

## Programme Five; Belief in Messengers.

### 5.0 Messengers- Introduction.

Allāh created prophets and messengers to deliver and preach the message of Islam to mankind. These figures play a crucial link between Allāh and His servants.<sup>1</sup> Without them, we have no real means of knowing Allāh, what He has ordered us to do and what He has asked us to refrain from.

Therefore it is compulsory upon us to believe that Allāh has sent prophets and messengers throughout the history of mankind. They are the chosen, pious servants of Allāh entrusted with preaching His word on earth.

### 5.1 The definition of *Nabī* and *Rasūl*.

#### Rasūl.

'A free male who has been given revelation (*Wahy*) in the form of a Sharīah from Allāh and has been ordered to preach it.'<sup>2</sup>

#### Nabī.

'A free male who has been chosen by Allāh and has been ordered to preach the Sharīah given to a previous Rasūl.'

In essence, there is only a slight difference between a Nabī and Rasūl. Both are chosen men of Allāh and both are supported with miracles. But a Rasūl is given a fresh Sharīah and has been ordered to teach mankind this message, whereas a Nabī simply implements a previous Sharīah. So every Rasūl is a Nabī, but not vice versa.

Note that only males can become prophets and messengers. Allāh has never sent a female prophet.<sup>3</sup> Allāh states:

'And We did not send before you (O Muhammad) except *men* whom We inspired...'  
(21: 7).

### 5.2 The attributes of messengers.

#### 5.2.1 What is necessary for them.

In short, all prophets and messengers are marked with praiseworthy characteristics to reflect their divine role and their exalted relation with Allāh Almighty – traits such as tolerance, justness, truthfulness, piety and nobility. Specifically, there are four attributes that all prophets and messengers have.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> p. 132. *Sharh al-Aqa'id al-Nasfiyya*. Allama Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazānī. Maktaba Khair Kathir, Karachi, Lahore. n.d. on publication.

<sup>2</sup> p. 16. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> On the basis that Maryam (peace be upon her) received instructions from Jibrail, some Orientalists (and unfortunately some Muslims) have assumed that women can become prophets. The scholars all agree unanimously that this does not at all prove she was a prophet; rather she was a pious servant of Allah who was granted *Karamats* (miracles to beings other than prophets and messengers) from Allah.

<sup>4</sup> pp. 63-65. *Sharh al-Risala al-Nafi'a wa al-Hujaj al-Qaat'ia*. Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Latif Salih al-Farfur (d. 1407 A.H.). Dar al-Nu'man li al-Ulum Publications, Damascus.

### 5.2.1.1 Sidq (Truthfulness).

In other words, they have never spoken except the truth, before official revelation and after. If – God forbid – they could lie, then people would have no means of knowing whether the message of Islam they teach is truthful or not. The task of the prophets is to draw people towards them, not repel them. An evil trait such as lying would only drive people away.<sup>5</sup>

### 5.2.1.2 Fitāna (Intelligence)

In order to successfully preach the message of Islam and repel likely objections and stubbornness, all prophets are marked with wisdom and outstanding and unparalleled intellect.

For example, when Ibrāhīm preached the oneness of Allāh to Nimrūd, he introduced Allāh as the one 'Who gives life and death' (2: 258). Nimrūd dismissed this and brought two people in front of Ibrāhīm; one was a prisoner who was about to be executed and one was an innocent, free man. He killed the innocent man and granted freedom to the prisoner and then remarked 'I can cause life and death [too] (2: 258). Ibrāhīm then showed his intelligence by saying to Nimrūd:

'Verily! Allāh causes the sun to rise from the east; then cause it to rise from the west.'

Upon this, Nimrūd was left speechless (2: 258).

### 5.2.1.3 Tablīgh mā Umirū bi hī (to preach what they have been ordered to).

The prophets and messengers must all fully convey the message of Islam, without distortion. Allāh states:

(O Muhammad!) Your duty is to only convey the clear message (16: 82).

If – hypothetically speaking – they were to hide anything from their preaching, then this would cause doubt in their prophet-hood and it would be a reason for the people to reject their message.

### 5.2.1.4 Amāna (Trustworthiness)

What this means is that outwardly and inwardly, they are immune from things that Allāh has prohibited, before the official revelation and after. This is also called *Asma* (immunity from sin).

The reason for this is simple; we have been ordered unequivocally to follow the footsteps of the prophets (3:31 & 4:59). If they can commit sin and show disobedience to Allāh, then this means – as the followers – this is permissible for us too. Moreover it would not be befitting to Allāh's lofty status to choose men for His mission who are sinful and disobedient.

