at one time. It is a collection of piece-meal revelations, covering a span of about twenty three years.

Can any scholar believe that any human being, unlettered, will remember every single word which he had uttered during the previous twenty three years? It is impossible and hence the chances of contradictions.

But the Qur'an has no contradiction; and, according to that test, it is the word of God.

Moreover, if someone reaches a stage of mastery over a special subject, he may display brilliance in that subject; but if he undertakes something on a subject of which he is not a master, he will not be able to produce any distinctive work. Although the Qur'an contains many different subjects, it has succeeded in retaining consistent style and unity of expression.

(c) SCIENTIFIC REVELATIONS

Now, a non-Arab may rightly wonder about the claim of literary miracle. He does not know Arabic, so the miraculous aspect of language might not be appealing to him at all, or even, to some extent, to the illiterate Arabs of our days whose colloquial language is a far deviation from the classical style of the Qur'an.

In modern days, we need a miracle in science, telling us what is in the heavens and within ourselves. The Qur'an, although not a scientific text, reveals many secrets and wonders of the heavens and of ourselves as part of its call to believe in the Creator of the universe.

THE MOON & THE SUN:

The Qur'an says: Do not you see how God created seven heavens in harmony; and made the moon a light therein, and the sun a lamp? (75:16-17)

The moon is a solid object which reflects light, hence it is a 'light'. But the sun is a source of energy and light, so it is described as a 'lamp'.

The sun is not static but moving in a path exactly computed. The Qur'an declared these facts 1400 years ago: And the sun is moving on the course determined for it.

That is the decree of the Almighty, the All-Knowing; and the moon, We have determined for it mansions (to traverse) till it becomes like the old (and withered) lower part of a date-stalk;-the sun is not allowed to catch up with the moon, nor can the night outstay the day. Each swims along in (its own) orbit. (36:39-41)

EXPLORING THE SPACE:

The Qur'an says: O Company of jinn and men, if you have the power to penetrate the regions of the heavens and the earth, then penetrate (them); you will not penetrate them except with a power. (55:34) This verse comes with undoubted encouragement to explore and travel through outer space.

Here one should pause and think of the society in which the Prophet of Islam lived. The means of transportation were camels, horses and donkeys. The people lived in tents and worshipped idols. They had not even dreamt of a car or an aeroplane or even a machine of any kind.

How does the Qur'an put such a high idea to encourage people not only to fly but to travel to other planets and heavens? In materialistic thinking, such a task is impossible because they claim that human thoughts are reflections of his material environment.

Then the only solution in this case is to believe that the Qur'an is not a product of the human mind, but is a revelation from God. No human being could definitely put forth such an idea even if he were the greatest astronomer or scientist.

PHARAOH'S BODY:

People in our times are proud of their knowledge and the Qur'an baffles them even now. There are so many examples of verses which remained a puzzle for commentators until the discoveries of recent times made their meaning clear. Here is one example:

Speaking about the drowning of Pharaoh, the Qur'an says: And We brought the children of Israel across the sea; and Pharaoh and his horse persuade them wrongfully and aggressively; till, when the calamity of drowning overtook him, he said, 'believe that there is no God but He in whom the children of Israel believe, and I am of those who submit to Him.'

What! Now! While you were disobedient before this and were of those who create disorder (in society). So this day We will save you in body only, so that you may be a sign to those who come after you. (10:91-93)

These verses clearly say that Pharaoh's body was recovered and it became a sign of warning to later generations. But this thing is not mentioned in the Bible. Still the Qur'an claimed that the body of Pharaoh was recovered; and 1300 years after this revelation, excavations have brought into light that body which was mummified and preserved for future generations, and even after these long centuries his face and body clearly show the effect of drowning.

If the Qur'an was the work of a man, how did he know of this fact which was not known even to the Jews and the Egyptians of that time?

In the end, it is necessary to remind the Muslims that if they get to know the Qur'an, or get to know it better and put its great, magnificent and precise project into action, greatness will be theirs, and more.

The huge edifice of the greatness of Muslims collapsed when they stopped putting the commands of this heavenly book into practice. So they fell down, they were satisfied only with the name of Islam.

Our departed greatness will return when we leave this crooked way and, starting again, become true Muslims and put the Qur'an at the top of the sights of our hearts and our wisdom, and make it an example for life, as the Prophet said, "When calamities encompass you like the darkness of the night, reach for the Qur'an."

Lesson 13: The Last Message & The Last Prophet

1. Muhammad, the Last Prophet

Islam, from the very beginning, has said that it is the last divine message to mankind, the final manifestation of revelation and prophethood, and the culmination of the previous revealed religions. The Muslims believe that the Prophet of Islam is the last Messenger of God, and that the Qur'an is the final revelation of God.

The Qur'an has explained the universality of Islam and has shown that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last messenger sent by God. For example, verse 40 of chapter 33 says:

"Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets; Allah has knowledge of everything."

Prophet Muhammad (a.s.) himself once said to 'Ali (a.s.): "In all respects, your relationship to me is like that of Harun to Musa (i.e., if Harun was Musa's brother, I also take you as a brother; if he was Musa's successor, you also will be my successor).

Except that Musa was not the last prophet, and I am the last."³ He also said, "I am the last brick in the building of prophethood. With my coming, the prophets have come to an end."

Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said, "With the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad's (a.s.), revelation came to an end."⁴ The eighth Imam, 'Ali ar-Riza

(a.s.), said, "The pure religion of Muhammad (a.s.) will not be abrogated till the day of resurrection, and also no prophet will follow him."⁵

What we have just recounted is only a sample of tens of hadith which clearly and succinctly explain the conclusive status of the Prophet (a.s.) and the perpetuity of his pure religion; they leave no room for doubt.

2. The Universality of Islam

Islam is an everlasting religion because it is all-inclusive. It is a comprehensive project based on human disposition, and it embraces all aspects of life: individual, social, material, spiritual, doctrinal, emotional, economic, legal and so forth, and it explains the basis of each in the most realistic manner for all peoples, in every time and place.

So now let us study some aspects of this universality.

(A) THE GOD OF ISLAM:

The God of Islam is the Preserver of all worldly things. He is not the god of a tribe or of a special group only. In their prayers, the Muslims say: "Al-hamdu lil lâhi Rabbi 'l-âlamîn - Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Universe." (Qur'an 1:2)

God is a reality without parallel, beyond all human attributes and likeness; He is not like the gods of some religions who are presented in the form of a human, an animal or a thing.

The God of Islam is One without equal; He has no son or mother or father; neither partner nor associate. This is the message of a short chapter of the Qur'an which the Muslims recite every day in their prayers so as to be far away from the possibility of associating anything with Him.

(B) EQUALITY IN ISLAM:

Superiority of race or segregation is not only eliminated and void in the eyes of Islam, but the equality of man is an absolute reality in Islam. Islam says that all human beings are equal, all are from one father and one mother, and are members of one family- so from the aspect of nobility, origin and connections, they are equal partners. No one is better than anyone else, except in purity and devotion to God.

The Qur'an says: O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into races and tribes so that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing of you. Allah is All-Knowing, Allaware. (49:13)

(c) ISLAM & FREEDOM OF THOUGHT:

Islam is a firm supporter of rational argument and freedom of thought. Imposition of ideas or beliefs, or the stifling of voices does not exist in Islam. The Qur'an says: There is no compulsion in religion [because] the truth has become clear from the error. (2:256)

In Islam, investigation of the foundations of beliefs is a duty for every individual, and it is an obligation for everyone not to accept anything without proof. Islam censures those who blindly follow the beliefs of their fathers and ancestors, and commends self-investigation and deep examination.

It rejects feeble-mindedness and vain speculation, and urges only to the perusal of knowledge and certainty. The Qur'an says: And pursue not that you have no knowledge of; the hearing, the sight, the heart - all of these shall be questioned of. (17:36)

Islam grants its opponents the right to set forth their queries in reasonable discussion and to enumerate their proofs and listen to the answers.

