

Aqeedah Corner: 'Ismah Or Infallability Of The Prophet'

All Prophets were protected from error or mistakes, in delivering their message to the people to which they were sent. Infallability means being protected from anything that would affect the delivery of the message. This means that prophets do not forget; they cannot become confused; they cannot be influenced or fall under the spell of magicians; they cannot have diseases that would cause people to run away from them, and they cannot do anything that would create doubt or suspicion among the people to which they were sent regarding his position as a prophet.

There are certain misconceptions about some of the prophets and these misconceptions were due to a lack of clarity in the concept of infallability. We would like to mention the cases of Prophets Yusuf, Yunus, and Muhammad, peace be on all of them.

Some Mufasireen (those who interpreted the Quran) mention in their tafseers of Surah Yusef: Ayah 24, that the a woman tried to tempt Prophet Yusef into committing zina (illegal sexual intercourse), and that he was about to initiate some actions toward the woman but backed off after he saw a sign which made him realize what he was about to do. Such interpretations contradict the concept of infallability (ISMAH). In fact in ayah 22, Allah informs us that when Prophet Yusef had reached puberty, He (swt) gave him Wisdom and Knowledge. In ayah 23, Allah informs us that the woman locked the door and beckoned Prophet Yusef to approach her, to which he made du'a to Allah, seeking refuge in Him, and declaring that those who commit unjust acts will never succeed. Then in ayah 24, the woman approached him to engage in zina, but since Prophet Yusef had been given Knowledge and Wisdom by Allah, and since he already knew that those who commit zina (unjust acts) would not succeed (earn the pleasure of Allah and earn a residence in the Paradise), he did not reciprocate the advances of the woman. Any other interpretation must be rejected since it contradicts the idea of ISMAH or infallability of Prophets.

With regard to Prophet Yunus, Suratul Anbiyaa ayat 87 to 88 states,

"And Zun-Nun (Father of the Whale, meaning Yunus), when he departed angrily, and he thought that We had no power over him. But he cried out through the depths of Darkness that THERE IS NO GOD BUT YOU, GLORY BE TO YOU, INDEED I WAS WRONG. So We responded to him and delivered him from his distress. Similarly do we deliver those who have faith."

In the interpretation of these ayat, some Mufasireen and commentators claim that this incident occurred when Yunus was sent to the people of Nineveh as a Prophet but the response was negative and so he decided not to fulfill his mission, and asked Allah to punish them. However, they say, Allah decided to forgive the people and because of this Prophet Yunus got angry and stormed away angrily because he thought Allah had made him appear foolish to the people. Then went on the boat, was tossed in the sea and was swallowed by the whale, as a punishment from Allah, and later on was rescued by Allah.

If we examine Surah Saffat ayat 139-147,

"So also was Jonah among those sent (by Us). When he ran away (like a slave from captivity) to the ship (fully) laden, he (agreed to) cast lots, and he was of the rebutted: then the big fish did swallow him, and he had done acts worthy of blame. Had it not been that he (repented and) glorified Allah, he would certainly have remained inside the fish till the Day of Resurrection. But We cast him forth on the naked shore in a state of sickness, and We caused to grow, over him, a spreading plant of the Gourd kind. And We sent him (on a mission) to a hundred thousand (men) or more."

We find that Allah clarifies the issue regarding Prophet Yunus. First of all Yunus went on the ship, was tossed into the sea, then he was swallowed by a fish or whale, while in the fish he made tasbeeh or glorified Allah asking to be saved. Allah answered his du'a and caused the fish to throw him out, and he made it to the coast. While there he was protected by Allah, and thereafter he was deputized as a messenger, and sent to a people numbering about one hundred thousand or more.

Therefore, Surah Saffat clarifies that Yunus became a prophet after he was swallowed by the whale, not before. This means that the explanation of Suratul Anbiyaa, which was mentioned above, is incorrect. Yunus could not have departed angrily because he was mad at Allah for forgiving his people, after he had asked Allah to punish them, because he was not yet a prophet or a messenger. The incident related in Suratul Anbiyaa occurred before he became a prophet, since he was made a prophet after being swallowed by the whale. Additionally, any explanation that states that a prophet chose on his own to abandon his mission, or which states that a prophet became mad at Allah, has to be rejected because such behavior contradicts the idea of infallibility, and contradicts the characteristics of messengers and prophets. Therefore this common explanation of Suratul Anbiyaa must be rejected, and even if there is a narration that supports this claim, this hadith must be rejected because it contradicts with the ayat of the Quran and with the concept of ISMAH or Infallibility.

With regard to Prophet Muhammad (saaws), there are some narrations which say that a Jewish person cast a spell of magic over him, and he (saaws) remained under its influence some 1 to 2 weeks. The narrations even say that while he (saaws) was under the spell, the Messenger started to imagine things, and other narrations state that indeed, this was the worst type of magic. Then the narrations state that because of this, or after this, the angel Jibra-eel revealed Surahs 113 & 114, or the last two surahs of the Quran. The narrations then state that after reciting these surahs, the Prophet was relieved from the magic spell.