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<sup>5</sup> In a Hadīth recorded by Abu Daud in his *Sunan*, Abd Allah ibn Umar said: 'I intended to write everything I heard from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to memorise, but Quraish stopped me. They said: Do you want to write *everything* you hear from the Messenger of Allah when he is a man who talks in content and in anger?' So I stopped writing. I later mentioned this case to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He pointed to his lips and said: 'Do write. By Allah! Nothing has emitted [from these lips] except the truth!' (Hadīth no. 3161). This Hadīth is clear proof that the Prophet could only speak the truth.

#### 5.2.1.4.1 Evidence to support the immunity of prophets.

a. The Qur'ān highlights the immunity of prophets from sin in several places. For example, the Devil told Allāh:

'I shall mislead them all. Except You chosen (guided) slaves amongst them' (15: 40).'

In other words, this is an admission from the Devil that he cannot mislead the chosen servants of Allāh. And of all of Allāh's servants, no one is closer to Him than His prophets.

b. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) himself said:

'There is no one from amongst you except that he has been allocated a Jinn (to entice evil) and an angel (to encourage good).' The Companions asked: Even you, O Prophet of Allāh?' He replied: Even me. But Allāh assisted me so the Jinn only orders me to perform good.'<sup>6</sup>

c. The Qur'ān orders Muslims not to accept the news of wrongdoers at face level but to further investigate the validity of the news. Allāh says:

'O those who believe! If a sinner comes to you (*Fāsiq*) with news, then investigate...'  
(49: 6).

The purpose of a prophet is to give important news to the people about Allāh. In fact, the word Nabī in Arabic means deliverer of important news. If prophets were allowed to sin, then according to the Qur'ān their reports should not be accepted at face level.

Allama Taftazānī writes:

'...Indeed the prophets are immune (*Ma'sūm*) from falsity, especially in what is connected with the commanding of laws and the conveying of judgements and the guidance of people.'<sup>7</sup>

#### 5.2.1.4.2 Objections.

In the Qur'ān and Sunna, there are cases where it seems that prophets and messengers did make mistakes. Some argue that this is a reason to suggest that prophets and messengers are not necessarily immune from sins. For example:

- Ādam (peace be upon him) ate the forbidden fruit, and as a result He was punished by Allāh by being ousted from Paradise (2:36).
- Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) reportedly lied on three occasions<sup>8</sup> (i) when his people invited him to the fair, he said 'I am sick' (ii) he destroyed the idols but when he was asked about it, he said 'the big idol did it' (iii) speaking about his wife, he said 'this is my sister.'
- The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) made mistakes in leading the Prayers on certain occasions. This suggests he is fallible.
- Mūsā (peace be upon him) struck a man who then died.

<sup>6</sup> *Musnad Ahmad*. The Musnad of Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud. Hadīth no. 3466.

<sup>7</sup> p. 139. *Sharh al-Aqa'id al-Nasfiyya*. Allama Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazānī. Maktaba Khair Kathir, Karachi, Lahore. n.d. on publication.

<sup>8</sup> (i) When his people invited him to the fair, he said 'I am sick' (ii) He destroyed the idols but when he was asked about it, he said 'the big idol did it' (iii) Speaking about his wife, he said 'this is my sister.'

### 5.2.1.4.3 Answers.

#### Ādam (peace be upon him).

• With regards to the ‘original sin’, we must focus on the statement Allāh delivered to the angels when He was about to create Ādam:

‘And remember (O Prophet) when your Lord said to the angels: ‘Indeed I am going to make a vicegerent on *earth* (my italics)...’ (2: 30).

Clearly, Allāh’s intention was always to make man a *Khalīfa* on earth and not in heaven. So the eating of the fruit was not the reason why he was ousted from paradise; man was always destined to live on earth.

Also, a sin is only considered as such when there is deliberate intent behind it. With Ādam (peace be upon him), no such intent is found and in fact Allāh makes this clear Himself:

‘And indeed We made a covenant with Ādam before, but he forgot, and We found on his part no firm intent [of sin]’ (20:115).

Indeed, the Sufi saints mention that Ādam (peace be upon him) had to leave paradise because the souls of the infidels and sinners were in his loins. Due to them being unworthy of paradise, Allāh ordered Ādam to leave until the Day of Judgement, when only the deserved would re-enter paradise.<sup>9</sup>

#### Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him).