Say, "Produce your proof, if you speak truly." (2:111) This was the reason that many Jews, Christians and those from other groups who took a stand against Islam, came to the Prophet or the Imams, and sat down and discussed their religious ideas.

(D) ISLAM & KNOWLEDGE:

Islam lends great value to thinking. It asks the learned and wise to think and think again about creation, time, night and day, the sky, the earth, animal life, man and the universe and what is in it. The Qur'an says:

Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and day, and the ship that floats in the sea with profit to men, and the water Allah sends down from the sky therewith reviving the earth after it is dead,

and His scattering abroad on it all types of crawling things, and the turning about of the winds and the clouds suspended between heaven and earth - surely there are signs for a people -who use their mind. (2:164)

The Qur'an also asks people to study the lives of the nations who came before, their thoughts and the causes of their decline and fall, so that they may keep far from the precipices of their destruction.

It says, "Indeed many events have taken place before you, therefore travel on the earth and see what was the outcome of those who rejected

/the message of God]. This is a clear statement for mankind, and a guidance and an admonition for the pious people." (3:136)

In short, Islam desires that man should think deeply and freely and travel across the far horizons of thought and knowledge and take everything that is best for the improvement of his being.

For this reason, Islam values scientific advances and discoveries which are for the help of humanity, and this is why scientists and scholars emerged in the centuries following the advent of Islam, to decorate the high road of human civilization with the jewel of their scientific endeavours, so much so that their great names will shine forever at the summit of scientific history.

They include Jabir ibn Hayyan, Razi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Nasiru 'd-Din Tusi, who were celebrities in all the sciences of their time: philosophy, natural science, astronomy, alchemy, etc. The books of Ibn Sina were even taught in European universities up to the end of the last century.

Jurji Zaydan, the famous Christian writer of Lebanon, says in his Ta'rikh at-Tamaddun al-Islami, "As soon as Islamic civilization found its feet, and the new sciences spread among the Muslims, Muslim scholars appeared whose thinking was more important than the founders of some of the branches of the sciences. In fact these sciences took on a fresh colour with the new researches of Islamic scientists, and progresses due to Islamic civilization." (p. 598)

(E) ISLAM'S CONCEPT OF LIFE:

There is no opposition, in Islam, between the material and the spiritual life. Islam does not approve of those who do not work in this world or make no effort; but neither does it accept those who only work for their material betterment without any regard to the spiritual life.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "He who abandons this world for the next (i.e., he who withdraws from the worldly life in the name of asceticism) and he who gives up the next world for this world - both are not from among us."⁶

So it can be said that in this matter Muslims should adjust their actions with equal movement in this world, by advancing with its happiness, and in the spiritual world, by enriching with its contentment.

There is no monasticism in Islam if monasticism means being a burden on society, withdrawal from social life, egoism or seclusion. The Prophet said, "There is no monasticism for us; the monasticism for my followers is to struggle in the way of Allah."⁷

(F) ISLAMIC LAWS & CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE:

The transformation, evolution and development of the means of living and progress in the various elements of civilization have no kind of incompatibility with the eternity of the laws of Islam. How? Because the incompatibility of a law with this kind of progress can only happen if the law depends on the specific material means available at the time and place the law was made.

For example, if a law is made that only the hand must be used in writing, or only a donkey must be used for traveling, etc. then this kind of law becomes outdated with the advance of science and technology.

But if the law was not based on specific and transitory means of life, and instead it pertained to the basic and permanent need of mankind, then there will be no clash between that law and the new means of life.

Islamic laws are of the latter category, that is, they do not look especially at the means of life at a given period in history. For example, they say, "A Muslim nation must be strong enough to protect itself from foreign powers."

This law, even though made at a time when sword was a means of defence, looks at the permanent need of a Muslim society. However, if Islam had said that a Muslim nation must defend itself with swords, then this law would become obsolete in the twentieth century.

Whatever changes take place in the means of life, it will not be outside the all inclusive domain of the laws of Islam - this is, indeed, the secret of Islam's eternity.

3. The Continuation of Divine Assistance

Some people imagine that since Muhammad (a.s.) is the Last Messenger, the divine guidance from God has stopped completely.

This is not valid because the meaning of the finality of prophethood is only that after the Prophet of Islam, no other prophet, messenger, book or religion will come. It does not mean that the connection between the unseen world and this world has been severed.

The divine guidance of God for human society is everlasting and is continued, according to the Shi'a Muslims, by means of the twelve Imams of Ahlu 'l-bayt.

According to Mulla Sadra, in Mafatih al-Ghayb, "Revelation, that is to say the descent of the angel to the delegated and prophetic eyes, has been forever cut off [after the Prophet of Islam], but the door of inspiration and illumination has not and will never be closed, and it is not possible for it to be interrupted."

Lesson 14: The Imamat Succession to the Prophet

1. Introduction

Eventually the inevitable occurred and the soul of the Prophet (a.s.) flew to its eternal abode. For in the words of the poet Nizami, "he who has not died and will never die is only God".

It was clear that with the death of this great man a storm would blow up over the peaceful ocean of Islam, and that turbulent waters would be churned up. The ambitious would try to benefit and to get as much as they could from this turbulence and commotion, to fish in these troubled waters.

On the other hand, we know that the great mass of people believe in anything they see; they have always been thus and have always been fuel for a fire that anyone may care to kindle.

They need constant training and continual taking care of, and without an educator they cannot reach their own perfection.

Now we must ask if such a society, in such conditions, needs a leader who can take the reins of command in the place of the Prophet or not, so that the result of all the pains the Messenger of Allah took should not be dissipated?

Is there not a need for a knowledgeable, political authority who is thoroughly acquainted with the Divine laws and who can guide and lead the people on the right path in the right way?

The Shi'a belief holds that the Love of God and His infinite wisdom demand that after the Prophet the people should not be without a leader. Such a leader must be sinless and wise, so that his correctness of speech and action may be a guarantee and a true sign of a superior man, someone selected by God.

He must take the reins of the Muslim community in his hands and lead and guide them with the extensive wisdom and foresight, without error, and this he must take from the Prophet of Islam. Because there is no reason for God, Who was considerate of the people in the time of the Prophet to change His judgment and to withdraw His loving concern.

How could it be possible that God, Who by His Grace created thousands of elaborate details for the protection and growth of our bodies, has neglected to appoint a goodly successor to the Prophet? Does not the bringing into existence of the best of communities, which is the aim of Islam, need the selection of the best of leaders?

Is not the appointment of a sinless leader, educator and Imam the basis of the contentment of society? Can Islamic society attain contentment and happiness without divine supervision and leadership?

So if there is a need for the divine, sinless leader, and Islamic society wants a divine educator, how can it be said that this matter has been ignored by Islam and that the people have been left to themselves?

In short, the same philosophy which demands the appointment of the Prophet also precisely demands that God should introduce and appoint a successor through the Prophet.

The Prophet of Islam (a.s.) said in the latter part of his life: "O People, I swear before Allah that I have explained what will make you nearer to

heaven and what will take you far from the Fire." With this explanation, how can it be said that the Prophet of Islam did not appoint his immediate successor?

2. Is the Qur'an not Sufficient?

The Qur'an is the fundamental basis for every kind of Islamic concept. Like a mighty rock, all the fruitful buildings of Islamic knowledge have been made steady on it. It is the clear spring from which all the streams of insight flow. The credibility and prestige of other religious foundations rest on it.

But, on the basis of the proofs we shall give, one cannot be content with the Qur'an alone to solve the problems of leadership, the differences which crop up in Islamic society, or to satisfy the needs of the Muslims people.

1. Firstly because the Qur'an and its great and abundant contents need commentary and explanation.

Since all the verses are not alike in clarity, unacquainted readers in the first moments of their journey may become lost and not take the path to their destination.

So the Prophet himself or those appointed by him who have a , spiritual link with what is beyond the external world, must be a guide in this valley also, so that they can interpret and explain the Qur'anic verses according to Allah's purpose.

