

Fast 7: Prophets and Messengers of Allāh — raised in all nations for guidance

- The Quran says prophets arose among all nations and gave the same basic teachings:

“And certainly We raised in every nation a messenger, saying: Serve Allah and shun the devil. Then some of them Allah guided, and for some of them remaining in error was justly due.” (16:36)

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ

Some of their people accepted the prophets raised among them. Others remained in error, and justly deserved to remain in error. That was because various factors prevented them from accepting the truth, such as pride, ego, prejudice, fear of losing their privileged position in society, cherishing their inherited beliefs, etc.

- To the wrong-doers, God will say on the Day of Judgment:

“Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, not to serve the devil? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you serve Me. This is the right way.” (36:60–61)

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿٦٠﴾ وَأَنْ اعْبُدُونِي ۗ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٦١﴾

As the address here is to human beings in general, it shows that prophets arose in every nation, and through them God charged people with the instruction not to follow the devil but to become bound to God (“serve Me”). They were given these instructions in their capacity as “children of Adam”, and not as belonging to a particular race, tribe or country.

The verse after the passage quoted above also conveys an important point:

“And certainly he (the devil) led astray numerous people from among you. Could you not then understand?” (36:62)

وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنْكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

The word here for “understand” is from the word *'aql* (عقل), and therefore it indicates using reason and intelligence. It amounts to saying: If you had used your reasoning faculty, you would not have been led astray by the devil. The use of sense, reason and knowledge can keep a person safe from the promptings of the devil by showing the right path. On the other hand, ignorance and superstition makes a person prone to being misled.

- The Quran not only reveals that prophets have appeared in all nations; it goes further and makes it necessary that a Muslim should believe in all those prophets.

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but **righteous is the one who believes in Allah**, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and **the prophets**, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the traveller and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and gives the due charity; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.” (2:177)

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّنَ وَآتَى
الْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ
وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ
الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا
عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ
الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

This verse lays down the fundamental doctrines of Islam and the basic practices a Muslim must follow. But it begins by reminding us that a person doesn't become a good Muslim by performing the **bodily** actions of worship. “It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West” means that it is not the directions to which you turn your body, or more generally any actions of your body, that make you good and noble.

To be righteous, a Muslim must hold certain beliefs, and five are mentioned here. The last of these is belief in all the prophets, not only belief in the Prophet Muhammad, but in all the prophets who appeared before him anywhere in the world.

After mentioning the beliefs, when the verse moves on to the practices required of a Muslim, it mentions the formal prayer and the formal obligatory charity known as *zakat*, **not at the beginning but later on**. This is despite the fact that these are the very basic duties of a Muslim. What it mentions at the beginning is: “and gives away wealth out of love for Him” to various needy persons. Now this giving away of wealth “out of love for God” is voluntary. It is up to an individual to decide what to give and to whom. Placing these at the beginning, before formal prayer and formal charity (*zakat*), shows that **unless we acquire these qualities** — of using our material possessions, which also include skill, talent, ability and energy, to help those in need — our mechanical prayers and our giving *zakat* like a tax are just empty actions.