

## STIRRING UP THE INTELLECT

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**Abstract:** *Many rational understandings are inherently embedded in human nature and, at the same time, require actualization. According to religious texts, one of the duties of divine prophets is to actualize the potential of innate intellect. Revelation takes various approaches to actualize intellect, such as promoting knowledge, providing directed topics, highlighting the pitfalls of reason, and clarifying its limitations. The present article explains and elaborates on this role of revelation, which is referred to in the traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) as "stirring up".*

**Keywords:** *Stirring up intellects, Treasures of intellects, Limitations of reason, Monotheism, Messengership of the Prophets.*

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## **Introduction**

Some topics in the science of theology are established through reason alone, leaving no room for reliance on revelation, such as the discussion on the existence of God. Other theological issues are such that they necessarily require the use of revelation, like many subsidiary beliefs and detailed aspects of doctrines, including the specifics of the Day of Judgment and the manner of resurrection. There are also some matters that can be proven both by reason and by revelation, such as the fundamental concept of resurrection, which can be demonstrated through rational arguments or can be understood through the words of the prophets after establishing prophethood. In this way, one of the functions of revelation in doctrinal matters can be seen as its independent role. Besides this significant function, revelation has other applications as well. Revelation can influence other human sources of knowledge and enrich them. It can revive the innate knowledge of God that has been forgotten. According to many verses and traditions, human beings possess innate recognition of God and have directly perceived Him, but this knowledge has since been forgotten. The divine prophets remind humanity of this forgotten recognition and covenant. This function of revelation can be referred to as the influence of revelation on human nature. Furthermore, revelation can impact the faculty of reason, fostering its growth and development. Religious sources and texts also consider one of the duties of divine prophets to be the stirring or awakening of the hidden recognition within humans. This function refers to the influence of revelation on reason. The present writing examines this particular function of revelation.

## **The Need for Reason to Rely on Revelation**

In the famous sermon of Nahj al-Balagha, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) describes one of the duties of divine prophets as "stirring up the hidden treasures of intellect":

فَبَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولَهُ وَوَاتَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْبِيَاءَهُ لِيَسْتَأْذِنُوا لَهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ، وَ يُذَكِّرُوا لَهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ نِعْمَتِهِ،  
وَ حَنْجُوا عَلَيْهِمْ بِالنَّبِيلِغِ، وَ يُبَيِّرُوا لَهُمْ دَفَائِنَ الْعُقُولِ<sup>1</sup>

"So He sent among them His messengers, and He sent forth to them His prophets one after another, to make them fulfil the covenant of their nature, to remind them of His forgotten blessings, to use the act of delivering His messages as a means of completing the argument against them, and to stir up the hidden treasures of intellects within them."

In this sermon, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) employs a delicate and beautiful metaphor, likening the gems of intellect and the fruits of thought within the human being, which exist in a potential state, to hidden treasures. He describes the prophets as those who prepare souls and extract and manifest the gems of human thought, attributing the awakening of ideas to them, a role that is perfectly aligned with the position of prophethood.<sup>2</sup> In reality, the Imam portrays humans as beings with hidden treasures of intellect and lights of recognition within them, which require someone to stir them so that these buried secrets can be brought to light. This stirring is the action of the prophets. Therefore, in this context, the prophets play a role of reminder, not of imposing new beliefs; because, in such cases, every principle and recognition that the prophet seeks to impart has already been placed in human nature by divine decree, though the individual may be unaware of it and may not become conscious of it without being reminded. Ayatollah Subhani uses an analogy to explain this concept, saying: The example of the prophets is like that of a farmer who, although not the creator of the fruit on the tree, waters the land and prepares it so that the tree may bear fruit. Similarly, the

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<sup>1</sup>Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 1; Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 11, p. 6

<sup>2</sup>Bahrani, Sharh Nahj al-Balagha, Vol. 2, p. 202; Amuli, Tafsir al-Muhit al-Azam wal-Bahr al-Khadam, Vol. 2, p. 306; Motahhari, Collected Works, Vol. 3, pp. 607-608.

prophets, through their divine teachings, prepare humans so that they can reveal what they have learned in the school of innate nature.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, divine recognition is inherently present in human nature in a potential form, but it is veiled by layers of darkness, and the divine prophets unveil this recognition.<sup>4</sup> The existence of this potential and innate capability is explicitly mentioned in Qur'anic verses, such as:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا. فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا. قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ رَزَقَهَا. وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا<sup>5</sup>

"By the soul and He who proportioned it. And inspired it with [discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness. He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it."