For if not, ordinary people will sometimes interpret incorrectly and will end up far from the truth. The Prophet himself has said, "Anyone who interprets the Qur'an according to his own opinions will have a place in the Fire."

It is recounted that a thief was brought into the presence of the Abbasid caliph Mu'tasim so that he might be punished according to the punishment prescribed in the Qur'an.

The command of the Qur'an is: "Cut off the hand of a thief." But Mu'tasim did not know from where the hand should be cut. He asked his Sunni "ulama. One of them said, "From the wrist."

"From the elbow," another said.

Mu'tasim was not satisfied. He was forced to ask Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (a.s.), the ninth Shi'a Imam, who was present in that gathering. The Imam replied, "Only four fingers must be cut off."

"Why?"

"Since Allah has decreed in the Qur'an, "And that the places of sajdah are for Allah.1 (72:18) that is the seven places of the body [which touches the ground in prostration], so they should not be cut off."

All those present accepted and were satisfied with his proof. This kind of interpretation is in fact interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, and is peculiar to the Ahlu 'l-bayt (a.s.), and no one, to whatever degree he may be a master of interpretation, is able to succeed in perfectly understanding interpretation in this way unless he has taken the lead from the Imams of the Ahlu 'l-bayt and has made them his example.

2. What we have said above is only in regard to the correct interpretation of the esoteric meaning and commands of the Qur'an. But beneath the esoteric words and meanings of the Qur'an, there are shades and layers of

spiritual messages which can only be correctly explained by qualified guides.

The Prophet of Islam (a.s.) said, "The Qur'an has a beautiful outer meaning and a profound inner meaning."⁸ He also said, "The Qur'an has profundity, and its profundity is deep too, up to seven inner layers."⁹

According to the great exegetists, the entire Qur'an has a hermeneutics and an inner meaning to it, and to arrive at them by thought and research alone is not possible. It is not explicable to all through words, for the ability to perceive and practice this is not given to all men.

Only those near to God, the pure, those free from moral corruption, can comprehend this, and use it for the solution of the differences and incidents between men, and learn it, and then, by virtue of the immunity from error and mistake that they have from God, teach it to others.

Those who are spiritually near to God and free from error are the Prophet and his Ahlu 'l-bayt about whom the Qur'an says: Allah desires only to keep away from you, O the Ahlu 'l-bayt, abomination and to cleanse you. (33:33)

There is also a hadith which says that only the Prophet and his Ahlu 'l-bayt can perceive all the truths of the Qur'an.¹⁰ This implies that the Prophet (who was the recipient of the Qur'an) and his Ahlu 'l-bayt (who were his close family-members) are more acquainted with the meaning of the Qur'an.

It is because of this connection between the Qur'an and the Ahlu 'l-bayt that the Prophet said, "I leave two things in your trust, the Book of Allah and my family; if you attach yourselves to these two you will never go astray."¹¹

As a postscript, the summary of this lesson can be found in the discussion which students of Imam Ja'far as-Sâdiq (a.s.) had with a Sunni in the presence of the Imam.

A man from Damascus (which was the support base of the Umayyids) had come to Medina with the intention of debating with one of the students of Imam Ja'far as-Sâdiq (a.s.).

The Imam said, "Introduce this man to Hisham." Hisham was the youngest of his students.

"O Child," said the man from Damascus, "ask me concerning the imamate of this man (referring to Imam Ja'far as-Sâdiq)." Hisham was angered by his lack of manners and shuddered.

But he concealed his temper and began: "Is your Creator more kind and loving towards His slaves, or the slaves themselves?" "The Creator."

"What has the loving Creator done for his slaves?"

"He has appointed a clear guidance and proof, to protect them from differences and disunity, and to establish friendship and unity among them. He has made clear to them their religious duties." "Who is that guide?"

"The Prophet."

"Who is it after the death of the Prophet?"

"The Book of Allah and the sunnah of the Prophet of Islam."

"Can the Book of Allah and the sunnah of the Prophet prevent us from differences today?"

"Yes."

"So why do you and I who are both Muslims have a dispute, or in other words, why have you come here from Damascus as a result of this difference?"

The man from Damascus was silent and said no more.

Imam Ja'far as-Sâdiq (a.s.) said to him, "Why don't you speak up?"

"What shall I say?" he replied. "If I say we have no difference, then I lie. And just as I said the Book of Allah and the sunnah of the Prophet should take away the differences between us, so this also is untrue, because, in many instances, the Book of Allah and the sunnah do not have a clear and obvious meaning that could dispel our differences."

So the man from Damascus said that he wanted to ask the very same question from Hisham. The Imam agreed.

"O Hisham. Who is more loving towards people? God, or the people themselves?"

"God."

"Did he send them someone to protect the unity of Muslims and to take over their control, to explain to them the truth and falsity?"

"Are you talking about the time of the Prophet, or about now?"

"In the time of the Prophet, it was him; no, tell me about now." "Today it is this man who is seated here and to whom people come from every corner of the land, and who gives us news of the heaven and the earth; and this knowledge was bequeathed to him from his father and so on back to the Prophet."

"How can I verify and accept this statement for myself?"

"Go now and ask him anything you like."

"That's right, there is no excuse; only I must ask."

Then Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) told him about his journey and of the things that had happened to him on his way which only the man could know of. When he had explained so that no doubt remained for him, the man declared his belief in the Imam. This lesson has been adapted with minor changes from Dar Rah-e Haqq, The Roots of Religion, Qum, Iran.

Lesson 15: Amir Al-Mu'minin 'Ali

1. The Successor of the Prophet

The Shi'a Ithna "Ashari Muslims believe that after the Prophet of Islam, the leadership of the world of Islam fell to Amir al- Mu'minin, 'Ali (a.s.), and then to his eleven infallible descendants. This belief is as clear as the rays of the morning sun, and those who are unprejudiced and impartial will have no cause to doubt it.

Jabir bin 'Abdullah, one of the prominent companions of the Prophet (a.s.), said, "The day the verse concerning obedience to Allah, the Prophet and the Ulu 'l-Amr was revealed (4:59),

I asked the Prophet: 'We know Allah and the Prophet, but who is the third?' He said, They are the Imams, my successors, the first of whom is 'Ali bin Abi Talib, then, in order, Hasan, Husayn, 'Ali ibn Husayn, Muhammad bin 'Ali, who was called Baqir in the Torah,

and whom you, Jabir, will meet and to whom you will convey my salam; then, after him, Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq, Musa ibn Ja'far,

'Ali ibn Musa, Muhammad ibn 'Ali, 'Ali bin Muhammad, Hasan ibn 'Ali, and in the end the son of Hasan ibn 'Ali will come, whose name will be the same as mine (Muhammad Abu 'l- Qasim).'"¹²

2. The First Leader

No society, at any time or place, can stand free and liberated without a leader. We also know that if a ruler is dedicated to the wellbeing of the society, then he must strive to protect it and he must also take into consideration the present as well as the future of that society.

It is because of this necessity that rulers, even during short journeys, appoint a deputy. This is evident in every case of leadership. A head of the family, a principal or headmaster of the school, a foreman in a factory, all put a deputy in their place for the absence of even a few hours. This matter is so obvious that it needs no proof.

The great Prophet of Islam, who was the leader of the Islamic world, observed this very principle. Wherever the light of Islam shone for the first time, he always appointed an administrator for that place to look after its affairs.

When he sent armies for jihad, he appointed a commander, and sometimes appointed several persons as deputy commanders so that if one was killed, the army would not be left without a commander.

Thus we know of persons whom the Prophet appointed as his deputies and representatives whenever he traveled from Medina, so that Medina should not be without a leader during his absence.

The Shi'as ask how, with this evidence, it is consistent with the wisdom of the Prophet that he should die without appointing a successor. Which of the following possibilities seems reasonable: Was the Islamic society, after the death of the Prophet, not in need of a leader again?

