

Fast 22: Revealed Books — What is revelation and the need for it?

- The word *kitāb*, meaning ‘book’, has been used in the Holy Quran to mean a revealed book. It has been used in the Holy Quran for the Quran itself, for its chapters, for any previous revelation, for all previous revelations taken together, and for all revealed books including the Holy Quran. But it has also been used to speak of the revelation of God to prophets whether written or not, while it is also freely used regarding Divine decrees (i.e., what God has decreed for the future) or His ordinances.
- The Arabic word for ‘revelation’ is *wahy*. In its highest form, this word has come to signify the Divine word which is communicated to prophets, and to saints or righteous servants of God (*auliyā’*) who have not been raised to the dignity of prophethood.
- The same word *wahy* is also used in the Quran to mean God establishing the laws of nature in the world and His granting of instincts to animals. In connection with creating the heavens and the earth, it is said that Allah “spoke” to the heaven and the earth and that He:

“...revealed in every heaven its affair.” — 41:12

So there is a kind of revelation through which the Divine laws are made to operate in the universe. Regarding the honey bee, the Quran says:

“And your Lord revealed to the bee: Make hives in the mountains and in the trees and in what they build, then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of your Lord submissively.” — 16:68–69

This is really an example of the Divine revelation being granted also to the lower creation, so that what they do by instinct is said to have been taught by revelation from God.

- As regards revelation to human beings, on several occasions the Holy Quran speaks of *wahy* having been granted to those righteous servants of God *who were not prophets*, men as well as women. The mother of Moses is said to have received a revelation though she was undoubtedly not a prophet, and so are the disciples of Jesus who were not prophets:

“And We revealed to Moses’ mother, saying: Suckle him; then when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear, nor grieve...” —28:7

“And when I revealed to the disciples [of Jesus], saying, Believe in Me and My messenger...” —5:111

- The highest form of revelation was granted to prophets only, brought to them by the angel Gabriel in the form of words. This is the surest and clearest form of revelation, and such was the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet. This is called *revelation that is recited in words (wahy matluww)*. It is the highest and most developed form, and it was in this manner that revelation was granted to all the prophets of God in every nation. What the Quran calls as revealed books of God are this highest type of revelation. The ten commandments revealed to Moses, and other laws, and the Lord's Prayer of Jesus are examples of this revelation. In Islamic writings, the word revelation (*wahy*) has often come to be applied to this highest form only, making people wrongly think that only prophets receive *wahy*.
- Why did Allah send revealed books? Speaking of Adam, the Holy Quran has stated the reason why revelation from God was needed, and the purpose which it fulfilled.
- Man had two objects before him, to conquer nature and to conquer self, to bring under his control the powers of nature and his own desires. In the story of Adam as the prototype of man, as related in the Quran, we are told that Adam was given the knowledge of things, that is to say that man was endowed with the capacity to obtain knowledge of all things; he was also gifted with the power to conquer nature, for the angels (beings controlling powers of nature) were made to submit to him; but *Iblis* (the inciter of lower desires in man) did not submit, and man fell a prey to his evil suggestions (2:31, 2:34, 2:36).
- Man was powerful against all, but weak against himself. He could conquer nature by his knowledge of things and the power granted to him, but the greater conquest and the greater perfection lay in the conquest of his inner self, and this conquest could only be brought about by a closer connection with God. It was to make this possible for him that revelation was needed.
- In the story of Adam, as man proved weak against his own desires and passions, Divine help came to him in the form of certain "words from his Lord" (2:37), that is to say, in the form of Divine revelation which was granted to Adam. And as for his posterity, the Divine law was given:

"Surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve." — 2:38

- In these words man is told that, with the help of Divine revelation, he shall have no fear of the Devil's temptings, and so the hindrance of his progress. The obstacle to the development of his faculties being removed, he will go on advancing on the road to perfection.