Many commentators believe that God has endowed humans with the ability to discern good from evil, and benefit from harm, which is referred to as reason. Additionally, God has inspired humans with certain aspects related to their individual and social life, which is referred to as innate disposition (fitrah). These two factors govern the rules and principles that guide human behaviour and shape human society. However, over time, these rational principles and innate dispositions may become distorted or weakened, rendering humans incapable of solving their own problems. This is where the need for divine messengers arises, to stir the hidden intellects and guide them towards prosperity.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the proportioning of the soul means that all the

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<sup>3</sup>Refer to: Subhani, Al-Ilahiyyat 'Ala Huda al-Kitab wal-Sunna wal-Aql, Vol. 3, pp. 44-46; also, Al-Fikr al-Khalid fi Bayan al-Aqa'id, Vol. 1, pp. 160-161.

<sup>4</sup>Mousavi Sabzewari, Mawaheb al-Rahman fi Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 3, p. 262 and Vol. 4, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup>Surah Al-Shams, Verses 1-7

<sup>6</sup>Refer to: Mawaheb al-Rahman fi Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 4, p. 456; Ibn Ashur, Al-Tahrir wal-Tanwir, Vol. 30, p. 326; Najafi Khomeini, Tafsir Asan, Vol. 18, p. 294; Tafsir Ibn Arabi, Vol. 1, p. 435; Husayni Shah Abd al-Azimi, Tafsir Ithna Ashari, Vol. 18, p. 229;

necessary faculties for happiness have been placed within humans, both external and internal faculties. Alongside these faculties, all forms of good and evil, benefit and harm, happiness and misery, beauty and ugliness have been inspired in them. Through reason, they can distinguish between what is good and what is bad. With the sending of the prophets, God's argument upon His servants is completed, leaving no room for excuses or justifications.<sup>7</sup>

At times, objections are raised against the role of the prophets in stirring up human intellect, with some arguing that God has endowed every human with reason, which itself motivates good actions and restrains from evil deeds. Moreover, all forms of recognitions exist within human nature in a potential state. Thus, this reason alone is sufficient for the growth and development of human potential, serving as both a motivator and a restraining force. According to this view, prophets merely perform the same role, making the sending of prophets unnecessary. Various responses have been given to this objection.

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Qarashi, *Tafsir Ahsan al-Hadith*, Vol. 12, p. 245; Mughniya, *Tafsir al-Kashif*, Vol. 7, p. 571; Zuhayli, *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-Aqida wal-Sharia wal-Manhaj*, Vol. 30, pp. 259-260; Hijazi, *Al-Tafsir al-Wadih*, Vol. 3, pp. 868-869; Tantawi, *Al-Tafsir al-Wasit lil-Quran al-Karim*, Vol. 3, pp. 2883-2884; Amili, *Tafsir Amili*, Vol. 8, p. 584; Nishapuri, *Tafsir Gharib al-Quran waRaghayeb al-Furqan*, Vol. 9, p. 508; Fadlullah, *Tafsir Min Wahy al-Quran*, Vol. 24, p. 283; Sabzewari Najafi, *Al-Jadid fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Majid*, Vol. 7, p. 374; Shadhili, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, Vol. 5, p. 3917-3918; Amin, *Makhzan al-Irfan dar Tafsir al-Quran*, Vol. 15, p. 153; Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, Vol. 31, p. 177; Haeri Tehrani, *Muqniyat al-Durar waMultaqat al-Thamar*, Vol. 2, p. 157; Tabataba'i, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Quran*, Vol. 20, pp. 297-298.

<sup>7</sup>Tib, *Atiyab al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Quran*, Vol. 14, p. 130; Makarem Shirazi, *Al-Amthal fi Tafsir Kitab Allah al-Munzal*, Vol. 20, p. 235-236; Husayni Hamadani, *Anwar Darakhshan*, Vol. 18, p. 94-95 andp. 163-164.

