

The Mission of the Prophets and the Consequences of Misunderstanding Their Mission

How Does the Mission of the Prophets Fulfill the Purpose of Creation?

What does the word mission (*risalat*) mean? Why is it essential for us to comprehend and study these concepts in our lives? Is it genuinely impossible to achieve bliss without grasping ideas like prophethood, the mission of the prophets, imamate, and related subjects?

Until we attain a profound and accurate understanding of God's intended purpose for our creation, we might view familiarization with these concepts as confined to seminary or religious studies, or simply categorize them as personal religious interests. However, knowing the purpose of creation not only shifts our worldview and perspective on many matters, but it also places us in a situation where, to achieve that purpose, we are compelled to learn specific subjects, including prophethood and the mission of the prophets.

Once it becomes evident that our objective in entering this world is to become like our Lord and Nurturer, Allah, and to manifest the divine names and attributes that God has instilled within us as potentials, we naturally begin to seek the path toward this similarity and look for the necessary tools and requirements to accomplish it. Because we humans believe our perfection and bliss rely on this emulation, we dedicate ourselves to acquiring whatever draws us nearer to our ultimate destination. This implies that we do not consider ourselves independent of identifying the individuals who carry this responsibility, and we actively seek to

comprehend the essence of this guidance and the programs that lead us to our objective.

Consequently, grasping the meaning of the prophetic mission or the role of imamate in our lives becomes a primary concern, as neglecting it could cause us to lose sight of our final destination.

In this lesson, we will explore the significance of the mission of the prophets, while the topic of imamate, representing the continuation of the path initiated by the prophets, will be covered in subsequent lessons.

The Importance of Human Guidance

The human being is the most complex being in creation. We possess specific complexities and subtleties regarding both our existential makeup and our connections with other beings and the universe. Therefore, guiding us is an extremely specialized task that can only be executed by the Creator, who comprehensively understands every facet of our existence, alongside our origin, trajectory, and ultimate destination.

God created us as comprehensive beings who, to achieve perfection, need to actualize all the potential names and attributes within us. These potentials require appropriate conditions to surface, as well as the support of an educator and guide. In other words, only through proper divine instruction can we actualize these capacities correctly, comprehensively, and harmoniously. This is only achievable through a specialist and guide appointed by God.

Pursuing this path through any route other than the one designated by God, or following anyone other than those He has approved, can lead to irreversible consequences. These consequences include being deprived of becoming similar to Allah and experiencing an unhealthy birth into the Hereafter. Because guiding humans, who have the potential to reach the rank of divine deputyship and similarity to Allah, is a sensitive and complex duty, authority over humanity and the administration of its affairs is only permissible with God's authorization. Only someone granted such permission by God can take responsibility for leading people; otherwise, such governance is deemed the rule of tyranny, or *taghut*.

Differences in Carrying Out the Mission

The individuals chosen by God to execute this vital role in our lives varied in their existential capacities and the duties assigned to them. These include the prophets (*anbiya*) and divine messengers or the *Ulul-Azm* prophets. While we generally refer to all of them as divine prophets, there were distinctions in the specifics of their duties.

The term *nabi* (prophet) originates either from the root *naba*,' which means the carrier of a significant message, or from *nubuww*, signifying someone who possesses an elevated and distinguished status. Conversely, the term *rasul* (messenger) denotes someone who delivers a message. These two expressions can be viewed as synonymous when referring to prophets.

Different interpretations exist regarding the distinction between these terms. For instance, Zurarah reported asking Imam al-Baqir (Peace be upon him) about the verse, “And he was a messenger, a prophet” [1] inquiring about the meaning of

messenger (*rasul*) and prophet (*nabi*) in this context. The Imam answered, “*Nabi* is one who sees the angel of revelation in dream and *Rasul* is one who sees the angel both in sleep and when awake. He can also hear the angel’s voice.” The Imam subsequently recited verse 52 of Surah al-Hajj [2].

