

MLU1.2: Faith in Angels, Faith in Prophets, Faith in Books

Belief in God's Angels

This is the second article of Islamic faith and is very important; because it solves the concept of Tawhid from all impurities and frees it from the danger of every shadow of shirk (polytheism).

The polytheists have associated two kind of creatures with God: (a) Those which have material existence and are perceptible to the human eye, such as the sun, moon, stars, fire, water, animals, great men. (b) Those who have no material existence and are not perceptible to the human eye: the unseen beings who are believed to be engaged in the administration of the universe; for instance, one controls the air, another imparts light, another brings rains, and so on and so forth.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has informed us that these spiritual beings, whom people believe to be deities of God or God's children, are really His angels. They have no share in God's divinity; they cannot deviate from His commands even by the slightest fraction of an inch. God employs them to administer His Kingdom, and they carry out His orders exactly and accurately. They have no authority to do anything according to their will; they cannot present to God any scheme conceived by themselves, they are not even authorized to intercede with God for any man.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) forbade us to worship angels, and to associate them with God in His divinity. He also informed us that they were the chosen creatures of God, free from sin, from their very nature unable to disobey God, and ever engaged in carrying out His orders. Moreover, he informed us that these angels of God surround us from all sides, are attached to us, and are always in our company. They observe and note all our actions, good or bad. They preserve a complete record of every man's life. After death, when we shall be brought before God, they will present a full report of our life's work on earth, wherein we shall find everything correctly recorded, not a single movement left out, however insignificant and however carefully concealed it may be.

We have not been informed of the intrinsic nature of the angels. Only some of their virtues or attributes have been mentioned to us, and we have been asked to believe in their existence. We have no other means of knowing their nature, their attributes and their qualities. It would therefore, be not wise on our part to attribute any form or quality to them according to our will. We must believe in them exactly as we have been asked to do. To deny their existence is kufr for, first, we have no reason for a denial, and, second, our denial of them would be equal to attributing untruth to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). We believe in their existence only because God's true Messenger has informed us of it.

They are not divine or semi-divine, and they are not God's associates running different districts of the universe. Also, they are not objects to be worshipped or prayed to, as they do not deliver our prayers to God. They all submit to God and carry out His commands.

In the Islamic worldview, there are no fallen angels: they are not divided into 'good' and 'evil' angels. Human beings do not become angels after death. Satan is not a fallen angel, but is one of the *jinn*, a creation of God parallel to human beings and angels.

Angels were created from light before human beings were created, and thus their graphic or symbolic representation in Islamic art is rare. Nevertheless, they are generally beautiful beings with wings as described in Muslim scripture.

The greatest of them is Gabriel. The Prophet of Islam actually saw him in his original form. Also, the attendants of God's Throne are among the greatest angels. They love the believers and beseech God to forgive them their sins. They carry the Throne of God, about whom the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said:

"I have been given permission to speak about one of the angels of God who carry the Throne. The distance between his ear-lobes and his shoulders is equivalent to a seven-hundred-year journey." (Abu Daud)

They do not eat or drink. The angels do not get bored or tired of worshipping God:

"They celebrate His praises night and day, nor do they ever slacken." (Quran 21:20)

The Number of Angels

How many angels are there? Only God knows. The most sacred place is the Kaaba, the black cube in the city of Mecca. Every day seventy thousand angels visit it and leave, never returning to it again, followed by another group.

The Names of Angels

Muslims believe in specific angels mentioned in the Islamic sources like *Jibreel* (Gabriel), *Mika'eel* (Michael), *Israfeel*, *Malik* - the guard over Hell, and others. Of these, only Gabriel and Michael are mentioned in the Bible.

Angelic Abilities

The angels possess great powers given to them by God. They can take on different forms. The Muslim scripture describes how at the moment of Jesus' conception, God sent Gabriel to Lady Maryyam in the form of a man:

"...Then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects." (Quran 19:17)

Angels also visited Prophet Abraham in human form. Gabriel used to visit Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in different forms. Sometimes, he would appear in the form of one of his handsome disciples, and sometimes in the form of a desert Bedouin.