Ayatollah Mirza Mahdi Esfahani (mercy be upon him) believes that, in reality, matters can be divided into two categories: The first category consists of things that no human reason, not even that of the Seal of the Prophets (peace be upon him and his progeny), can independently grasp in terms of their goodness or vileness. The second category consists of rational independents (al-mustaqillat al-‘aqliyyah), which, although not all people can comprehend entirely, a fully developed reason can grasp. Other people, to varying degrees, can understand these matters, especially after the prophets have removed obstacles and cultivated human reason, enabling them to comprehend all these aspects.<sup>8</sup>

In reality, human intellects do not have complete awareness even of rational independents; rather, they exist in degrees, with the highest level of awareness belonging to the fully developed intellect, exemplified by the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his progeny), the other prophets, and the Imams (peace be upon them). Therefore, by nurturing reason and removing barriers, the prophets enable humanity to succeed in understanding even these independent rational concepts. This highlights the crucial role of the prophets in stirring up and developing human intellect.

Allamah Tabataba’i, in response to the aforementioned objection, believes that although it is practical reason (as opposed to theoretical reason) that invites humans to follow the righteous, the foundations of practical reason are inner feelings. Among these inner feelings, the ones that become active first in humans are the appetitive and irascible faculties, unlike the rational faculty, which is potential and, therefore, subject to differences and unable to issue a unified judgement. Consequently, the rational faculty, being in a potential state, is not effective, and what is active (i.e., practical reason

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<sup>8</sup>Refer to: Bani Hashemi, "Reason from the Perspective of Mirza Isfahani," Sarchashmeh Hikmat, Essays on Reason, p. 302-305.

and the appetitive and irascible faculties) cannot bring reason from a potential state to an active one. Thus, the prophets were sent to stir up intellects and actualize reason.<sup>9</sup>A similar view is expressed in the commentary Mawahib al-Rahman:

If reason is considered in isolation, without being engaged and influenced by material thoughts and emotions arising from the appetitive and irascible faculties, it would undoubtedly be sufficient to guide humans, for reason is a divine light. But where can such a pure reason be found? Yes, this state applies to potential reason, while the actualized reason is mixed with material thoughts and earthly emotions, so it cannot independently and without divine support lead one to happiness. For this reason, ignorant peoples and different groups, despite possessing reason, are led astray. Moreover, if human perfection were only worldly, perhaps relying solely on reason would make sense. However, spiritual perfections, which lead to happiness in both this world and the hereafter, are attainable only through divine means.<sup>10</sup>

It is based on this principle that Shaykh Mufid believes that reason needs revelation and the prophets to learn how to reason correctly, from the very beginning to the present day.<sup>11</sup>

### **Methods of Stirring the Intellect**

We mentioned that humans require those who can awaken them to unveil the treasures and hidden depths of their intellect. Now, the question arises: how is this awakening of the intellect accomplished? What did the

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<sup>9</sup>Refer to: Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 2, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup>Mawaheb al-Rahman fi Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 3, p. 277-278.

<sup>11</sup>Refer to: Mufid, Awail al-Maqalat fi al-Madhabihwa al-Mukhtarāt, p. 44; Tustari, Bahj al-Sabaghah fi Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Vol. 2, p. 31.

prophets do to reveal the hidden resources within the depths of human existence? How can the intellect be awakened? Revelation employs various methods to awaken intellects and bring hearts to fruition. Some of the divine methods for revitalising intellects and nurturing hearts are as follows:

### **1. Fostering Knowledge**

Sometimes revelation provides the grounds for the growth of knowledge, thereby enabling the intellect to develop and reach its full potential. To achieve this, it employs various methods, including:

#### **A. Presenting Minor Premises for Major Rational Principles:**

Humans possess certain innate and intuitive understandings. Some forms of knowledge are embedded within their nature. Among these innate and self-evident understandings are principles such as the need of a creator for the creation, a cause for every effect, the necessity of gratitude to a benefactor, the avoidance of potential harm, the wrongness of injustice, and the goodness of justice. These principles and propositions do not require logical arguments, but major self-evident principles remain ineffective unless applied to specific instances. Knowledge is the result of combining these general principles with specific examples and premises. This is why it is said that reason alone is of little utility; with it, one can only grasp generalities like the goodness of justice, the goodness of truthfulness, and the wrongness of injustice. However, the Sharia (Islamic law) provides both the generalities and the specifics. Reason becomes enriched in the light of Sharia.<sup>12</sup>

The Sharia can elucidate the specific instances and applications of these general principles. For example, through rational understanding, one can realise that gratitude is due to God, the Wise, who has bestowed many

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<sup>12</sup>Sufi Tabrizi, *Minhaj al-Wilayah fi Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, Vol. 1, p. 247.



blessings upon us. Yet, many people may not know how to properly express this gratitude, and they might consider objects as intermediaries to God and worship them in gratitude! Idolaters, too, believed that worshipping idols would bring them closer to God.<sup>13</sup>

