

# وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ

37:181

## PROPHECY

### النبوة

#### Objectives >>>

##### Students should:

- Understand why we need prophets
- Understand that all prophets teach the same religion: Islam, in different stages
- Understand the difference between a prophet (Nabi) and a Messenger (Rasūl)
- Understand some of the qualities shared by all prophets
- Discuss at least one story from the life of one of the Prophets that shows the good moral conduct of Prophets
- Understand the concept that the belief in all the past prophets and their holy books is an essential part of our faith and that past prophets received Divine Books
- Understand that these books have not remained safe from distortion, unlike the Qur'ān which has
- Be aware that Islam was never spread by force so we should not force others to believe as we do
- Understand the basic etiquette of dealing with people from other faiths in terms of avoiding debate until we have proper knowledge, avoiding vain debate, avoiding insults and mockery
- Understand that we should not take non-Muslims as leaders or role models

## FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

## LEVEL 3

### Lesson 1: Why do we need Prophets?

In this lesson, we will discuss the role of prophets and why we need prophets.

### WHY DO WE NEED PROPHETS?

All creatures on Earth act with purpose. An ant moves about the way it does for a particular reason, birds migrate the way they do for a purpose and even flowers open and close their petals for a purpose. People also have a purpose. We all do things for a reason. If we do things without any reason, we would be called mad or crazy. One who acts without purpose is unwise.

We know from our previous lessons that Allah (SWT) is definitely Wise. Therefore, when He created us, He did it for a purpose. Part of the purpose was to test us. Allah (SWT) tests each person to see whether they choose the path of good or the path of evil.

When there is a test or examination, there needs to be a teacher or a guide. Just like we have a teacher in school who prepares us for the examination, it is necessary for us to have a teacher and guide in this world to help us pass the tests we will face. Allah (SWT) has sent us prophets to act as teachers and guides for us, and to teach us what Allah (SWT) wants from us.

Allah (SWT) wants us to move closer and closer to Him through these tests He gives us, and He has sent us prophets to help us through these tests.

Imagine the following situation: a person invites you to his home in a different city and you start making the journey. On your way there, you get to a fork in the road

and you don't know which way to go. You realize that you should have asked for directions, or at least brought a guide along with you. You walk on, but another fork in the road comes, and this keeps happening until you realize that you will be completely lost unless you have a guide or you get directions from someone who knows the way. The Prophets are our guides on the journey towards Allah. Imam 'Ali (as) says about Prophet Muḥammad:

"Whenever anyone became tired or distressed and stopped (on the path) the Prophet would stand with him and help him until he helped him reach his goal."<sup>i</sup>

The Prophets give us directions and help us along the path on our journey to Allah (SWT). They do this by teaching us about the rules for how we should live in this world and which actions will help us in the Hereafter.

#### Memorisation Task

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ

"He it is who sent His Messenger with guidance and the true religion" (48:28)

## HOW DO THE PROPHETS GUIDE US?

The Prophets (as) guide us in a number of ways:

- The Prophets teach us what Allah (SWT) wants us to do and what He does not want us to do. For example, the Prophets have taught us that God wants us to live purposeful lives and not waste our lives simply playing.
- They also teach us what actions are right and what actions are wrong. Lying and stealing are wrong actions and telling the truth and giving charity are good.
- They also teach us about things we cannot see or understand, such as Hell and Heaven, angels and jinn.
- The most important way the Prophets (as) teach us is by being good practical examples for us. By seeing how they live their lives and what they do, we learn how to live our life as well.

## THE PROPHETS ARE THE BEST ROLE MODELS

As we are growing up, it is important for us to have the right role models and 'heroes'. Many of us know a lot about the life of sports players, actors and musicians. We follow their lives and their activities and without knowing it, we begin to think their qualities are good qualities. Unfortunately, many of these people lead very empty lives. Many of them end up depressed, most lose their families and more than a few end their life by committing suicide. The more rich and famous they are, the more troubled their life seems to be.

So instead of taking these people as role models, we should take lessons from the lives of prophets and take them as role models. The Prophets of Allah have real achievements: their names are still mentioned on the tongues of millions of people thousands of years after their death. They guided so many people, and they sacrificed their life not for wealth or fame, but for the sake of justice and the truth.

