

<p> </p> <h2 class="MsoNormal" style="margin: 0in 0in 0.0001pt 0.25in; text-indent: 0.25in; text-align: center;">Summary of First Series on Monotheism</h2>

<p>We will start by establishing the relationship between prophet-hood and the concept of monotheism. In the last series of eight programs our focus was on Islamic creed. We stated that the Muslim creed is that there is no deity but Allah (God) and Muhammad is his messenger. Our focus was on half of the creed; concept of monotheism, the oneness of God, errors in our perception of Him, and the affirmative side (divine attributes) and how they affect our lives.</p>

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</p> <p>Muhammad (PBUH) as God's messenger is the second half of the Muslim creed and the focus of this upcoming series. After believing in God it follows that we have to believe in the prophets that communicated Allah's message. We noticed here that the second half of the creed summarizes the whole concept of prophet-hood, even though it only mentions the name of Muhammad (PBUH). The reason for this is simple: Muhammad recognized all prophets that came before him and the Quran asserts this by also recognizing all prophets from Adam to Muhammad. By believing in Muhammad as the last of the prophets it follows that a Muslim must believe in all prophets throughout history.</p> <p>
</p> <p>The second way that this series is relevant to the previous series is in its emphasis on the exclusive lordship of God and the fact that He has infinite knowledge and wisdom. There must be some purpose behind creation and human presence on this planet. As humans, we need to know what our role on earth is and what guidance is needed in order to conduct our lives in accordance to His will. The only source of authentic information would be the revelation of God's message and that can only take place through His prophets.</p> <p>
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</p> <p>Host: Granted that we need guidance and a path to follow why do we need prophet-hood to give us this? Why do we not rely on our own minds or our own science and the scientific method?</p> <p> </p> <p></p> <p> </p> <p> </p> <p>Jamal Badawi:</p> <p> </p> <p>>There are at least four basic reasons why science can't take the place of prophets. We do not belittle science because each of these subjects have their own sphere. To start

with science describes specific facts or phenomena which we call scientific law. ♦ These laws are used to predict things that may occur in the future. ♦ The kind of information that science give us depends on individual perception. ♦ An individual's perception is effected by background, predisposition, and biases. ♦ We know that most things that one person believes, as fact, is really only a fact for that individual. ♦ Like the saying goes ♦ beauty is in the eye of the beholder. ♦ Individual perception is useful but it is incomplete.

The second problem with complete dependence on science, even if our perceptions are accurate, is that science only explains partial aspects of life and can't explain the totality of life. ♦ This is an area that we as human beings are very eager to understand. ♦ We need a good and all encompassing explanation of the totality of life.

The third difference between science and revelation is that science focuses on the physical phenomenon, matter is real but it is not ultimate reality. ♦ Science is incapable of prescribing rules for human life. ♦ Science doesn't give answers to the ultimate aim of human life. It doesn't answer questions such as: where did we come from? What is our purpose? What is our destiny? And what is the destiny of the universe?

The fourth difference between science and revelation is that science in itself can't achieve human happiness nor can it inculcate in us a sense of purpose. ♦ Science may help us build a material civilization, however, this is not responsive to our true nature. ♦ It fails to address the problems of the mind and the soul. ♦ This leads to alienation, anxiety, absence of real happiness, peace and tranquility. ♦ It ultimately collapses the entire civilization as we have seen over and over again throughout history. ♦ Humans are not only a physical existence or a reflex system. ♦ They possess freedom and moral consciousness.

To conclude, science while quite useful should not be deified or worshipped. ♦ It is incapable of giving us moral discipline, peace of mind, sense of purpose and balance and final answers to high realities about God or prophet-hood.

Host: ♦ Can you elaborate on the concept of revelation and receiving guidance through mystical experience of meditation or contemplation etc? ♦ Where does mystical experience fit into Islam?

Jamal Badawi:

As we distinguish between science and revelation we have to also distinguish between a mystical experience and a revelation. ♦ There are six basic differences.

First of all, a mystical experience defies expression and can't be transferred from one person to another. ♦ It is a sort of personal insight into reality. ♦ A genuine prophet receives revelation from God that is not individualized but has to be fully and completely communicated to the people or humanity, as is the case with Prophet Muhammad. In the Qur'an, a verse addresses Prophet Mohammad saying, ♦ O Messenger proclaim the (message) which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His mission. And Allah will defend thee from men (who mean mischief). For Allah guideth not those who reject Faith. ♦ (5:67) This verse shows that it is part of the Prophet's duty to communicate the revelation.

The second difference is that the mystical experience is highly individualized; it is restricted to one person at a time. ♦ The experience depends on the feelings, temperament, subjectivity and bias of the person. ♦ Each person can claim that their experience is the ultimate belief or experience. ♦ This claim is made by people who hold many contradictory sets of beliefs. ♦ So how dependable are these individualized mystical experiences? ♦ This is different from revelation in which its very nature comes from God through a genuine prophet. ♦ Revelation does not come from a private personal feeling. ♦ The Quran emphasizes the generality of the message in the Qur'an ♦ We sent not an apostle, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah. ♦ (4:64) So the prophet is not speaking of his own accord, he is actually communicating what God commanded him to communicate to the people.