Innate reason understands the need for a creator for a creation, but in identifying specific instances, it sometimes needs the guidance of Sharia to assist. For example, Imam Reza (peace be upon him) was asked about the reason for the contingency of the world, to which he replied: "You did not exist before, and then you were born. Thus, you did not create yourself, and someone who shares the attribute of being contingent with you is not your creator either."<sup>14</sup>

**B. Presenting Directional Topics:** The Sharia (Islamic law) cultivates the intellect by encouraging humans to reflect on various sources of knowledge, such as the human soul, the universe, the Quran, history, and life experiences. For instance, the verse

سُنُرِيهِمْ ءَايَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَّبِعِنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ<sup>15</sup>

"We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth" invites humans to contemplate the universe and their own souls, leading them to recognize the existence of the Almighty God. Similarly, the verse

كَتَبْنَا أَنزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِّيَدَّبَّرُوا ءَايَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Subhani, Al-Ilahiyyat 'Ala Huda al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Aql, Vol. 3, p. 60; Bahj al-Sabaghah fi Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Vol. 2, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup>Ibn Babawayh, Al-Tawhid, p. 293; also, Uyun Akhbar al-Rida, Vol. 1, p. 134; Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 3, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup>Surah Fussilat, Verse 53.

"A blessed Book which We have revealed to you, that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded" encourages believers to reflect on the Quran and its verses, so they may embrace guidance.

Additionally, in the verse

فَأَقْصِبْ الْآقْصِبَ كَلَّمُ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ<sup>17</sup>

"So relate the stories that perhaps they will give thought", God advises the study of the fate of previous nations and the reflection on history and the end of the arrogant and rebellious, so that the intellect may flourish. Teachings such as "Sufficient are experiences as a teacher"<sup>18</sup> also guide one toward the path of happiness.

The Sharia, besides encouraging reflection on sources of recognition, sometimes places certain topics before the intellect, preparing the ground for activating rationality within humans. Among these directed topics are matters such as God, monotheism, prophethood, the immortality of the soul, free will, Imamate, and the details of the path to happiness.<sup>19</sup> Here's how:

## **Monotheism**

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<sup>16</sup>Surah Sad, Verse 29.

<sup>17</sup>Surah Al-A'raf, Verse 176.

<sup>18</sup>Amidi, Tasneef Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim, p. 444.

<sup>19</sup>Hashimi Khui, Minhaj al-Bara'ah fi Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Vol. 2, p. 151; Wahid, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Vol. 2, pp. 131-132; Nawab Lahiji, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 20; Sufi Tabrizi, Minhaj al-Wil'Verse fi Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Vol. 1, p. 245; Mousavi, Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Vol. 1, p. 43; Amuli, Tafsir al-Muhit al-Azam wal-Bahr al-Khaddam, Vol. 2, p. 306.

The Qur'an illustrates the story of Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and his debate with the idolaters. To make them aware of their error, Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) broke the idols and placed the axe on the shoulder of the largest idol. When the idolaters saw this scene, they questioned Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him). He replied, "The largest idol did this; ask him if he can reply!"

فَرَجَعُوا إِلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ فَقَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ أَنْتُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ<sup>20</sup>

“Then, they returned to themselves and said, "Indeed, it is you who are the wrongdoers." This statement by Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) made them reflect, and internally they admitted their error. In fact, Prophet Ibrahim's (peace be upon him) debate with them was to revive their innate reason so that they would think within themselves and submit to the truth; although, not all of them achieved this success and some persisted in their erroneous ways.

The Qur'an also narrates another debate of Ibrahim (peace be upon him) with the idolaters,<sup>21</sup> which serves as a wake-up call to human reason. To show that the moon, stars, and sun are creations and not creators, Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) accompanied the polytheists and, upon seeing the stars, said, "This is my lord!" But when the stars set, he criticised the worship of transient and disappearing gods and said, "I do not worship those that set." He repeated this excellent argument concerning the moon and the sun to remind the polytheists of the obvious and innate truth that something transient and perishable cannot be the creator and giver of existence.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Surah Al-Anbiya, Verse 64.

<sup>21</sup>Surah Al-An'am, Verses 76-82.

<sup>22</sup>Surah Ta-Ha, Verses 95-98.