When we come to a choice in our life, we should try to copy the prophets in the choices they made. For example, we know that Prophet Muḥammad (saw) used his time very effectively. He had a set routine which he would follow every day so that he could look after all the different aspects of his life. He put time aside for worship, for his family and for his work. He did not waste time playing aimlessly or 'mucking around'. Yes, he did also make time for activities like horse riding, and he would even race his companions. However, he did this with a purpose and reason in mind, he didn't do it just to 'kill time'. We should learn from this, for example, that we too should not waste our time or 'kill time' by spending endless hours moving between the television, computer games and internet surfing. Instead, we should make time for the most important things like our religion, our family and our studies. Yes, we need time to play and have fun, but we can do this in ways that benefit us somehow.

In general, we should learn more about the lives of our prophets, and use them as role models when we make choices in our lives.

## Review Questions

### Q1. The Prophets (as) were sent to us by Allah (SWT) in order to:

- a. Guide us to the true religion
- b. Teach us right from wrong
- c. Both a & b

### Q2. The best role models we can take in our life are:

- a. The prophets
- b. Sports stars
- c. Famous celebrities

### Q2. Prophet Muḥammad (saw):

- a. Spent all his time having fun and racing horses
- b. Spent all his time praying
- c. Balanced his time between worship, family, work and other activities

## Lesson 2: Learning more about our Prophets

In this lesson, we will learn more about our prophets. In particular, we will learn about their characteristics and their miracles.

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PROPHETS

### PROPHETS ARE CHOSEN BY GOD

The most important thing to remember is that all prophets are chosen and sent by Allah (SWT). They do not choose themselves and they are not chosen by other people. Allah (SWT) Himself chooses them. This means that they are definitely the right people to follow and take as guides.

### PROPHETS ARE SINLESS (MA'ŠŪM)

Another important fact is that prophets are sinless (ma'šūm). They are given special knowledge from Allah (SWT) which helps them avoid sin, and so they live their whole lives without sinning. This is important because if they are messengers from Allah and they are the role models for us, we need to be sure that they do not make any mistakes. This is why Allah (SWT) gave them a special knowledge to protect them from ever sinning.

## THE MIRACLES OF THE PROPHETS

Allah (SWT) gave permission to His prophets to do certain amazing things that other people could not do. This was to help prove to people that they really were chosen and sent by Allah (SWT). In the Qur'ān, a miracle is called a sign (āyah). However in the Arabic language it is common to refer to a miracle as mu'jizah (plural: mu'jizāt).

The miracle of each prophet matched his time. For example, the staff of Mūsā (as) turned into a serpent and his hand would shine very brightly after he put it into his pocket and took it out again. These miracles were given to him because his people, the Egyptians, were expert magicians.

Prophet 'Īsā (as) was able to cure the sick and bring back to life the dead. This is because the people of his time were making great advances in medicine.

Prophet Muḥammad (saw) was sent to the Arabs who were experts in poetry and literature. The eloquence of the Qur'ān was a challenge to them at that time and is a living miracle till today. From that day until today, no one has ever been able to produce something like the Qur'ān in terms of its eloquence and style.

## PROPHETS AND MESSENGERS

So by now we have come to learn that Allah, the Merciful, has sent us guides to help us make the journey to Him. These guides were humans like us, and they are called prophets. No community or nation has ever existed without having a prophet to guide them and teach them how to live in the best way possible.

Many Prophets were sent to one or two villages, while others were sent to bigger areas or whole nations. What we must remember is that they were all prophets, and that believing in them is the third fundamental of our religion.

In Arabic, a prophet is called a nabi. Some prophets were also messengers. In Arabic, a messenger is called a rasūl. A messenger is a prophet who also comes with a Holy Book from Allah (SWT), to update what was taught in the last Holy Book.

- Prophet Mūsā was a messenger who was sent with the book called al-Taurāt (the Old Testament)
- Prophet Dawūd was a messenger who was sent with the book called al-Zabūr (The Psalms)
- Prophet ‘Isā was a messenger who was sent with the book called al-Injīl (The New Testament)
- Prophet Muḥammad (saw) was the Final Prophet and Messenger who was sent with the book called al-Qur’ān

When these books were revealed to these Prophets, their followers originally followed them. Over time though, after these Prophets left their people, the leaders, for selfish reasons, started changing the texts to suit their own purposes and to support their own ideas.

In some cases though, the rules that the previous prophet brought were not relevant for the people anymore, in those cases, Allah (SWT) sent another book with His prophet with ‘updated’ rules.

The Jews initially followed the book of Prophet Moses (as). Unfortunately after he passed away, the Jews began to change the book to suit their own purposes. After a while, they had strayed very far from what Prophet Moses (as) had taught them. Therefore, Allah (SWT) sent His Prophet Jesus (as) with a newer book to confirm what Moses (as) had originally taught and to update some of the rules. Unfortunately, after Jesus (as) was taken up to heaven by Allah (SWT), his book was also destroyed by the people of the time. Therefore, we do not know what was in the original Book that Allah (SWT) revealed to Jesus (as). This is why today there are so many different versions of ‘The Bible’. All of these have been written by people who were not alive at the time of Prophet Jesus and who simply wrote what they thought was in the original Holy Book.