• Under compulsion and when one fears for his life, then speaking lies is not a sin. In fact saying the words of disbelief (as long as the heart remains firm with faith) is permitted (16: 106). When Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) said about his wife ‘this is my sister’ he was worried that the tyrannical king would snatch her away.<sup>10</sup> Also, he could have meant ‘this is my sister in religion’.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, when he was asked whether he broke all the idols, (to which he replied ‘the big one did it’), He was highlighting the foolishness and shallowness of their beliefs. The people thought the idols were worthy of worship and could help them in worldly and heavenly affairs. Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) showed them that the idols could not even protect themselves. Thirdly, when Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) said to his people that he was ill (*Saqīm*), it could have meant that ‘watching you worship idols other than Allāh is making me sick.’<sup>12</sup>

In short, these statements from Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) were *seemingly* lies in our eyes, but not in the sights of Allāh. If these ‘lies’ were deliberate and malice, then surely Allāh would have reproached his messenger. Instead, we find that Allāh gave him the title of *Khalīl* (close friend) (4: 125) and said that ‘We bestowed Ibrāhīm guidance’ (21:51).

<sup>9</sup> p. 469. *The Obliteration of Falsehood (Ja al-Haqq)*. Mufti Ahmad Yaar Khan (English Translation by Moulana Omar Dawood Qadri. Maktab Qadria, Bolton, 2008. Mufti Sahib also suggests that the Devil was responsible for this incident, not Ādam. Iblis took an oath using Allah’s name and Ādam assumed that anyone taking such an oath must be truthful.

<sup>10</sup> p. 471. p. 469. *The Obliteration of Falsehood (Ja al-Haqq)*. Mufti Ahmad Yaar Khan (English Translation by Moulana Omar Dawood Qadri. Maktab Qadria, Bolton, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> The Qur’ān has mentioned *Aku* (brother) to mean brother in religion, not brother in relation. It states in Surah Swad: ‘This my brother (in religion) has ninety-nine ewes, while I only have one ewe.’ (38:23).

<sup>12</sup> *Lisan al-Arab* (vol. VI, p. 298) by Ibn Manzur (d.711); Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi Publications, Beirut, 1988.

• The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) did certainly read Salāh incorrectly on certain occasions.<sup>13</sup> But this was purely to teach his followers what to do when they are forgetful in prayers. In other words, it was a deliberate mistake for our sake.<sup>14</sup> If the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) never performed a delayed Salāh (*Qadhā*) or never made a mistake in Salāh, then how would we ever know what to do in similar circumstances? The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) epitomised this issue when he reportedly said: 'I do not forget but I am made to forget.'<sup>15</sup>

#### Mūsā (peace be upon him).

• Mūsā had no intention of killing anyone. Rather, he wished to free the Jew from the unfair Egyptian. When the Egyptian did not free him, he struck him to separate them. The man could not bear the might of a prophet and died. This therefore does not count as murder, which is a crime that requires deliberate intent.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Conclusion.**

Overall, the *Ahl Sunna* hold all the prophets and messengers in highest regard and do not contemplate uttering even the smallest remark which may de-rank their lofty status. The lapses that have been reported from the Qur'ān and Sunna (such as Ādam's eating of the forbidden fruit) are not something we should dwell on. Our position is clearly explained in *Bahār Sharīat*:

'Any mention of the lapses on the part of the prophets if any, except those mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān and Hadīth is a serious taboo. No one should ever depreciate a misdemeanour of the prophets. It is only Allāh, the All-Powerful, who can mete out to his prophets any treatment he thinks fit for them. No one else has this prerogative...Even a small lapse on the part of a prophet is equal to thousands of acts of wisdom of an ordinary person.'<sup>17</sup>

The Ulama mention a very important phrase which helps us to understand this issue.

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'The good actions of the pious are the sins of the [chosen] close servants.'<sup>18</sup>

What we consider a good action is seen as a lapse by the close servants of Allāh. When we complete the recitation of Sūrah Baqara in a day, then we are pleased with this. The close servants see this as a lapse; it is widely reported that the likes of Imam Shāfi'ī would finish the entire Qur'ān in one night.

<sup>13</sup> Imam al-Bukhari reports from Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him) that he once performed two Rak'ats with the Companions and then performed Salam. A Companion called Zul Yada'in asked: 'O Messenger of Allah! Has Salah now become shorter or did you forget?' The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked the Companions if he had indeed read only two and they confirmed this. So he stood up, performed two more and then performed Sajda Sahv (the prostration of forgetfulness) at the end. *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Book of Azan. Hadīth no. 673.

<sup>14</sup> p. 64. *Sharh al-Risala al-Nafi'a wa al-Hujaj al-Qaat'ia*. Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Latif Salih al-Farfur (d. 1407 A.H.). Dar al-Nu'man li al-Ulum Publications, Damascus.