Furthermore, the Holy Qur'an repeatedly reminds us of the judgement of innate reason concerning the One God and states: if there were gods other than the One God in the heavens and the earth, certainly both the heavens and the earth would have been ruined.<sup>23</sup> In this reasoning, the Qur'an uses evident truths and appeals to the knowledge hidden within human intellects, making it easy to accept and difficult to deny.

### **Prophethood**

In addition to warning and raising awareness about monotheism and cleansing minds of idolatry and superstition, the prophets must also be able to prove their prophethood to the people. People will only follow someone who claims to be a messenger if they are certain that the individual has a connection with God and is not a false claimant. For this reason, throughout all eras, when someone claimed prophethood, clear and irrefutable evidence was demanded. The divine prophets did not refuse these requests and sometimes fulfilled them. One of the clearest and most undeniable forms of evidence is the presentation of miracles. When prophets bring miracles, they prepare the grounds for the intellectual acceptance of the people so that their innate reason recognizes the prophethood and message of the prophets. Mulla Sadra believes that the demonstration of miracles is one of the ways to awaken the intellect, because the intellect only listens to the reasoning of another intellect and ceases to deny and make excuses when it submits to that reasoning. The demonstration of miracles is one of the methods and premises that lead to the subjugation of the intellect and the acknowledgment of prophethood. Thus, with the arrival of a miracle, the minor premise of the intellectual judgement is established, and the intellect rules in favour of the

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<sup>23</sup>Surah Al-Anbiya, Verse 22.

prophethood of the claimant, leading to the acceptance of and obedience to him, which in turn brings about salvation.<sup>24</sup>

### **Imamate**

The narration of Hisham ibn Hakam's debate with Amr ibn Ubayd is an example of guiding reason in the matter of Imamate. Hisham—according to his own account—learned the principles of this debate from Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him). He recounts his debate with Amr to the Imam as follows:

One day, I attended Amr's teaching circle and asked him for permission to ask a question. Amr said, "Ask." I asked, "Do you have eyes?" He said, "What kind of question is this?" I said, "Please just answer my question." He said, "Ask, though your question isn't a sensible one." I asked, "Do you have eyes?" He replied, "Yes." I asked, "What do you do with your eyes?" He said, "I see colours and people with them." I asked, "What do you do with your nose?" He said, "I smell with it." I asked about his mouth, and he said, "I taste flavours with it." I asked about his ears, and he said, "I hear sounds with them." Finally, I asked, "Do you also have a heart and reason?" He said, "Yes." I asked, "What do you do with your heart and reason?" He said, "I evaluate the perceptions of my five senses with them." I said, "Aren't your other senses sufficient by themselves?" He said, "No." I asked, "Why not? Aren't they healthy?" He said, "When I doubt something I have seen, smelled, or heard, I refer to my heart and thus reach certainty." I said, "So, the heart is there to resolve the doubts of your senses?" He said, "Yes." I said, "So how could God, who has provided anleader for your healthy senses to

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<sup>24</sup>Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Sharh Usul al-Kafi*, Vol. 1, p. 75.

assess your sensory perceptions, leave His creations in confusion and doubt without a leader and guide?"<sup>25</sup>

This reasoning prepares the ground for Amr to recognize his mistake and humbles him before Hisham's argument, leaving him unable to respond.

### **Resurrection**

A man who denied the resurrection and the Day of Judgment came to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) with a decayed bone in his hand. He crushed it in front of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) until it turned to dust and fell to the ground. Then he asked, "Who can resurrect this bone on the Day of Judgment after it has decayed and disintegrated?"<sup>26</sup> God revealed to His Prophet: Say, the same One who created it in the first place. Can the One who created the heavens and the earth not create the likes of them? In reality, through this reasoning, God directs him to the judgement of his own intellect. These verses are among the best and clearest examples of direct reasoning about resurrection and the enlightenment of innate reason.

**Question:** The previous examples are more rational in nature than revelatory. Can human reason not arrive at these answers without revelation?

**Answer:** There are two approaches to defining rational and scriptural (revelatory) evidence. Fayadh Lahiji defines rational evidence as that which indicates the truth of the desired conclusion without relying on any revelation; therefore, all its premises must be rational. Scriptural evidence, on the other hand, is that which relies on revelation, whether all its premises are scriptural or only some are scriptural and others rational. Hence, definitive scriptural evidence is that in which the scriptural premise is either a

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<sup>25</sup>Kulaini, Al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 170.