Angels have the ability to take human forms in some circumstances involving common people.

Gabriel is God's heavenly messenger to mankind. He would convey the revelation from God to His human messengers. God says:

"Say: whoever is an enemy to Gabriel - for he brings down the (revelation) to your heart by God's will..." (Quran 2:97)

Tasks of the Angels

Some angels are put in charge of executing God's law in the physical world. Michael (Mikael) is responsible for rain, directing it wherever God wishes. He has helpers who assist him by the command of his Lord; they direct the winds and clouds, as God wills. Another is responsible for blowing the Horn, which will be blown by *Israafeel* at the onset of the Day of

Judgment. Others are responsible for taking souls out of the bodies at the time of death: the Angel of Death and his assistants. God says:

“Say: the Angel of Death, put in charge of you, will (duly) take your souls, then shall you be brought back to your Lord.” (Quran 32:11)

Then there are guardian angels responsible for protecting the believer throughout his life, at home or traveling, asleep or awake.

Others are responsible for recording the deeds of man, good and bad. These are known as the “sacred scribes.”

Two angels, *Munkar* and *Nakeer*, are responsible for testing people in the grave.

Among them are keepers of Paradise and the nineteen ‘guards’ of Hell whose leader is named ‘*Malik*’.

There are also angels responsible for breathing the soul into the fetus and writing down its provisions, life-span, actions, and whether it will be miserable or happy.

Some angels are roamers, traveling around the world in search of gatherings where God is remembered. There are also angels constituting God’s heavenly army, standing in rows, they never get tired or sit down, and others who bow or prostrate, and never raise their heads, always worshipping God.

As we learn from above, the angels are the creation of God, varying in numbers, roles, and abilities. God is in no need of these creatures, but having knowledge and belief in them affirms our faith in God, in that He is able to create as He wishes, for indeed the magnificence of His creation is a proof of the magnificence of the Creator.

Faith in the Books of God

The third article of faith is faith in the Books of God; Books which He has sent down to mankind through His Prophets.

God had revealed His Books to His Prophets before Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and these books were sent down in the same way as He sent down the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). We have been informed of the names of some of these books: Books of Prophet Abraham, the Torah of Prophet Moses, Zabur (Psalms) of Prophet David, and the Injil (Gospel) of Prophet Jesus. We have not been informed of the names of Books which were given to other Prophets.

(1) Therefore, with regard to other existing religious books, we are not in a position to say with certainty whether they were originally revealed books or not.

(2) But we believe that whatever Books were sent down by God are all true.

(3) Of the Books we have been told, the Books of Prophet Abraham are extinct and not traceable in existing world literature. Prophet David's Zabur, the Torah and the Injil exist with the Jews and the Christians, but the Qur'an informs us that people have changed and added to these books, and God's words have mixed up with texts of their own making. This corruption of the Books has been so large and so evident that even the Jews and the Christians they admit that they do not possess their original texts, and have only their translations, which have been altered over many centuries and are still being changed.

(4) We have been commanded to believe in previously revealed Books only in the sense of admitting that, before the Qur'an, God had also sent down books through His Prophets, that they were all from one and the same God, the same God Who sent the Qur'an and that the

sending of the Qur'an as a Divine Book is not a new and strange event, but only confirms, restates and completes those divine instructions which people had lost in ancient times.

Even a study of the first books of the Old Testament and the four Gospels of the New Testament reveals that they are the productions of men and in these writings some parts of the original Psalms of David and the Gospels of Christ have been incorporated.