Certain theologians clarify the distinction by stating that the word *nabi* pertains to an individual's internal state, their awareness of the unseen, and their reception of revelation. It applies to anyone who receives revelation, regardless of whether they are instructed to publicly announce the message. By contrast, the term *rasul* refers to the missionary or communicative aspect of prophethood, namely the responsibility of delivering God’s message to people. Therefore, every messenger is a prophet, but not every individual granted prophethood is necessarily a messenger tasked with public proclamation [3].

Other scholars argue that a messenger could even be an angel, while the status of prophethood is exclusively for humans [4].

Nevertheless, since God addresses both *rasuls* and *nabis* collectively as prophets in the Quran without dwelling on these distinctions, we will not focus further on these differences and will instead center on the main topic: the mission of the prophets.

The Duty and Mission of the Prophets

The fundamental goal of all divine prophets aligns with the purpose God set for human creation. The prophets aimed to save humanity and guide people to the rank of divine deputyship. Therefore, the core principles of religion and the path

to this objective were identical in the teachings of all prophets, concerning both ethics and beliefs. Only specific legal rulings of the religious law, which vary based on time and geographical location, underwent modifications. In essence, ethics and beliefs remained unchanged, whereas the practical laws and aspects of religious law evolved.

It is quite clear that fulfilling this mission and establishing these programs and stages necessitates the formation of a divine government. Within such a government, divine laws can be enforced, giving society's members the chance to abide by them. However, these programs and laws frequently clashed with the worldview and lifestyles of oppressive powers and tyrannical rulers, who were consumed by illusions and the quest for greater wealth and power. Consequently, the mission of the prophets regularly faced fierce resistance from these tyrants.

Thus, alongside forming a just government, most divine prophets also engaged in battling tyrants and those who hindered the development of humanity's supra-rational dimension, preventing people from reaching authentic human growth.

Requirements of the Prophetic Mission

Naturally, any structured plan to reach a goal demands specific prerequisites. The program of the prophets and their mission were no different and necessitated particular conditions and tools, including the following:

-The Book and the Scale

As noted in previous lessons, the universe operates on precise order and mathematical relationships. Therefore, in addition to the Book provided by God to guide humanity, divine prophets also utilized a standard and scale while executing their mission. Achieving the purpose of creation, navigating the path to the rank of divine deputyship, and developing a sound heart are impossible without principles and rules to evaluate and measure our advancement.

-Establishing Justice

Because the prophets were completely aware of every aspect and dimension of the human being, they recognized that human bliss is only attainable when all the dimensions of a person are nurtured with justice and when every dimension of human existence develops harmoniously and in balance. Just as ignoring the rights of the human dimension to solely focus on the lower aspects of existence pulls a person away from their goal and ruins a healthy birth into the Hereafter, eradicating the lower and natural aspects of existence to pursue the human dimension is similarly unjust.

In truth, the journey to our perfection and bliss is possible when each of our five existential dimensions receives its proper rights, and when our lower aspects function as a ready carrier for our human dimension.

Indeed, one of the obligations of the divine prophets was to establish an environment where individuals could justly satisfy the needs of all their existential dimensions and, unburdened by the anxieties of their lower dimensions, progress toward becoming like Allah.

In this lesson, we examined the concept of *risalat* and the role of the prophets in guiding humanity toward the purpose of creation. We explained that only those approved by God have the legitimate authority to rule over people. The mission of the prophets, therefore, involves establishing a divinely guided order and confronting tyranny (ṭāghūt). We also discussed the prophets' aim of establishing justice and providing the standards and criteria through which humanity can move toward fulfilling the purpose of creation.

References

[1]. Quran 19:51

[2]. Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya edition, vol. 1, p. 176, *ḥadīth* 1.

[3]. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī. *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Quran*, entries “n-b-” and “r-s-l.”

[4]. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Quran*. Commentary on Quran 22:75.