Or did the Prophet of Islam attach no importance to the Muslim community after he had gone?

Or were concerns and prudence something he could do nothing about?

Or did he not know who was the worthiest successor?

Which of these possibilities seems more reasonable?

With the quality of leadership and the concern for the affairs of the people which we see in the Prophet of Islam, how could he have not given any guidance or instruction on this vital matter of the Muslims' leadership?

In the light of this reality, the Shi'as proceeded to investigate the original texts and documents of Islam and they came across an enormous quantity of sources which made them conclude that there are clear, sufficient, precise orders from the Prophet of Islam about his successor: the verse of wilayah, the hadith of Ghadir, the hadith of Safinah, the hadith of Thaqalayn, and many more, all of which are tested, examined and explained in the great works done on this subject.

From all these we shall select only the hadith of Ghadir and we shall seek to judge its value and implications in an unprejudiced manner.

3. The Historical Hadith of Ghadir

In the tenth year of the Islamic calendar (hijrah), the Prophet set out for Mecca to perform the pilgrimage (hajj). This hajj was undertaken in the last years of the Prophet's life, and for this reason history has given it the name of the "Farewell Pilgrimage" (hajjatu 'l-wida').

Muslims participated in extraordinarily large numbers in this journey of the Prophet to Mecca with the eagerness to learn and do the pilgrimage from the Prophet directly. They numbered about 120,000. Some groups joined him in the town of Mecca.

After completing the hajj, when the Prophet was returning to Medina, the following verse was revealed on the 18th day of Dhil Hijja at Ghadir Khumm:

O Messenger, deliver that [message] which has been sent down to you from your Lord; for if you do not, then [it be as if] you have not delivered His message [at all]. Allah will protect you from men. (5:67)

Thus a great message reached the Prophet from Allah. The edges of the caravan were slowly rolling along. Suddenly a herald proclaimed on behalf of the Prophet: "Allah has given a command...Let everyone await the command..."

Thereupon, the Prophet (a.s.) gave the order that everyone should stop moving and come to a halt; and they did. Many travelers stood there on the order of the Prophet to hear the news.

We have been told that the desert of Ghadir Khumm is plain without water; it was midday and the heat of the sun was scorching. What is the news for which the Prophet is keeping the people standing in such a place, at such a time?

Then the sound of adhan was heard. The Prophet performs the prayer with the people, and then camel saddle-packs are built up to form a raised platform. The Prophet stands on the top of them. People catch their breath, and are as quiet as the sands of the desert. They are waiting for the news.

The Prophet starts. After praising Allah, the Prophet says, "Do you agree that I have fulfilled my responsibility by conveying the message of Allah to you?"

"We are the witnesses that you have delivered the message to us, and that you made every effort in this direction. May Allah give you the best reward!"

"Do you witness to the unity of God, the prophethood of his slave, Muhammad, and to heaven and hell, death and the resurrection, and to the life after death?"

"We do witness to these."

"May Allah be our witness!" And then he said, "O people; I and you, we shall see one another besides [the fountain of] Kawthar [on the day of judgment]. Be careful after me how you deal with two precious things."

"O Prophet, what are these two things?"

"The Book of Allah, and my descendants. Allah told me that these two are not be separated from one another till they reach me beside the Kawthar. Do not go ahead of them, for you will be ruined. Do not fall behind them, for you will also be ruined."

Then he raised the hand of 'Ali so that everyone could see him and know him. Then, in the same position, he read the divine order of succession.

"O people, who is more deserving among the believers to have wilayah (authority) and guardianship over them?"

"Allah and the Prophet know best."

"Allah gave me wilayah, and I am more worthy than the believers and the followers themselves. Therefore, to whosoever I am his wali (master) and guardian, 'Ali is his master and guardian too. O Allah, be the friend of his friends, and the enemy of his enemies. Help anyone who helps him, and punish anyone who rebels against him."

"Now everyone who is present must tell [the event to] those who are absent."

The people had not yet dispersed when the following verse was revealed:

Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion. (5:3)

Then the Prophet cried out: "Allahu Akbar! The religion of Allah has been perfected, and He is pleased with my prophethood and the wilayah of 'Ali after me."

After this ceremony, people felicitated Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali. Among the foremost of the companions who felicitated him were Abu Bakr and 'Umar who said, "How good for you, O 'Ali, to have become the master of me and every believing man and woman."

(a) The Authenticity of the Hadith of Ghadir

From the point of view of its chain of narration, the hadith of Ghadir is so strong that it is probably unique.

One hundred and ten of the companions (sahabah) of the Prophet who were present at Ghadir have narrated it from the Prophet without any intermediary, and also eighty four of the disciples of the companions (tabi'iyin).

The unbiased scholars of the Sunni world have mentioned the event of Ghadir in their books with great documentation, 'Allamah Amini has mentioned three hundred and fifty such scholars in his al-Ghadir.

Many great Islamic scholars have written books exclusively on the event of Ghadir, and twenty-six such writers have been mentioned in al- Ghadir. Dictionary compilers have related the story of Ghadir under the entry of 'Ghadir' or 'Mawla' (master).

So there can not be the smallest doubt, nor the least shadow over the chain of narration of the hadith of Ghadir except for those handful of people who can stand in the light of the sun and feel its warmth on their skin but still say that there is no light or warmth.

(b) The Meaning of "Mawla" in the Hadith of Ghadir

The hadith of Ghadir is so striking that everybody must in all fairness notice and then become certain that 'Ali became the first successor of the Prophet. So let us look at the crucial word and context of the hadith.

Mawla, in this hadith, means someone who has the status of wilayah and imamate, and can give his opinion and command on it; his command has priority over all other commands. For this reason, before he said, "He whose master (mawla) I am," the Prophet asked, "O People, who among the believers has more authority (awla)?"

Awla, or having more authority, means that the Prophet's wish comes before the wish of the people, and that whatever he says or does is an authority for the people. People follow him; he has wilayah and guardianship over them.

Now, we can see that just as in the first sentence, the authority and wilayah of the Prophet is mentioned, so in the following sentence the word 'mawla' for Ali must have the same meaning so that there can be some connection between the two sentences.

Therefore the correct meaning which we get from these few sentences is as the Prophet asked: "Do not I have more authority over you?" "Yes!" everyone replied. "So, whosoever among you on whom I have authority, 'Ali also has authority. After me, he will be the mawla of all Muslims and my successor."

Thus, in this hadith, there is no question of any other meaning for 'mawla' apart from having authority or priority - wilayah and imamate; and any other meaning in its place is entirely irrelevant.

We should also note that the Prophet of Islam kept people standing in this great heat. This historical fact makes it clear that the matter has a special importance; for, if not, no reasonable man would suppose that the Prophet would detain people under such conditions when his purpose was only to remind them of a trivial matter, for example, that 'Ali was his friend!

Lesson 16: Khilafat & Consulation (a review of Saqifa)

1. The Authority of the Prophet

Muslims maintain that the Prophet of Islam is infallible and sinless, and that his speech is the same as reality and is the wish of Allah. If it were otherwise, they say, Allah could not have commanded unconditional obedience to him. So his command is Allah's command, and it is absolutely mandatory to obey him.

Moreover, the Prophet had the right to make laws for the people, and his orders took precedence over everyone else's idea or opinion, and his commands on social and other matters had to be carried out.

Allah says, "The Prophet has a greater authority over the believers than they themselves have." (33:6) He also says, "When Allah and His messenger have decreed a matter, it is not for any believing man or woman to have a choice in the matter." (33:36)

An examination of the last verse and its explanation makes it clear that the decree of the Prophet in every matter, even in personal matters, is binding, since the verse was revealed concerning an individual matter, viz., the marriage of Zayd bin Haritha and Zaynab bin Jahash. Zaynab was the cousin of the Prophet whereas Zayd was a slave whom the Prophet had freed.

In order to break the pre-Islamic custom whereby the noble and rich did not marry outside their own, the Prophet ordered Zaynab to marry Zayd.