(5)The Qur'an is the last of the Divine Books sent down by God and there are some very important differences between it and the previous Books. These differences may briefly be stated as follows:

1. The original texts of most of the former Divine Books were lost altogether, and only translations exist today. The Quran, on the other hand, exists exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet; not a word, not a syllable of it -- has been changed. It is available in its original text and the word of God has been preserved for all time.

2. In the former Divine Books man mixed his words with God's, but in the Quran we find only the words of God -- and in their perfect purity. This is admitted even by the opponents of Islam.

3. In respect of no other sacred Book possessed by different people can it be said on the basis of authentic historical evidence that it really belongs to the same Prophet to whom it is attributed. In the case of some of them it is not even known in what age and to which Prophet they were revealed. As for the Quran, the evidence that it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is so huge, so convincing, so strong and so compelling that even the fiercest critics of Islam cannot cast doubt on it.

4. The former Divine Books were sent down in languages which died long ago. No nation or community now speaks those languages and there are only a few people who claim to understand them. Thus, even if the Books existed today in their original form, it would be virtually impossible in our age to correctly understand and interpret their injunctions and put them into practice in their required form. The language of the Quran, on the other hand, is a living language; millions of people speak it.

5. Each one of the existing sacred Books found among different nations of the world has been addressed to a particular people. Each one contains a number of commands which seem to have been meant for a particular period of history and which meet the needs of that age only. They are neither needed today, nor can they now be smoothly and properly put into practice. It is evident from this that these Books were particularly meant for that particular people and not for the world. Furthermore, they were not sent to be followed permanently by even the people they were intended for; they were meant to be acted upon only for a certain period. In contrast to this, the Quran is addressed to all mankind; not a single injunction of it can be suspected as having been addressed to a particular people. In the same manner, all the commands and injunctions in the Quran can be acted upon at any place and in any age. This proves that the Quran is meant for the whole world, and is an eternal code for human life.

6. There is no denying the fact that the previous divine Books are also good and virtue; they also taught the principles of morality and truthfulness and presented the mode of living which was to God's pleasure. But none of them was comprehensive enough to embrace all that is necessary for a virtuous human life. Some of them excelled, in one respect, others in some other. The Qur'an is the sole book that contains all of the teachings of the previous books and perfects Allah's way, presenting it in its whole. It also establishes a code of living that includes everything that is required of man in this world.

FAITH IN GOD'S PROPHETS

Q: What's the difference between a Nabi and a Rasool?

A: Imam Fakhruddin Raazi has explained the differences between a Rasool (prophet) and a Nabi (messenger). A Rasool is one who has performed miracles and has received a new Divine book. He establishes a new code of law (Shar'iah) and invalidates the previous code of law and book. He has also visibly seen the angel that comes with the Divine message, and the Rasool is commanded to invite the people towards the Deen.

A Nabi is one who is not given a new book, but rather establishes the book which was revealed to the Rasool before him. He does not invalidate the book and the code of law which was in practice before him. He sees the angel in a dream or the Rasool of the time informs him that he has been chosen as a Nabi. (Tafseer Raazi V1 p3212, Mafaateehul Ghayb V23 p43)

All the Messengers of God belong to the same category and on a par with each other. If a man confirms and believes in one of them, he must and ought to confirm all. The reason is quite simple. Suppose ten men make one and the same statement; if you admit one of them to be true, you admit the remaining nine of them as true, and if you disprove anyone of them, by implication you disprove all of them.

It occurs in traditions that the total number of all the prophets sent to different peoples at different times is 124,000. We have to believe positively in those of the prophets whose names have been mentioned in the Qur'an. Regarding the rest we are instructed to believe that all Prophets sent by God for the guidance of mankind were true. Thus we believe in all the prophets raised in India, China, Iran, Egypt, Africa, Europe, and other countries of the world, but we are not in a position to be definite about a particular person outside the list of prophets named in the Qur'an, whether or not he was a Prophet, for we have not been told anything definite about him. Nor are we permitted to say anything against the holy men of other religions. It is quite possible that some of them might have been God's Prophets, that some of them might have been God's Prophets, and their followers corrupted their teachings after their demise, just as the followers of Moses and Jesus (God's blessings be upon them) have done. Therefore, whenever we express any opinion about them, it would be about the principles and rituals of their religions; as for the founders of those religions, we will remain silent, lest we could become guilty of disrespecting towards a Prophet.