It must be clear that any such narrations must be rejected because it contradicts with ISMAH or infallibility of the Prophets & Messengers. This is because the Prophets cannot be put under the influence of magic spells or the like, because such things impede the delivery of the message to the people. If the Prophet Muhammad (saaws) was indeed affected by magic for one to two weeks, or any period of time for that matter, and that he (saaws) started imagining things, this would mean that there is a possibility that he (saaws) could have made an error in relaying an ayah or in clarifying an ayah, or in giving a hadith. Since prophets and messengers are protected from erring in the delivery of their message, it is then impossible for Prophet Muhammad (saaws) to have been put under any magical spell. It is quite possible that they tried to do something, but surely they failed to affect the Prophet. And so even though some of these hadiths appear in the collection of hadith by Imam Bukhari, they have to be rejected on the basis of its text (matn), even if the chain of narrators were found to be correct.

In the science of hadith, a hadith can be rejected either based on its chain of narrators (sanad), or it can be rejected based on the text of the hadith itself (matn). Additionally, this hadeeth was not reported by way of Tawatur (absolute definity), rather it is classified as Khabr-al-Ahaad. Most of the Scholars of Islam, declared that hadiths which were narrated by way of Khabr-al-Ahaad do not lead to absolute certainty. Therefore they must not be used as a source of Aqeedah. Therefore, the narrations which claim that Prophet Muhammad (saaws) was bewildered by magic contradicts an issue of the Islamic Aqeedah, namely the infallibility of the Prophet in delivering his message, and in addition to this they did not come by way of an absolute and definitive source, and so must be rejected.

Other narrations claim that once while the Prophet (saaws) was reciting Surah Najm, he (saaws) was put under another satanic inspiration, and actually prostrated to the idols of the Qureysh of Mecca. These narrations even add that Prophet Muhammad (saaws) mistakenly added some verses to this Surah, and then the following day he (saaws) told the Sahaba to remove ayat, they had been influenced by Satan. Again, any such narration must be rejected because the Prophets cannot be put under anyone or anything else's influence but Allah's. The Prophets cannot be bedeviled or induced by magic, since they are protected and given the ISMAH or infallibility by Allah. Therefore, the narrations which contradict the concept of infallibility must be rejected. Incidentally, Salman Rushdie used these narrations as the underlying theme of his book called The Satanic Verses,

referring to the verses which were supposedly added to Surah Najm, due to the influence of Satan. We reject Rushdie, his book, and anyone who claims that Prophet Muhammad (saaws) was ever influenced by or put under the spell of magic or Satan. Anyone who claims that this is possible must realize that he is verifying and supporting the reprehensible idea put forward by Salman Rushdie.

When it comes to the Islamic Aqeedah and the issues related to it, it should be understood that there cannot be any doubtful idea or concept in it. Anything which contradicts with the Islamic Aqeedah has to be rejected, regardless of who reports it. Since the Prophet was in fact protected by Allah the Creator, it is impossible for any created thing to block or prevent the Messengers of Allah from delivering their message to the people to whom they were sent. This idea must be clearly understood, believed in, and carried by those who believe in the Aqeedah of Islam. Therefore the Mu'jizah (Miracles) and 'ISMAH (Infallibility) are issues related to the belief in Messengership and Prophethood, and any idea or narration which contradicts these issues must be rejected, and should not be believed in.

APPLICATION OF 'ISMAH TODAY

The concept of 'ISMAH is a prerequisite for only the messengers, prophets, and no one else besides these two. Some people claim that head of state, meaning the Imam or the Khalifah, must also have 'ISMAH. This claim is invalid since the "ISMAH was only for prophets and messengers, and there is a great difference between the Imam and Prophet. Prophets were given the mu'jiza (miracles) to prove their mission and 'ISMAH (infallibility) to protect the message. The Imam or the head of state, implements and applies the rules which emanated from the message, which was already delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (saaws).

Since the message was already delivered by Prophet Muhammad (saaws), there is no need for the Imam or the Head of State to have 'ISMAH, because the Imam or Head of State only implements and applies the Islamic rules. Therefore, the claim that the Imam or Head of State is infallible is absolutely false.

When the Prophet (saaws) was operating as a judge he would debate with the people and he said he is human just like them. As a judge he could have made a mistake, and also as a military leader. In every action he has two sides. As a head of state and prophet, judge and prophet, military leader and prophet. While doing these functions he can err but as a prophet he cannot err, consequently 'ISMAH is for prophethood side.

"The judges are three. Two in hell fire and one in paradise. Any judge that judges without knowledge and the judge who knows the truth and insists on judging the other way will be in the hellfire. However the judge in Jennah is who has Ilm."

"If the Qadi, Mujtahid issues a judgement and it is correct, it is equal to two ajran, and if he is wrong then he gets one, etc."

Prophet listened to a case about two persons who disputed a piece of land. In Prophet's judgement he said that each one of them knows better if the land was his or not. He told them that he would judge based on what he hears only. Jibraeel could have come to tell him the correct answer, but he did not and this set a precedent in judging for us.

In conclusion, the 'Ismah is for Prophets only. No Imam, Ali (ra) or others, were infallible, simply because 'Ismah is not needed for an Imam. We should put 'Ismah in its right context and stop labelling others with it or ascribing some attributes to the Prophets that contradict the 'Ismah.

by Iyad Hilal

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