The verse revealed above shows that even in personal matters like marriage, the Prophet's command has to be obeyed, and so Zaynab married Zayd and was content with him.

2. Is the Prophet Subject to the Opinion of the Majority?

Some Sunni Muslims say that in social matters the opinion of the majority takes precedence over the commands of the Prophet.

A deeper look at the verses mentioned above would make it clear that this view is incorrect. Now we shall proceed to an investigation of their evidence and then answer them.

Their evidence is verse 159 from chapter 3 of the Qur'an: It was by some mercy of God that you are gentle to them; had you been harsh and hard of heart, they would have scattered from around you.

So pardon them, and pray [to Allah] for forgiveness of their [sins], and take counsel with them in the affair; and when you have resolved, put your trust in God, surely God loves those who put their trust [in Him]. The answer to this is that this verse itself gives clear evidence that the Prophet is not subject to the opinion of the majority.

In other words, the right of decision-making belongs to the Prophet even in social matters, and he has a duty, after consultation, to put his view into practice, not the opinion of others.

We say so because the above mentioned verse says: "Take counsel with them in the affair, and when you have resolved, put your trust in God."

If it had been otherwise, and the view of others was to be acted upon, then it should have said, "When the opinion of the people has been obtained on a matter, then accept it and carry it out." But we see that the verse was not revealed in this manner.

What is more, there is evidence in history against the view of the Sunnis. For example, the peace treaty of Hudaibiyyah.

The Prophet of Islam left Medina to visit Mecca for the sole purpose of the minor pilgrimage (known as 'umrah). Near Mecca, the Meccan forces stopped him and said that the unbelievers of Mecca were not prepared to admit him into their city.

The Prophet replied that he had not come for war, but only to visit the Ka'bah. After much discussion, the Meccans agreed to make a peace treaty. The Prophet also agreed to the treaty although it had some conditions with which the Muslims were not happy.¹³ On hearing of the Muslims' reluctance, Prophet told them: "I am the slave of Allah, and His Prophet. I will never turn away from the command

51 of Allah, nor will He let me go."¹⁴ A reasonable question at this point would be that: What then is the meaning of the Prophet consulting with the people at all?

The Prophet's consultation was part of the policy of both respecting the views of the people, and of using reason and thought for the progress of Islam.

But this does not mean that the Prophet subjected himself to the majority opinion, and if he paid attention to the opinion of some person or group, it was, in fact, because that was also his own opinion.

3. Did Consultation Take Place after the Prophet's Death?

In light of the above, we can state that the Prophet was above the opinion of the people, even above the majority view. We also saw that the Prophet had selected Imam 'Ali to be his successor on the day of Ghadir and informed the people of his decision.

So consultations aimed at appointing a successor after the Prophet are clearly against the wish of Allah and His Prophet, and, therefore, lack any legal grounds. We want, however, to ask whether consultative meetings were held after the Prophet's death, and, if so, whether the majority view was upheld.

A Brief Look at Saqifah:

The Muslims of Medina were of mainly of two groups: the Ansar (the 'helpers' - natives of Medina) and the Muhajirin (the immigrants - mostly the Qurayshi who migrated from Mecca). The Ansar themselves consisted of two tribes: the Aws and Khazraj who were enemies of each other in pre-Islamic days.

After the Prophet's death and even before his burial, the Ansar gathered in Saqifah and proposed to declare Sa'd bin Ubadah (an Ansari from the tribe of Khazraj) as the new leader of the Muslims. Some among them started a discussion about how should they respond if the Qurayshi disputed with them in the issue of leadership.

While this discussion was going on among the Ansar in Saqifah, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (a Qurayshi Muhajir) was informed about it. He sent for Abu Bakr who left the Prophet's body and joined 'Umar.

In Saqifah, Abu Bakr gave a speech in which he exhorted the virtues of the Muhajirin and proposed that the leader should be from the Muhajirin. He ended his speech as follows: "So we are the rulers, and you are the ministers and the counselors. We will not do anything without consulting you."

Hubab ibn Mundhir, an Ansari, stood up and said, "O Ansar, beware! Take the reins of government in your hands; for the people [i.e., Muhajirin] are under your protection, no one can quarrel with you. Do not fall out between yourselves, so that what you do is ruined."

'Umar, a Muhajir, responded: "That can never be! The Arabs would never submit to your rule; they will not yield, for the Prophet was not from you." Then very heated words were exchanged between Hubab and 'Umar.

In the middle of all this chaos, 'Umar swore allegiance to Abu Bakr. Then Bashir ibn Sa'd, leader of the Aws tribe of Ansar, swore allegiance to Abu Bakr. Seeing this, the other Ansaris of the tribe of Khazraj also pledged allegiance so as not to lose favour in the eyes of Abu Bakr against their rival Aws!

This is the basis of Abu Bakr's khilafat.

A Short Review of Saqifah:

The event narrated above, which is based on Sunni historical sources, shows that the khilafat of Saqifah was not a consultation among the Muslims, but was a plot to usurp the khilafat of Imam 'Ali (a.s.).

Firstly, while on his way to Saqifah, 'Umar sent word only to Abu Bakr, and not to anyone else. And Abu Bakr, who was in the house of the Prophet with the great companions and Imam 'Ali, did not tell anyone about the plot of Saqifah and left the corpse of the great man!

Does consultation mean that two or three people should go to the Ansar, create division among them and then impose themselves upon those people?

In consultation over such a great and important matter, should not at least the great companions and the Banu Hashim have been called?

Secondly, the best comment on Abu Bakr's khilafat can be found in the words of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab himself. During his own khilafat, 'Umar said, "We have heard that one of you said that if 'Umar dies I shall swear allegiance to so-and-so. Someone said to him that the allegiance to Abu Bakr was without consultation."

It is true that allegiance to Abu Bakr took place all at once without much thought, but Allah protected us from mischief. However, no one should give you the example of Abu Bakr to follow." (Tabari, Ta'rikh, vol. 4, p. 1820-1823)

Thirdly, 'Umar himself said, "After the Prophet, 'Ali, Zubayr and their companions rose up against us, and assembled in Fatimah's house." (ibid). We ask the Muslims whether this clear opposition to Abu Bakr's khilafat be ignored, especially as it is acknowledged by 'Umar himself?

Finally, if the matter of the khilafat was to be resolved on the basis of consultation, the Prophet of Islam would certainly have explained before his death, the way it should have been done. Is it thinkable that the Prophet

would explain some very obscure commands, but make no mention of such a great matter as the leadership?

Lesson 17: Twelve Caliphs or Imams

1. The Hadith on Twelve Imams

After studying about the leadership of Imam 'Ali and briefly reviewing the khilafat of Saqifah, it is now advisable to refer to several parts of the 77th chapter of Yanabi'u 31-Mawaddah of a famous Sunni scholar al-Hafiz Sulayman al-Qunduzi al-Hanafi (d. 1294AH/1877AD).

Al-Qunduzi first quotes a well known hadith of the Prophet that: "There will be twelve caliphs, all from the Quraysh." This hadith has been quoted by many books of ahadith including that of Bukhari, al-Muslim, Abu Dawud and at-Tirmidhi.

Then al-Qunduzi quotes many traditions to the effect that the Prophet said, "I, 'Ali, Hasan, Husayn and nine of the descendants of Husayn are pure and sinless."

Then the author quotes that the Prophet said to Imam Husayn bin 'Ali: "You are a chief, brother of a chief; you are an Imam, son of an Imam, brother of an Imam; you are Proof (of Allah), son of a Proof (of Allah), brother of a Proof (of Allah), and father of nine Proofs (of Allah), the ninth of whom will be al-Mahdi."

After quoting many such traditions, he writes: "Some scholars have said that the traditions (which show that the caliphs after the Prophet would be twelve) are well known, from many chains of narration.

Now, with the passage of time and through historical events, we know that in this hadith the Prophet has referred to the Twelve Imams from his family (Ahlu 'l-bayt) and descendants, because:

"This hadith cannot apply to the four al-khulafa'u 'r-rashidun from among his companions, as they were less than twelve.