As for the fact of being Prophets of God and having been deputed by Him for teaching the same straight path of 'Islam,' there is no difference between Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and other Prophets (God's blessings be upon them all), we have been ordered to believe in all of them alike. But in spite of their equality in this respect, there are the following three differences between Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and other Prophets (God's blessings be upon them all):

1. The Prophets of the past had come to certain people for certain periods of time, while Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been sent for the whole world and for all times to come.
2. The teachings of those Prophets have either disappeared altogether from the world, or whatever of them remains is not pure, and is found intermingled with many wrong and fictitious statements. For this reason even if anyone wishes to follow their teachings, he cannot do so. In contrast to this, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his biography, his conversation, his ways of living, his morals, habits, and virtues, in short, all the details of his life and work, are preserved. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), therefore, is the only one of the whole line of Prophets who is a living personality, and in whose footsteps it is possible to follow correctly and confidently.

3. The guidance imparted through the Prophets of the past was not complete and all-embracing. Every Prophet was followed by another who effected alterations and additions in the teachings and injunctions of his predecessors and, in this way, the chain of reforms and progress continued. That is why the teachings of the earlier Prophets, after the lapse of a certain period of time, were lost in darkness. Obviously there was no need of preserving former teachings when amended and improved guidance had taken their place. At last the most perfect code of guidance was passed on to mankind through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and all previous codes were automatically invalidated, for it is useless to follow an incomplete code while the complete code exists. He who follows Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) follows all the Prophets, for whatever was good and eternally workable in their teaching has been embodied in his teachings. Whoever, therefore, rejects and refuses to follow Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s teachings and chooses to follow some other Prophet, only deprives himself of that vast amount of useful and valuable instruction and guidance in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s teachings.

That is why it is now obligatory upon each and every human being to have faith in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and follow him alone. To become a true Muslim (a follower of the Prophet's way of life) it is necessary to have complete faith in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) be and to affirm that:

- a. He is a true Prophet of God;
- b. His teachings are absolutely perfect, free from any defect or error;
- c. He is the Last Prophet of God. After him no Prophet will appear among any people till the Day of Judgment.

The Finality of Prophethood

This brings us to the question of the finality of the Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). We have already discussed the nature of Prophethood and this discussion makes it clear that the advent of a prophet is not an everyday occurrence. Nor is the presence in person of the Prophet essential for every land, people and period. The life and teachings of the Prophet is the light to guide the people to the right path, and as long as his teachings and his guidance are alive he is, as it were, himself alive. The real death of a Prophet consists not in his physical death but in the ending of the influence of his teachings. The earlier Prophets have died because their followers have change their teachings, distorted their instructions, and corrupted their life examples by attaching fictitious events to them. Not one of the earlier books — Torah, Zabur (Psalms of David), Injl (Gospel of Jesus), for example, exists today in its original text and even the followers of these books confess that they do not possess the original books. The life histories of the earlier Prophets have been so mixed up with fiction that an accurate and authentic account of their lives has become impossible. Their lives have become tales and legends and no trustworthy record is available anywhere. It cannot even be said with certainty when and where a certain Prophet was born, how he lived and what code of morality he gave to mankind. Thus, the real death of a Prophet consists in the death of his teachings. By this criterion no one can deny that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his teachings are alive. His teachings stand uncorrupted and are incorruptible. The Qur'an is the book he gave to mankind exists in its original text, without a word, syllable or even letter having been changed. The entire account of his life, his sayings, instructions and actions are preserved with complete accuracy. It is as though it all happened yesterday rather than thirteen centuries ago. The biography of no other human being is as detailed as that of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Prophet of Islam.