<sup>15</sup> *Muwatta Imam Malik*.

<sup>16</sup> p. 475. *The Obliteration of Falsehood (Ja al-Haqq)*. Mufti Ahmad Yaar Khan (English Translation by Moulana Omar Dawood Qadri. Maktab Qadria, Bolton, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> p 24. *Islam: The Basic Articles of Faith, according to the Beliefs of the Ahl Sunna wa al-Jama'a; A Modern English Translation of Bahar-e-Shariat*. Part One. Crescent Publishing, Rochdale, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> p. 144. *al-Aqida al-Hasana (al-Mar'uf bi) Aqa'id al-Islam*. Hazrat Shah Wali Allah Muhaddith Delhvi. Edited by Moulana Mufti Muhammad Khalil Khan, Farid Book Stall, Lahore, 1400 A.H.

### **5.2.2 What is permissible for them.**

The prophets and messengers can be attributed with characteristics that people are usually marked by – like eating, drinking, marriage and human illnesses that do not lead to de-ranking their high status.

As for sleeping, their eyes sleep but their hearts never do. Imam al-Bukhārī reports in his *Sahīh* that Āisha asked the Prophet whether he slept before performing the Witr prayers (after *Salāh al-Tahajjud*). He replied:

‘My eyes sleep but my heart does not.’<sup>19</sup>

This is the reason why the Prophet’s ablution never broke after sleeping.<sup>20</sup>

### **5.2.2 What is impossible for them.**

They cannot be attributed with illnesses that will lead to them being seen in a lesser light, such as leprosy, insanity and blindness.

This is why the scholars are very careful when describing the first revelation given to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him):

- When Jibrā’īl instructed the Prophet to ‘read’ in the cave of Hira and he responded ما أنا بقارئ , we interpret this as ‘I shall not read’ and not ‘I cannot read’. Illiteracy is a defect which people see as defamatory.

- When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) then returned Sayyida Khadīja (may Allāh be pleased with her), he did not do so in a state of fear, anxiety and thinking that he was possessed by an evil spirit (God forbid). Rather the reaction was from the sheer intensity of the *Wahy* (revelation). Āisha (may Allāh be pleased with her) reports that she once saw the Prophet when he was receiving revelation. This was on an extremely cold day but the Prophet was still covered in sweat, due to the intensity of the revelation.<sup>21</sup>

- With regards to the Ya’qūb (peace be upon him) and his apparent blindness, the scholars state that this was not permanent and real blindness; rather it was a temporary state that occurred due to his sadness upon the absence of Yūsuf (peace upon him).

### **5.3 The number of messengers.**

It is necessary to believe in all the prophets and messengers that Allāh sent to mankind, the ones we know by name and the ones we do not. The Qur’ān states:

‘And indeed We have sent messengers before you; some of them We have mentioned to you before (O Muhammad) and some of them We have not mentioned to you’ (40:78).

<sup>19</sup> *Sahīh al-Bukhari*. Book of Superiorities. Chapter, the Prophet’s eyes used to sleep but not his heart. Hadīth no. 3304. In the following Hadīth in the same chapter, Imam al-Bukhari mentions a report in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asserts that the same attribute was to be found in all prophets and messengers.

<sup>20</sup> p. 66. *Sharh al-Risala al-Nafi’a wa al-Hujaj al-Qaat’ia*. Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Latif Salih al-Farfur (d. 1407 A.H.). Dar al-Nu’man li al-Ulum Publications, Damascus.

<sup>21</sup> *Sahīh al-Bukhari*. Book, the Beginning of the Revelation, Hadīth no. 2. In short, the words of Allah carry extraordinary weight. The Qur’ān affirms this where we are told that ‘Had We sent down this Qur’ān on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rending asunder from the fear of Allah’ (59: 21).

Allama Sa'd al-Dīn Taftazānī writes that there are some Ahadīth in which the number of prophets Allāh sent was identified. One Hadīth states 124,000 whereas another puts the number at 224,000.<sup>22</sup>

There are twenty-five messengers that Allāh has informed of us in the Holy Qur'ān.<sup>23</sup>

There are four figures in which there are a difference of opinion: Luqmān, Zūl Qarnain, Uzair and Khidr (peace be upon them). Some scholars believe that they are classified as the *Awliyā* (friends of Allāh) rather than his prophets.