<sup>26</sup>Surah Ya-Sin, Verses 72-77.

fundamental religious truth or leads to such a truth; just as definitive rational evidence is that in which all the premises are either necessary truths or lead to necessary truths.<sup>27</sup>

Although this definition is one of the common definitions for rational and scriptural evidence, and at first glance, this is the meaning that comes to mind, another definition can also be offered. As Shaykh Mufid says in *Awā'il al-Maqālāt*:

وَاتَّفَقَتِ الْإِمَامِيَّةُ عَلَى أَنَّ الْعَقْلَ يَحْتَاجُ فِي عِلْمِهِ وَنَتَائِجِهِ إِلَى السَّمْعِ وَأَنَّهُ غَيْرُ مُنْفَكٍّ عَنِ السَّمْعِ  
يُنْبِئُهُ الْعَاقِلُ عَلَى كَيْفِيَّةِ الْاسْتِدْلَالِ وَأَنَّهُ لَا بَدَّ فِي أَوَّلِ التَّكْلِيفِ وَابْتِدَائِهِ فِي الْعَالَمِ مِنْ رَسُولٍ

"The Imamiyyah agreed that reason requires the assistance of revelation in its knowledge and results, and that it is inseparable from revelation, which guides the rational person on how to reason. Therefore, at the beginning of the world and the start of responsibility, a messenger is necessary."<sup>28</sup>

From this statement, one can infer that revelation has a broader meaning and even applies to the messenger himself, whether the messenger of God presents a rational argument, a supra-rational one, or manifests a creative act. Thus, miracles or traditions containing rational arguments are not outside the domain of scriptural evidence. Given this broader meaning of revelation, religious texts on beliefs can be classified into four categories:

**1. Guidance:** Reason can independently arrive at a conclusion without the help of religious law.

**2. Reminder:** This involves reminding a person of things they have previously understood through their heart, reason, or senses, but have

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<sup>27</sup>Gouhar-e-Murad, p. 400.

<sup>28</sup>Awail al-Maqalat fi al-Madhahibwal-Mukhtarāt, p. 44

forgotten. This reminder may be about something one could recall without religious law or not; in religious language, this reminder is often related to a part of the innate knowledge of God.

**3. Teaching:** The understanding of certain matters requires a teacher, but after learning, the individual can comprehend other related issues independently.

**4. Submission:** These are matters that reason cannot grasp except through submission to revelation, particularly after believing in the existence of God and prophethood.<sup>29</sup>

## **2. Identifying the Pitfalls of Reason**

There are times when reason, due to various factors, deviates from its proper path or its potential is stifled by various barriers, allowing emotions driven by base desires or anger to take its place. Religious law (Shari‘a) can identify these pitfalls and guide reason back to its rightful course. This guidance can take various forms, including:

### **1. Eliminating Incorrect Assumptions:**

Sometimes, due to various factors, an individual forms a presumption and considers it to be certain and correct, even building beliefs upon it. These incorrect assumptions can lead to doubt or even denial of certain true beliefs. Through warning and awareness, religious law can help a person recognize their error in these presumptions and thereby foster the growth and flourishing of reason. This approach is observed in one of the debates between Imam Baqir (peace be upon him) and the Khawarij regarding the

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<sup>29</sup>Berenjkar, "Methodology of Ilm al-Kalam: Method of Deriving from Religious Texts," p. 108-109.



visibility of God. Abdullah ibn Sinan narrates from his father that he was with Imam Baqir (peace be upon him) when a Kharijite asked him, "Who is your Lord?" He replied, "Allah." The man asked, "Do you see Him?" The Imam replied, "Yes, but not with the physical eye, rather with the eye of the heart that is enlightened by the truths of faith. He is not known through analogy and is not similar to His creation. He is described by His signs and recognized through His proofs; He does not wrong in His judgement, and there is no deity other than Him." The narrator says the Kharijite left, saying, "God knows best where to place His message!"<sup>30</sup>

The question about whether God can be seen arises from the incorrect presumption that a deity must be visible. The Imam, in his response, points out the error and reminds the questioner of the inherent reasoning of their innate intellect. As a result, the questioner is satisfied and acknowledges the Imam's wisdom. Another such incorrect presumption can be seen in the fundamental beliefs of the Khawarij, which Imam Baqir (peace be upon him) sought to correct, opening their eyes to their mistakes. Nafi' ibn Azraq approached Imam Baqir (peace be upon him) and asked him about what is lawful and what is forbidden. In response, the Imam said to Nafi', "Ask the 'Māriqīn' (the Khawarij) how they justified separating themselves from the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him), even though most of them fought alongside him for the sake of God and died in his ranks, before the incident of arbitration. They will say that he submitted to arbitration in God's religion. Then tell them: God Himself accepted the arbitration of two men from His servants in the matter of discord between a husband and wife in the religion of His Prophet...<sup>31</sup> And likewise, the Prophet of God (peace be upon him and his progeny) entrusted the arbitration in the matter of the Banu

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<sup>30</sup>Tabarsi, Al-Ihtijaj, Vol. 2, p. 157.