In everything affecting our lives we can seek the guidance of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the example of his life. That is why there is no need of any other Prophet after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Furthermore, there are three conditions, which necessitate the arrival of a new Prophet over and above the need to replace a deceased Prophet. These may be summed up as follows:

1. That the teachings of the earlier Prophets have been distorted or corrupted or they have died and their revival is needed.
 2. That the teachings of the Prophet who has passed away were incomplete and it is necessary to amend them, improve on them or add something to them.
 3. That the earlier Prophet was raised for a particular nation or territory and a Prophet for another nation, people or country is required,
- None of these conditions exist today.

The teachings of the last Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are alive, have been fully preserved and made immortal. The guidance he has shown unto mankind is complete and flawless, and is present in the Holy Qur'an.

Secondly, God has completed His revealed guidance through the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Islam is a complete religion for mankind. God has said that, "Today I have perfected your Faith – religion, for you, and have completed my bounty upon you," and a thorough study of Islam as a complete way of life proves the truth of these Qur'anic words. Islam gives guidance for life in this world and in the hereafter and nothing essential for human guidance has been left out. There is no ground for new Prophethood on the statement of imperfection. (As Some people say that the passage of time itself is a sufficient ground for the need of new guidance, and a religion, which was revealed some thirteen centuries ago, must necessarily grow obsolete and become a thing of the past. The objection is totally unfounded. The reasons may be briefly stated as follows:

(a) Islam's teachings are eternal, because they have been revealed by Allah Who knows all the past, present and future and Who Himself is eternal. It is the human knowledge that is limited, not God whose knowledge is above all the limitations of time and space.

(b) Islam is based on human nature, and the nature of man has remained the same in all times. All men are cast in the moulds of the earliest men and fundamental human nature remains unchanged.

(c) In human life there is a beautiful balance between permanence and change. Neither is everything permanent, nor is everything changeable. The fundamental principles, the basic values, do not invite change. And Islam has catered for the needs of both permanence and change. The timeless principles of Islam suggested by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and they are applied to each period based on its unique needs through ijtihad. The only religion that has put mechanisms in place to ensure that human society develops in line with the core ideas and enduring values of life is Islam.

(d) According to science, the human race is currently living in the era that was brought in by the discovery of life on Earth, and there hasn't been a significant evolutionary shift at this stage of our existence. There have been emergence and collapse of empires, growth and fading of cultures, and rise and fall of civilizations. However, the age does not change within the grand scheme of cosmic evolution. Thus, it is incorrect and superficial to believe that advice that was offered centuries ago necessarily becomes outdated.

Lastly, the Message of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not meant for any particular people, place or period. He was raised as the World Prophet, the messenger of truth for the whole of mankind. The Qur'an has commanded Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to declare: "O mankind. I am God's Messenger to all of you." He has been described as "a blessing for all (the people of) the world" and his approach has been universal and human. That is why after him there remains no need for new Prophethood and he, has been described by the Qur'an as Khatam-an-Nabiyyin (the last of the chain of the true prophets) The Holy Prophet himself has said: "There will be no prophet after me. "On another occasion he said: "My relation to the (long chain of the) Prophets can be understood by the parable of a palace: the palace was most beautifully built. Everything was complete therein except the place for one brick. I have filled in that place and now the castle has been completed" (ride Bukhari and Muslim).

The only source, therefore, for the knowledge of God and His Way is Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). We can know of Islam only through his teachings, which are so complete and so comprehensive that they can guide men through all ages to come. The world does not need a new prophet; it needs only such people as have full faith in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to become the standard-bearers of his message, propagate it throughout the world, and make effort to establish the culture which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave to man. The world needs such men of character as can translate his teachings into practice and establish a society which is governed by Divine Law, whose supremacy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came to establish. This is the mission of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and on its success hinges the success of Man.