So again, Allah (SWT) sent us another prophet with another book, the Holy Qur’ān. This is the final book and the most perfect one, and we will never need any other book from Allah. To this day, after 1400 years, The Qur’ān has not changed at all. This is because the Qur’ān is especially protected by Allah (SWT), and contains the highest teachings and instructions from Allah (SWT).

## Review Questions

### Q1. A Messenger:

- a. Is not a prophet
- b. Is the same as a prophet
- c. Is a prophet who was sent with a Holy Book from Allah (SWT)

### Q2. The Prophets are:

- a. Chosen by people to be prophets
- b. Chosen by God to be prophets
- c. Declare themselves to be prophets

### Q3. The Prophets:

- a. Committed some sins
- b. Did not commit any sins
- c. We are not sure if they committed sins

## Lesson 3: Islam and other Religions

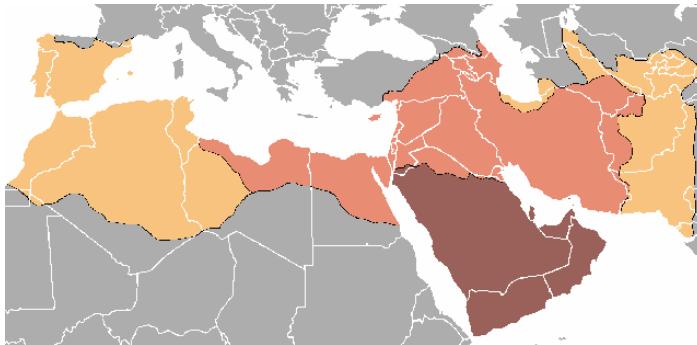
In the last lesson, we learnt about the previous prophets like Prophet Moses and Prophet Jesus and the books that Allah (SWT) sent down to them. In this lesson, we will learn more about Islam, other religions and how to deal with people of other religions.

### THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

After Prophet Muḥammad (saw) passed away, Islam spread to many different parts of the world. This did not happen through wars or by force. Instead, people were becoming Muslim because they could see the beauty of the Qur’ān and the religion of Islam. Within a couple of hundred years, Islam reached all the way to Spain in the west, India in the east, Turkey in the North and Yemen and Sudan in the South.

### Class Activity

How many countries can you name from this image that had become Muslim? Can you identify where Medina is? Can you identify where Damascus is? Can you identify where Karbala is? From where on this map do you or your parents originally come from? Which of these countries is still Muslim?



## HOW SHOULD WE TREAT NON-MUSLIMS?

Now that we know how Islam spread, let us look at how we should treat non-Muslims in order to help Islam spread further. The Holy Prophet taught the Muslims to treat non-Muslims with justice on many occasions. He said:

“Whoever annoys a Dhimmi (a Jew or Christian living in an Islamic country) then I am his enemy and whoever I am his enemy Allah will be his enemy in the hereafter.”<sup>ii</sup>

Allah (SWT) also states very clearly that:

### Memorisation Task

لَا إِكْرَاهٌ فِي الدِّينِ

“There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256)

For the last eleven years of his life, the Prophet (saw) lived in Medina. Most of the people who lived in Medina were Muslims. However, there was a small group of Jewish people. The Prophet (saw) spoke to them and signed a treaty with them. This treaty was a promise by both Muslims and Jews to treat each other well, help each other, and let each other practice their religion. If you would like to read the text of the actual treaty, it is there for you in the endnotes of the lesson.<sup>iii, iv</sup>

This clearly shows that the Prophet did not force people to accept Islam. Instead, he taught both Muslims and people of other Divine religions to live together in peace. In today's world, the country with the largest Muslim population is Indonesia. There were never any wars to bring Islam to Indonesia and no armies were ever sent to this country. The people of Indonesia met Muslims by trading with them, and slowly most of them became Muslims.

Just as the Prophet did not force Islam on people, we have no right to force our beliefs on any one. We have to use the same ways that the holy prophet used. He showed good character, kindness, justice, nobility and gave good advice to guide people to the truth.