A third distinction is that there is high possibility of extremism and error when depending on individual mystical experiences. ♦ This perhaps would explain the existence of so many cults with all kinds of strange beliefs. ♦ Where do we draw the line between truth and falsehood? ♦ When we talk about divine revelation we are talking about something that is reliable that is free of error. ♦

2.1 Prophets- The Need for Prophets

There is no error in God's revelation. Like we discussed in previous sessions, the attribute of divinity precludes the assumption that God would make an error and there cannot be any error on the part of the prophet in accurately transmitting the message.

On the other hand, the only problem that occurs with revelation is not the accuracy of the message but the problem of preservation. Any error that may arise is that of people adding their own philosophical or theological speculation and theory, which in turn changes the original revelation. There is also the problem of not having, in preservation, the original revelation that was given to the prophets. As far as I know, in the history of the major monotheistic religions the only scripture that remains intact is the Quran, which was copied down in writing while Prophet Muhammad was alive. So the errors are not from the revelation given to Muhammad, Moses or Jesus (peace upon them all) but in terms of the message being kept intact in their entirety.

The fourth distinction is that mystical experience is attained by personal effort, discipline and spiritual training. Prophet-hood is not a status that anyone can attain. It can't be attained by personal effort. It is more a gift from God to a select type of persons that are qualified to carry the message to others. It is very important to realize that a prophetic consciousness is not derived from the prophet himself, it is not dependent upon his own inherited tendencies that may cloud his experience as he receives revelation from God.

The fourth distinction is that the mystical experience is passive and contemplative. A person going through this trance does not want to come back and considers it to be an ultimate goal. In divine revelation the prophet is never passive. Indeed the prophet is anxious to get back to life after receiving the revelation in order to communicate it, teach it and fight against the evil in the world.

A sixth difference is that unlike some mystics, God is not only to be perceived admired and loved but He is to be recognized as Lord, Commander, Guider to whom submission and unwavering commitment are due. Any mystical figure in history would very easily be dwarfed when compared to the towering figures of prophets such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad may peace and blessings be upon them all.

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</p> <p>Host:◆ We have the clarified differences between science and revelation and between the mystical experience and revelation.◆ What is the definition of the word ◆revelation◆ in an Islamic context?</p> <p> </p> <p> </p> <p> </p> <p>Jamal Badawi:</p> <p> </p> <p>In all humbleness and frankness, revelation, which is the communication of the word of God to a prophet, is difficult to explain and comprehend because it defies our conventional way of perception and understanding.◆ Basically, revelation is a form of communication between Allah and His chosen prophet.◆ This can be better explained by roughly comparing our communication process as humans with the communication of the word of God to prophets.</p> <p> </p> <p> </p> <p>
</p> <p>There are four basic elements to the communication process. They are the sender, the receiver, the message and the channel through which the message is communicated.◆ In the matter of faith, the sender is God as the ultimate source of guidance, knowledge and wisdom.◆ The receiver, in this case, is a righteous model human being, which we will discuss later on.◆ In Islam, a prophet must be righteous, honest and a role model in order to qualify in carrying the message to humanity.◆ The third component is the message itself, which covers a wide variety of subjects but, above all, the knowledge of the unseen.◆ The unseen is the area of knowledge which is not within the realm of science or human perception.◆ It answers questions of how the universe came about, where we go after this life, as well as giving us basic truths about divinity and prophet-hood.◆ It also provides various laws that regulate our life whether it is social, economic or political.</p> <p> </p> <p> </p> <p>
</p> <p>Finally, the channel through which the message is communicated is the area that is most relevant to the question of revelation.◆ The Qur'an says that there are three basic channels of communicating God◆s message.◆ All of them are summarized in one passage in the Qur'an, ◆It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil (mystical veil), or by the sending of a messenger to reveal, with Allah◆s permission, what Allah wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise.◆ (42:51) First of all there is no possibility so long as we are still human and on earth that we are in a state where we can communicate with God directly.◆ It is beyond our perception, ability and nature as human beings or even prophets.</p> <p> </p> <p>
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This leads to the three ways of communicating His message. The first way is God instilling the inspiration of truth into the heart of the chosen prophet, which in turn causes the actions and words of the prophet to innately follow those that are pleasing to God. ♦ The veil is a barrier used by God to address prophets as mentioned in the Quran when God spoke to Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai and again to Prophet Muhammad during his journey and ascension (Miraj). ♦ The third form of communication mentioned in the passage is that God may send a messenger to His chosen prophet. ♦ This messenger is not a human but one among the angels. ♦ In Islam, and I presume in Judaism and Christianity as well, Gabriel is known as the angel of revelation. ♦ In fact the Quran says, ♦Allah chooses messengers from angels and from men for Allah is He Who hears and sees (all things). ♦ (22:75) The Quran also indicates that the notion of a prophet receiving a message or a holy book is not new. ♦ In fact, one verse in the Qur'an addresses Prophet Muhammad directly, ♦We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms. ♦ (4:163)

To conclude, not all three methods in communicating a revelation were used for each and every prophet. All of them were used with Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad spoke to God through a veil. He received God's words as a revelation through the angel Gabriel (the Quran is the word of God verbatim, Muhammad did not use his own words). He also received revelation in the third form by God inspiring him in knowledge and wisdom, which he then expressed in his own words (separate from the Quran known as the Prophet's traditions). ♦ As the last messenger, God chose to use all three methods of communication to give the revelation through Prophet Muhammad.

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