<sup>31</sup>Surah An-Nisa, Verse 35.

Qurayza to Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, and God ratified his judgment. Do you not know that the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) instructed the two arbiters to judge according to the Qur'an and stipulated that it should not be contrary to the Qur'an? When they said to him, 'You have appointed someone to judge who may rule against you,' he replied, 'I did not appoint a servant to judge, rather I chose the Book of God to judge....'<sup>32</sup>

The Khawarij, with the assumption that any arbitration other than that of God was tantamount to disbelief, declared the Commander of the Faithful (Ali, peace be upon him) to be a disbeliever and saw themselves as justified in demanding his repentance! This erroneous thinking was prevalent among the followers of the Khawarij during the time of the Commander of the Faithful, and Imam Baqir's argument sought to correct it, thereby humbling their reason and preparing it for growth.

## **2. Restraint from Mental Enslavement and Blind Imitation**

Blind imitation hinders the freedom of reason and thought. Accordingly, God praises those who seek truth and after thorough investigation, choose the best path. God says in the Qur'an,

فَيَشِيرُ عِبَادَ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَاهُمُ اللَّهُ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمْ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ<sup>33</sup>

"So give good tidings to My servants, those who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones Allah has guided, and those are people of understanding". Conversely, God warns those who blindly imitate others without reason, adhering stubbornly to the customs and traditions of their ancestors:

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<sup>32</sup>Tabarsi, Al-Ihtijaj, Vol. 2, p. 162-163.

<sup>33</sup>Surah Az-Zumar, Verses 17-18.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا  
وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ<sup>34</sup>

"And when it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed,' they say, 'Rather, we will follow that which we found our forefathers doing.' Even though their forefathers understood nothing, nor were they guided?"

The inherent repugnance of blind imitation is so fundamental that it does not require teaching. The following narration reflects this point: Imam Hasan al-Askari(peace be upon him), in reference to the verse

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِيٍّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ<sup>35</sup>

"And among them are unlettered ones who do not know the Scripture except in wishful thinking, and they are only assuming", said: "The term 'unlettered' refers to one who is associated with his mother, meaning that he does not know how to read or write just as he was when he emerged from his mother's womb. The 'Scripture' they do not know refers to the one revealed from the heavens, not a false book; however, they were unable to distinguish and mistook 'vain hopes' for the Book and Word of God. In other words, they accepted only what their elders told them. Hence, they denied the Prophet of God, even though imitation of their leaders was forbidden for them:

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَسْتَرْوَا بِهِ تَمَنَّا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ  
أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 170.

<sup>35</sup>Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 78.

<sup>36</sup>Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 79.

'So woe to those who write the Scripture with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn."

The Imam explains: "These people were the Jews who attributed certain characteristics to Muhammad(peace be upon him and his progeny), even though they were aware of his true features. They told the ignorant masses that the last Prophet would be tall, robust, and corpulent... even though this was not the case. They said that the last Prophet would appear in five hundred years... Their purpose in spreading these lies was to maintain their leadership over the weak, and to avoid serving the Messenger of God, Ali, and his family and companions. So, God Almighty said, 'Woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they earn.'"

Then, a man asked Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq(peace be upon him), "The Jews know the Torah only through what they have heard from their scholars, so they have no choice but to follow them. If their imitation of their scholars is deemed reprehensible, why is it not the same for us when we follow our scholars in religious matters?" The Imam replied, "There is a difference and a similarity between the common people following our scholars and the common people following the Jewish scholars. The similarity is that God has condemned the blind imitation of our common people, just as He has condemned the common people and scholars of the Jews. However, the Jewish commoners were aware of the falsehood, corruption, injustice, and hypocrisy of their scholars, yet they still followed them blindly... If the common people of our community also imitate corrupt, worldly scholars, they are subject to the same condemnation..."<sup>37</sup>

In reality, the prohibition against blindly following one's ancestors or being influenced by prejudice is rooted in the innate and fundamental nature

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<sup>37</sup>Al-Ihtijaj, Vol. 2, pp. 549-553, summarized.

of every human being. Anyone who introspects will recognize the inherent ugliness of such behaviour. When divine revelation prohibits such actions, it serves as a reminder of what is naturally understood and logically obvious. It aims to awaken the inner truths within a person, prompting them to act according to their innate reason.