## HOW DO WE DEAL WITH PEOPLE FROM OTHER FAITHS?

In the Qur'ān, Allah (SWT) has on many occasions invited people from other religions to open discussions and debate in a peaceful and logical manner. Allah says in the Qur'ān:

“Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and debate with them in ways that are best and most gracious.” (16:125)

It is important to follow certain rules and etiquettes when we talk to non-Muslims. These include:

- 1- Avoid debating without knowledge: The Imams of the Ahlul Bayt used to often train specific people only for debating. Often we get into a debate and do not have enough knowledge of our own religion or the other person's religion. This can cause us to have doubts in our faith. So before we debate with anyone, we have to make sure we have sufficient knowledge about what we are talking about.
- 2- Avoid vain debate: If there is no hope of the other person being able to see or accept the truth, we should not debate with them for the sake of debating. Also, it is not a good habit to argue just to show that we are right. Sometimes, it is good to agree to disagree. It is also important to remember that we should only debate about topics which are important and would make a difference to our lives.
- 3- Avoid Insults and mockery: as much as another person's faith sounds funny, we have no right to laugh at them or mock them or insult them, especially because it might cause them to make fun of our beliefs. Therefore, always remember:
  - a. Never to tease or bully someone because of their faith
  - b. Never to make fun of someone else's faith
  - c. Respect their property as if it were your brother's

- 4- Pray for others' guidance: whenever we meet with a non-Muslim and he/she is stubborn with their beliefs, we should stop debating in vain and pray to Allah for their guidance. It is only with the Mercy of Allah that a person will believe.
- 5- Do not take them as role models or leaders: the Prophet (saw) tells us that on the Judgment Day we will be placed in the same group as the person we took as our leader. Therefore, we should always remember never to take a non-believer as a leader or role model in our life, because we may end up going down the same wrong path that they did.
- 6- Be just and fair to others: we as Muslims have to be kind to all people, including Non-Muslims. Imam 'Ali (as) was passing by a road. He saw an old beggar asking people for help. He asked his companions who the man was "*He is a Christian*", replied the companion. Imam 'Ali became upset and said: "*You used him as much as he could work for you, and now that he is old and unable, you have left him behind! Make sure you provide him a reasonable life from the treasury.*"

Let us finish with an example of a debate between one of our Imams, Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) and a non-Muslim person (an atheist in fact). One of the leaders of an atheist sect had kept some mud and water in a glass bottle. After some days worms grew in it and he claimed to be their creator. One day he came to Imam (as) and said that he had created the worms. The Imam (as) said: "*If you are their creator, tell us how many of them are male and how many female?*" He said: "*I don't know*". The Imam (as) said: "*If you can't do that, command the worms going one way to crawl in the opposite direction*". He said: "*I cannot do it*". The Imam then said: "*All right, then tell us what is the weight of each of them?*" He replied: "*I do not know*". The Imam (as) eventually said: "*When you have neither any knowledge about them, nor any control over them, then how can you be their creator?*"<sup>v</sup>

What we can see in this example is that the Imam (as) used logical reasoning and a sound argument against the atheist. He did not yell or scream at the man, and he did not insult him in any way. We should remember that if we do ever enter into a debate with a non-Muslim or a person with different beliefs, we should remain calm and logical and not get angry and become abusive in any way.

## Review Questions

### Q1. When debating with non-Muslims:

- a. It is okay to make fun of them and insult them
- b. We should never make fun of them or insult them
- c. We should never debate with them in any situation

### Q2. When it comes to non-Muslims:

- a. We should never take them as role models
- b. We can take them as role models
- c. It is better not to take them as role models

### Q3. Islam was spread:

- a. By war and violence
- b. Through peaceful teaching and setting a good example
- c. Neither of the above

<sup>i</sup> Nahjul Balaghah, sermon 102

<sup>ii</sup> Living in harmony - Sheikh Mansour Leghaei

<sup>iii</sup> "The Jews who enter into this covenant shall be protected from all insults and vexations; they shall have an equal right as our own people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of the various branches of 'Aws, Najjar, Harith, Jashim, Thal'abah, Aws, and all others domiciled in Yathrib (i.e., Medina) shall form with the Muslims one composite nation. They shall practice in their religion as freely as the Muslims."

The clients and allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom. The guilty shall be pursued and punished. The Jews shall join the Muslims in defending Yathrib (i.e., Medina) against all enemies. The interior of Yathrib shall be a sacred place for all who accept this Charter. The clients and allies of the Muslims and of the Jews shall be as respected as the principals..."

<sup>iv</sup> Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi - <http://www.al-islam.org/how-did-islam-spread/>

<sup>v</sup> Akhlaq e-A'imma, Morals & Manners of the Holy Imams by Sayyid Zafar Hasan Amrohi