"And it cannot apply to the caliphs from the tribe of Umayyad, because (a) they were more than twelve; (b) all of them were tyrants and unjust (except 'Umar ibn 'Abdi 'l-'Aziz); and (c) they were not from the Banu Hashim as the Prophet has said in a hadith that "all of them will be from the Banu Hashim'...

"And it cannot apply to the caliphs from the 'Abbasids, because (a) they were more than twelve; and (b) they did not comply with (the demands of) the verse Say, 7 do not ask of you any recompense for it except the love for (my) near relatives' (42:23), nor with the tradition of the Mantle.

"Therefore, the only way to interpret this hadith is to accept that it refers to the Twelve Imams from the Holy Prophet's Ahlu 'l-bayt and descendants,

because they were, in their times, most knowledgeable, the most illustrious, the most God-fearing, the most pious, the highest in their family lineage, the best in personal virtues, and the most honoured before Allah; and their knowledge was derived from their ancestor (the Prophet) through their fathers, and by inheritance and by direct teachings from Allah."

2. A Few Facts About the Twelve Imams

First Imam: Amiru 'l-Mu'minin Abu 'l-Hasan "ALI al-Murtaza, son of Abu Talib, was born on 13th Rajab, 10 years before the declaration of the

Prophethood (600 A.D.), inside the Ka'bah; became Imam, on the death of the Prophet on 28th Safar,

11/632; was fatally wounded by the poisoned sword of Ibn Muljim while engaged in prayers at the mosque of Kufa (Iraq), and expired two days later on 21st Ramadhan, 40/661 and was buried at an- Najaf (Iraq).

Second Imam: Abu Muhammad AL-HASAN al-Mujtaba, son of 'Ali, was born on 15th Ramadhan, 3/625 in Medina; died of poison on 7th or 28th Safar, 50/670 at Medina.

Third Imam: Sayyidu 'sh-Shuhada1 Abu "Abdillah ALHUSAYN, son of 'Ali, was. born on 3rd Sha'ban, 4/626 in Medina; was martyred with his sons, relatives and companions, on 10th Muharram, 61/680 at Karbala (Iraq).

He and his elder brother, al- Hasan, were sons of Fatimah az-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet of Islam (may peace be upon them all).

Fourth Imam: Abu Muhammad 'ALI Zaynu 'l-'Abidin, son of al-Husayn, was born on 5th Sha'ban, 38/659; died of poison on 25th Muharram, 94/712 or 95/713 in Medina.

Fifth Imam: Abu Ja'far MUHAMMAD al-Baqir, son of 'Ali Zaynu 'l-'Abidin, was born on 1st Rajab, 57/677 in Medina; died of poison on 7th Dhu 'l-hijjah 114/733 in Medina.

Sixth Imam: Abu 'Abdillah JA'FAR as-Sadiq, son of Muhammad al-Baqir, was born on 17th Rabi'u 'l-Awwal, 83/702 at Medina; died there of poison on 25th Shawwal, 148/765.

Seventh Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan al-Awwal MUSA al-Kazim, son of Ja'far as-Sadiq, was born in al-Abwa' (7 miles from Medina) on 7th Safar 129/74(5); died of poison on 25th Rajab, 183/799 in the prison of Harun ar-Rashid at Baghdad and was buried at Kazimiyyah, near Baghdad (Iraq).

Eighth Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan ath-Thani, "ALI ar-Riza, son of Musa al-Kazim, was born in Medina on 11th Dhu 'l-hijjah 148/765; died of poison on 17th Safar, 203/818 in Mashhad (Iran).

Ninth Imam: Abu Ja'far ath-Thani MUHAMMAD at-Taqi al- Jawad, son of 'All ar-Riza, was born on 10th Rajab 195/811 in Medina; died of poison in Baghdad on 30th Dhu 'l-qa"dah 220/835; was buried near his grandfather at al-Kazimiyyah.

Tenth Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan ath-Thalith 'ALI an-Naqi al-Hadi, son of Muhammad at-Taqi, was born on 5th Rajab 212/827 in Medina; died of poison in Samarra (Iraq) on 3rd Rajab, 254/868.

Eleventh Imam: Abu Muhammad "AL-HASAN al-"Askari, son of 'Ali an-Naqi, was born on 8th Rabi'u 'th-Thani, 232/846 in Medina; died of poison in Samarra (Iraq) on 8th Rabi'u 'l-Awwal 260/874.

Twelfth Imam: Abu 'l-Qasim MUHAMMAD AL-MAHDI, son of al-Hasan al-'Askari, was born on 15th Sha'ban 255/869 in Samarra (Iraq).

He is our present Imam; he went into .Lesser Occultation in 260/874 which continued until 329/844; then the Greater Occultation began, which still continues.

He will reappear when Allah allows him, to establish the Kingdom of Allah on earth, to fill the world with justice and equality, as it would be full of injustice and tyranny.

He is al-Qa'im (the one who shall stand to establish the rule of Allah); al-Hujjah (the Proof of Allah over His creatures); Sahibu 'z-Zamân (the Lord of Our Time), and Sahibu 'l-Amr (the one vested with Divine authority).

Lesson 18: The Twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi (a.s.)

The twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his appearance) was born on the 15th of Sha'ban in the year 255 AH in Samarra. His imamat began at the age of five when his father died in 260 AH. His name (Muhammad) and his agnomen (Abu 'l- Qasim) are the same as that of the Prophet of Islam.

His father was the eleventh Shi'a Imam, Imam Hasan al- 'Askari; and his mother was the great lady Nargis (may the peace of Allah be with them both).

For various reasons, the Twelfth Imam, did not appear publicly; and for about seventy years, people were in communication with him through the intermediary of his special agents, in order of succession: 'Uthman bin Said, Muhammad bin 'Uthman, Husayn bin Ruh, and 'Ali bin Muhammad as-Samarri.

This period of seventy years is known as the minor occupation (alghaybatu 's-sughra) and at the end of that period began the major occultation (al-ghaybatu 'l-kubra).

During the major occultation till the time of re-appearance, no one has been appointed as his special representative. As for legal issues, the people have the duty of referring to the fuqaha and mujtahids-those excelling in knowledge of the Islamic laws.

1. Belief in Al-Mahdi & the Universal Reform

The belief in the re-appearance of the expected Mahdi, the universal reformer is not confined to the Shi'a Muslims. Other Islamic groups and even non-Muslims like the Jews and the Christians believe in the appearance of a great spiritual reformer.

In Psalm 37, we read:

"...Trust in the Lord and do good; so you will dwell in the land and enjoy security...

For the wicked shall be cut off; but those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land...

But the weak shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity...

The Lord knows the day of the flawless, and their heritage will abide forever...

For those blessed by the Lord shall possess the land, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off...

The righteous shall possess the land, and dwell upon it for ever..."

2. The Qur'an & the Belief in al-Mahdi

Allah has promised the believers and worshippers of the True God that a time will come when they will take over the power of the world, and the glorious religion of Islam will reign all over the earth.

For We have written in the Psalms, after the remembrance, "My righteous servants will inherit the earth' (21:105) Allah has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you

successors in the land just as He made those who were before them successors,

and that He will surely establish their religion for them, and will give them in exchange, after their fear, security: 'They shall serve Me, not associating with Me : anything.'(24:55)

It is He who has sent His Messenger with the religion of truth, that he may lift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse. (61:9)

We desire to be gracious to those who were abased in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors. (28:5)

The above verses clearly show that in the end the world will fall into the hands of Allah's worthy and righteous servants and that they will become the leaders of the people of the world. Then Islam will be victorious over all religions.

3. Belief in the Mahdi & Sunni Authorities

In this subject, the scholars in the Sunni school have related many hadiths from the Prophet of Islam through trustworthy narrators. From among them are ahadith which say that the Imams are twelve persons and that they are all from the Quraysh.