#### 5.4. *Mu'jiza* (Miracles).

When Allāh sent prophets and messengers to people, He did so with an undeniable and easily-understandable message. Unfortunately, in each and every generation, people have lived who refused to accept Islam. Sometimes this was because they preferred their own distorted belief system and sometimes they preferred to seek the short-term, worldly gain instead.

Moreover, each and every prophet was tested by their people. They were subject to denial, insult and mockery. In order to convince people that they were indeed the representatives of Allāh, the prophets and messengers were granted miracles that contravened the laws of nature. The purpose behind this *Mu'jizas* was to produce an extraordinary event that could only happen through the involvement of Allāh.

Allama Taftazānī defines *Mu'jiza*:

'It is something that appears contrary to the customary way of things (*al-Āda*) at the hands of one who claims the office of prophet, [and it happens] in such a way that those who deny are unable to do the same thing that he does when they compete with him.'<sup>24</sup>

##### 5.4.1 Examples of the Prophet's *Mu'jizas*.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was granted countless miracles which are almost impossible to encompass. Some of his most famous and widely reported ones – as mentioned in *al-Shifā* – include:

- The Isrā and Mi'raj (Night Journey and Ascension to heaven).
- The splitting of the moon.
- The emission of water from his blessed fingers.
- The speech of the tree to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) and its walking towards him.
- The tumbling of the 360 idols at the Ka'ba on the mere indication of the Prophet's stick, on the day Makka was conquered.
- Curing Qatāda's sight (and in fact making it better than before) when it was directly struck by an arrow during the Battle of Uhud.
- Curing a blind person completely by teaching him a Du'ā using himself as a *Wasīla*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> p. 138. *Sharh al-Aqa'id al-Nasfiyya*. Allama Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazānī. Maktaba Khair Kathir, Karachi, Lahore. n.d. on publication.

<sup>23</sup> Ādam, Idris, Nuh, Hud, Salih, Ibrāhīm, Lut, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qub, Yusuf, Ayyub, Sho'aib, Mūsā, Harun, Zul Kifl, Daud, Sulaiman, Ilyas, al-Yasa', Yunus, Zakariyya, Yahya, Isa and the seal of all prophets, Muhammad (may Allah shower His infinite salutations and blessings upon them all).

<sup>24</sup> p. 134. *Sharh al-Aqa'id al-Nasfiyya*. Allama Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazānī. Maktaba Khair Kathir, Karachi, Lahore. n.d. on publication. In *Reliance of the Traveller*, Sheikh Nuh Keller defines a *Mu'jiza* as an 'event contravening natural laws that appears at the hands of someone who claims to be a prophet and is challenged by those who deny this, such that the deniers are unable to perform the like of it. (p. 919).

<sup>25</sup> pp. 175-190. *al-Shifā*. Qadi Ayadh (d. 544/1149) Dar Ibn Hazam, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002). In fact, *al-Shifā* contains a whole chapter of over eighty pages listing just some of his miracles.

## 5.5 The Difference between a *Karāma* and a *Mu'jiza*.

Imam Taftazānī explains the subtle difference between a *Mu'jiza* and a *Karāma* when he writes:

'The *Karāma*...is the appearance of something that annuls the customary way of things (*al-Āda*) on the *Walī*'s behalf, but which is not in any way connected with the claim to the prophetic office.'<sup>26</sup>

In other words, a *Mu'jiza* is classified as such when he stems from a prophet. A *Karāma* is something which stems from a saint of Allāh (*Walī*). Both contravene the laws of nature. Imam Taftazānī asserts that Muslims must also believe that the miracles from the saints of Allāh are true, as many have been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān and in the Ahadīth. For example:

- Sulaimān's Companion Asaf brought the throne of Bilqīs before the twinkling of an eye, although it was a great distance off (27:40).
- In Maryam's *Mihrāb*, summer fruits were miraculously found with her in winter, and winter fruits in summer (3: 37).
- Khālid ibn Walīd (may Allāh be pleased with him) drank poison without dying. This is because he recited *Bismillāh* before drinking it.<sup>27</sup>
- Whilst on the pulpit in Madina during Friday prayers, Umar (may Allāh be pleased with him) suddenly shouted 'O Sāriya! The mountain, the mountain!' Sāriya was hundreds of miles away engaged in battle with the enemies. He heard Umar's call and realised it was a warning that the enemies were lurking behind the mountain ready to attack the Muslims.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> p. 145. *Sharh al-Aqa'id al-Nasfiyya*. Allama Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazānī. Maktaba Khair Kathir, Karachi, Lahore. n.d. on publication.

<sup>27</sup> p. 147. Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> pp. 146-7. Ibid.