Al-Mahdi, the promised one, is from the family of the Prophet and a descendent of Imam 'All and Fatimah az-Zahra, and in many ahadith it is mentioned that he is from the line of Imam Husayn.

The Sunnis have mentioned and recorded hundreds of ahadith about the Mahdi in more than seventy books through their own authorities of which we shall just mention a few examples:

Al-Musnad of Ahmad bin Hanbal (d. 241 AH).

Sdhih of al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH).

Sahihof al-Muslim (d. 261 AH).

Sunan of Abu Dawud as-Sajistani (d. 275 AH).

Sahih of at-Tirmidhi (d. 279 AH).

The authors of the above books are among the most authoritative books of the Sunnis and, more interestingly, all died either before the birth of the Twelfth Imam (255 AH) or shortly after his birth.

4. The Hidden Reformer

We have at least three hundred ahadith from the Prophet and from five Imams about Imam al-Mahdi (a.s.).

From these ahadith, it is clear that the Mahdi is the ninth son of Husayn bin 'Ali; that his father is Hasan al-'Askari and his mother is Nargis Khatun; that his name is the same as that of the Last Prophet; that the Mahdi would be born during his father's lifetime in Samarra;

that his father would die when he would be young; that he will live as long as God wished it; that he will re-appear and the world will be filled with justice and equality at a time when there will be injustice everywhere.

And when he comes -may God hasten his appearance- he will lean against the Ka'bah and cry out and call for his followers, who will number 313 persons.

Prophet 'Isa (Jesus) will come from the heaven down to the earth, and will pray behind the Mahdi. The Twelfth Imam will enforce the commands of Islam all over the world; and the earth will be like heaven.

There are many ahadith related by the Shi'a and Sunni scholars on many aspects connected with this great Imam, and these are mentioned in books like Biharu 'l-Anwar of 'Allamah Majlisi (d. 1010 AH) and Muntakhabu 'l-Athar of Shaykh Lutfullah as-Safi.

When we look at the ahadith on this subject, we come to realize the ahadith mentioning al-Mahdi (a.s.) have been narrated most frequently, and that there are few subjects in Islam which have been mentioned in hadith so often.

Thus, in this light, anyone who believes in Islam and its Prophet must necessarily declare his belief in the existence of the promised Mahdi who is now in occultation.

Now we shall relate two ahadith on this issue from the famous Sunni book, Yanâbi'u 'l-Mawaddah:

1. The Prophet said, "Al-Mahdi is a descendent of mine. He will be in concealment, and when he manifests himself, the earth will become filled with justice just as it was previously filled with injustice."

2. Salman al-Farsi says that he went to the Prophet when Husayn bin 'Ali was sitting in his lap and the Prophet was kissing his eyes and mouth, and then the Prophet said to Husayn, "You are a chief, son of a chief, and the brother of a chief; you are an Imam, son of an Imam, and the brother of an Imam."

You are the Proof (hujjah), son of a proof and the brother of a proof; you will be the father of nine proofs of whom the ninth will be the qa'im (one who will establish the divine rule on this earth)."

5. The Length of al-Mahdi's Life

We believe that the lengthening of a man's life is not an impossibility, because it is explicitly stated in the Qur'an that, "We sent Nuh to his people and so he lived among them a thousand years, all but fifty." (29:14) Even modern science does not deny the possibility of lengthening the human lifespan.

If a greatly extended life is not an impossible event, there is nothing to prevent God from keeping a man alive for thousands of years because the regulations of a man's life is in the hands of God. He can bring a new order into existence which has precedence over the usual order of things, just as He did in the case of all the miracles.

The miracles of the prophets: the cooling of the fire for Ibrahim, the turning of Musa's staff into a serpent; bringing the dead to life through Isa, and so forth, are all against the usual flow of things but God brought another order into existence by His own power and a miracle occurred. All the Muslims, the Jews and the Christians believe in these miracles.

Similarly, for the length of the life of Imam Mahdi, there remains no place for any kind of objection, because if someone says that such a length of life is impossible, then his claim cannot be at all accepted after the stipulation of the Qur'an concerning the length of Prophet Nuh's life.

If someone says that a prolonged life is possible but against the normal natural order of things, then it can be retorted that the length of life of Imam Mahdi is against the natural order just as the miracles of the prophets are against the natural order but within the power of God.

Someone who believes in the power of God and in the miracles of the prophets cannot have the slightest objection to the length of Imam Mahdi's life.

Lesson 19: The Return & Resurrection (Al-Ma'ad & Al-Qiyamah)

All revealed religions have clearly stated that death is not an end to the existence of man, by death a man only goes from this world to another world, a world where he will reap the fruits of his deeds.

All prophets and their followers have mentioned that we have not been in vain, and that after we are removed from this world, we shall stand accountable for our deeds and be rewarded or punished accordingly.

The belief in the Return is known as al-ma'dd, and the resurrection is known as al-qiyamah. This belief is based on the wisdom and justice of God.

1. The Wisdom & Justice of God

God's wisdom requires that those who do good should not be left without reward, that those who do evil should not be left without punishment and that the oppressed be delivered from their oppression.

We can see that this world is not a place of complete reward and punishment, and that many good-doers and evil-doers die before they receive complete recompense for their deeds.

Thus if the records of these people were to terminate right here and there is no return and resurrection, what would have happened to God's infinite justice, wisdom and mercy?

How can it be said that the Just, Wise and Merciful Creator brought a world into existence where good people are troubled with oppression and injustice, and after a while become nothing?

We all know that this would be nothing less than injustice. How is it possible that a God who had no need to create us, and whose aim in creating us was only to train us and make our existence productive, could be satisfied merely with this present world? How could He cut the root of man's existence before he became aware and reached fruition and annihilate him?

God, no doubt, will give complete reward and punishment for all deeds and behaviour in another world, and will neglect nothing. He says, Or do those who commit evil deeds think that We shall make them as those who believe and do righteous deeds,

equal their living and their dying? How ill they judge! Allah created the heavens and the earth in truth, and that every soul may be recompensed for what it has earned; they shall not be wronged. (45:21-22)

Moreover, there are certain deeds for which a person cannot be adequately punished in this world. For example, a person who drops an atom bomb and blows millions of people away cannot be adequately punished by his death-his full punishment will only come in the next world which is an eternal world.

Similarly, there are certain good deeds for which a person cannot be rewarded properly in this world.

2. The Return in Islam

Islam has laid most emphasis on the issue of the Return (alma'ad). More than a thousand verses of the Qur'an refer especially to the Return and life

after death, whereas the verses related to the individual and social laws scarcely reach five hundred.

The belief in the Return is one of the foundations and basis of Islam.

A person who does not believe in the Return and Resurrection cannot and is not considered a Muslim. Now a few verses from the Qur'an on the Return and Resurrection.

On the necessity of .the Return:

What, does man reckon that he shall be left to roam at will (after death)? (75:36)

We have not created the heavens, the earth, and what is between them for vanity; such is the thought of the unbelievers; wherefore woe unto the unbelievers because of the Fire!

Or shall We make those who believe and do righteous deeds same as those who cause corruption in the earth, or shall We make the God-fearing same as the transgressors? (38:27-28)

Do not think that Allah is heedless of what the evildoers do; He is only deferring them to a day when eyes shall stare. (14:42) On the possibility of the Resurrection:

One day Ubayy ibn Khalaf brought some decaying bones before the Prophet and crumbled them in his own hands, saying: 'Who shall quicken these bones when they are decayed?' (36:78) In answer, Allah said, Say, 'He shall quicken them Who created them the firsttime [from nothing]; He is well-aware of all creations.'

Is not He, Who created the heavens and the earth, able to create the life of them? Yes indeed; He is the Perfect Creator, the All-Knowing. (36:79) On Reward & Punishment:

Then as for him uuho was insolent and preferred the life of this world, surely Hell shall be the abode. But as for him who feared the station of his Lord and protected the soul from its caprice, surely the Garden shall be the refuge. (79:37-41)

Whosoever does an evil deed shall be recompensed only with the life of it, but whosoever does a righteous deed, be they male or female, as long as they are believers, they shall enter the Garden, therein they shall be provided without any limitation. (40:40)

O Men, fear your Lord! Surely the earthquake of the Hour is a mighty thing; on that day when you behold it, every suckling woman shall neglect the child she has suckling, and every pregnant woman shall deposit her urden, and you shall see mankind drunk, yet they are not drunk-however, Allah's chastisement is terrible. (22:1- 2)

If these and hundreds of other verses concerning the day of judgement are considered with care and attention, they will transform man's behaviour in this world to such an extent that he will not undertake a thing without first thinking about the hereafter and fearing God's chastisement.

Good Muslims, out of fear of the next world, will carefully weigh their acts and words and even thoughts; they will not do things dictated by their pleasure, and will spend the night and day thinking how to improve themselves and the community.

Lesson 20: After Death After Death

That which does not die is Allah. We, human beings, will one day eventually leave this world. The setting of the sun each day is a poetical metaphor for our passing away. The sunset is inevitable; similarly, death is a reality which, like it or not, must happen.

So we have no control over our death; but what we must think about is the following: What will happen to us after death? Will we become nothing? Will we merely "end" by death? Or will we "remain", and if so, what will our "remaining" be like?

Those who do not believe in God consider death as the end of human beings, and life is just limited to one or two days.

But those who believe in God say that human beings are immortal and that death is just a ladder which will take us through the world purgatory to Resurrection and the everlasting abode in the hereafter.

1. Purgatory (Barzakh)

According to the Qur'an and many ahadith from the Prophet and the Imams, death is not our end. The human spirit, after death, remains and experiences blessings or torment up to the time of the turmoil of Resurrection.

This period from death to Resurrection is called barzakh. Allah says, "Count not those who were slain in the way of Allah as dead, but rather they are living with their Lord, being sustained and are rejoicing in the bounty which Allah has given them." (3:169-170)

It is clear that if the life after death was not real, the phrase "living with their Lord, being sustained" would be meaningless.

2. The Questioning in the Grave

It can be seen from many ahadith that the spirit has a very special relation with the body in the grave, although the nature of this relationship is not clear. The sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), said, "Those who deny the questioning of the grave are not from our party (Shi'ah)."

When the dead person is laid in the grave, the angels of the questioning present themselves and ask him about his faith, beliefs and deeds.

If the person has faith and has done good, he joins the believers; if not, he joins the unbelievers and evil-doers. And everyone will pass the period of Barzakh until the Resurrection with their respective group.

Shaykh Saduq writes in his Risalah al-ftiqadat: "In our opinion, the questioning in the grave is a truth, and he who answers rightly will benefit in the grave from comfort and blessings, and the next world from the Garden. He who cannot answer rightly will see torment in the grave, and in the Resurrection he will go to the Fire."

3. The Torment of the Grave

Man's placing in Barzakh is intimately connected with his deeds in this world. For those who are virtuous, Barzakh will be a sample of Heaven, and they will see the result of their good deeds.

Imam Hasan al-"Askari (a.s.) said, "When a believer dies, six beautiful youths will hurry with him to his grave, one of them more fragrant and more beautiful than all the others.

They will come and stand on his right, on his left, above him and below him and in front of him and behind him. Then the most beautiful of them will ask, 'Who are you all.' The one standing in the front will say: 'I am prayer'; the one on the left: 'I am zakat'.

The one standing in front will say: 'I am fasting'; the one behind: I am hajj and 'umrah.' The one at his feet will say: "I am the goodness which he did to his brothers.'

"Then they all will ask the most beautiful one: 'You, yourself, who are you and who is more perfect?' He will answer, 'I am the wilayat and love of the Ahlu '1-bayt of Muhammad (peace be upon him).'

"However, those who committed indecent acts and created chaos on the earth, when they enter the grave, they only face constraint and darkness; and the angels of torment will inflict chastisement on them."

The questioning of the grave and its torments are not necessarily to be perceived by the physical eyes. That power by which the prophets, the Imams, the pure and righteous servants of God spoke is enough and must be accepted.

4. The Paradise & Hell in the Qur'an

A few verses from the Qur'an describing the Paradise:

Surely the God-fearing shall be in the gardens and fountains [of Paradise].

Enter them in peace and security!' We shall strip away all rancour that is in their hearts; they shall be upon couches sitting face to face as brothers; no fatigue there shall suite them, neither shall they be driven forth from there. (15:47-48)

Those who rank first [among the good-doers], they will be brought near the Throne, in the gardens of delight...they will be reclining upon close-wrought couches, sitting face to face while immortal youths going round about them with goblets, ewers, and a cup from a spring..., such fruits as they choose, such flesh of fowl as they desire, and wideeyed houris as the likeness of hidden pearls, a recompense for what they had done. (56:11-24)

A few verses of the Qur'an describing the Hell:

Surely those who disbelieved in Our signs - We shall certainly roast them at a Fire; as soon as their skins are wholly burned, We shall give them in exchange other skins, so that they may taste the chastisement [repeatedly]. Surely Allah is All-mighty, All-wise. (4:56)

As for the unbelievers, garments of fire shall be cut for them, and boiling water shall be poured over their heads whereby whatsoever is in their bellies and their skins shall be melted;

hooked iron rods await them; as often as they desire in their anguish to come forth from it, they shall be restored into it, and Taste the chastisement of the burning!" (22:19-23)

Behold, the Jahannam has become an ambush, for the insolent a resort, there to tarry for ages, tasting therein neither coolness nor drink save boiling water and pus for a suitable recompense. (78:21-23)

Amiru l-Mu'minin, 'AH bin AbiTalib (a.s.) said:

"Know that the delicate skin of your body cannot tolerate or bear the fire of Hell. So pity yourselves. You who have experienced the discomforts of this world, and who know your own incapability, and who have seen how when a thorn enters your foot and makes it septic, the warm stones of the ground burn it, you take the pain. So how will it be when you are between two walls of fire, when you lie on stones and your companion is Satan.

"O those who are slaves of Allah; remember Allah, remember Allah, remember Allah while you are well before you become ill; while you have the opportunity before you become constrained; strive to be free of the fire of Hell before the way of salvation becomes impossible for you. Give yourself to the way of Allah with eyes clear of sleep, and your stomach empty (i.e., fasting).

Walk in His path; give away your possessions in His path; use your body to the benefit of your spirit, being sparing."

Notes

- 1 At-Tabari; Ta'rikh, vol. 3, p. 1159; Ibn Hisham, Sirah, vol. 1, p. 240-245.
- 2 At-Tabari, Ta'rikh, vol. 3, p. 1171-1173.
- 3 This is an authentic hadith accepted by all Muslims, see al-Amini, al-Ghadir, vol. 3, p. 196-202.
- 4 Nahjv 'l-Balaghah, sermon 133.
- 5 Bihar al-Anvar, vol. 2, p. 34.
- 6 Wasa'ilu 'sh-Shi'a, vol. 12, p. 49
- 7 Biharu 'l-Anwdr, vol. 70. p. 114.
- 8 Al-KuJaynir al-Usul mm al-Kafi, vol. 2. p. 599.
- 9 Al-Kashani, Tafsir as-Safi, vol. 1, p. 39.
- 10 Tafsir Mir'atu 'l-Amvar, p. 16.
- 11 Ibn Hanbal, Mitsnad, vol. 3 (Beirut) p. 17; al-Amini, al-Ghadir, vol. 1, p. 55; Ghayatu 'l-Maram, p. 212
- 12 Lutfullah as-Safi, Muntakhabu 'l-Athar, p. 101. Safi quotes 50 similar hadith from Sunni and Shi'a sources.
- 13 Ibn Hisham, Sirah, vol. 3. p. 321.
- 14 Tabari. Ta'rikh, vol. 3, p. 1546.

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