### **3. Avoiding the Influence of the Majority**

The criterion for distinguishing truth from falsehood is not based on the number of supporters. It is not the case that if an opinion is favoured by the majority, it is necessarily correct, or if it is held by the minority, it is necessarily false, or vice versa. A viewpoint may be widely accepted and still be true, or it may enjoy majority support and still be false. Similarly, the perspective of a minority may be true or false. This is a matter that reason inherently understands and judges. However, sometimes, due to social pressures or other influencing factors, a person may become oblivious to this innate rational judgement. In such situations, divine revelation and religious teachings can help a person become aware of their innate and self-evident reasoning and awaken them from their neglect. For this reason, many verses in the Quran emphasise this important point.<sup>38</sup>

### **4. Avoiding Following Doubt and Suspicion**

Beliefs are among the most important and influential aspects of a person's life. Commitment to action or a lack of it often stems from one's beliefs and the degree to which they are ingrained in the heart. A person who has faith in God and the afterlife is more motivated to engage in worship and

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<sup>38</sup>Refer to: Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 100; Surah Aal-E-Imran, Verse 110; Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 103; Surah Al-An'am, Verses 37 and 111; Surah At-Tawbah, Verse 34; Surah Al-Anfal, Verse 36; Surah Yunus, Verse 60, etc.

righteous deeds compared to someone who believes that human life is confined to this brief worldly existence. Naturally, from a materialistic person, one cannot expect them to gather provisions for the hereafter or think about the next world and the Day of Judgment. Doubts in beliefs can sometimes disrupt the moral and legal framework of life. For this reason, beliefs are subject to stricter scrutiny. Innate reason dictates that matters of such significance in a person's life should not be founded on whims and doubts; rather, they must be based on certainties and reliable sources. Numerous Quranic verses strongly prohibit basing one's faith on mere assumptions and speculation:

إِن يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ<sup>39</sup>

“They follow nothing but conjecture, and they do nothing but lie”

وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ إِلَّا ظَنًّا إِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا<sup>40</sup>

“Most of them follow nothing but conjecture. Surely, conjecture is no substitute for the truth”

إِن يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ<sup>41</sup>

“They follow nothing but conjecture and what their souls desire”

وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Surah Al-An'am, Verse 116 and Surah Yunus, Verse 66.

<sup>40</sup>Surah Yunus, Verse 36.

<sup>41</sup>Surah An-Najm, Verse 23.

<sup>42</sup>Surah An-Najm, Verse 28.

“They have no knowledge of it, they only follow conjecture, and conjecture is no substitute for the truth”

The technical meaning of *ẓann* (conjecture) is the preference of one side of an issue over the other; meaning, a state arises within a person where they lean towards believing something exists or doesn't exist. Believing in the likely outcome is called *ẓann* (conjecture), while believing in the unlikely outcome is called *wahm* (delusion). However, in lexicons, *ẓann* is used in two senses: doubt and certainty.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, *ẓann* in the above verses does not mean certainty because God has forbidden it. Thus, *ẓann* in these verses refers to doubt.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, this prohibition serves as a reminder of what is inherently understood by human reason.

### **Explaining the Limitations of Reason**

There is no doubt that no single faculty can grasp all matters, and naturally, each faculty has its own specific understanding. It is unreasonable to expect sensory perception to provide mystical knowledge or to expect mystical faculties to perceive material and sensory objects. Similarly, reason also has its limitations. Even in logic and philosophy, it is acknowledged that reason is only capable of understanding general concepts and is incapable of directly comprehending particulars.

Master Mohammad-Reza Hakimi summarised the limitations of reason into ten stages:

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<sup>43</sup>Ibn Faris, *Mu'jamMaqayis al-Lughah*, Vol. 3, p. 462; Ibn Athir Jazari, *Al-NihVerse fi Gharib al-Hadith*, Vol. 3, pp. 162-163; Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 8, p. 271; Berenjkari, *Methodology of Ilm al-Kalam, Principles of Derivation and Defense in Beliefs*, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup>*Methodology of Ilm al-Kalam, Principles of Derivation and Defense in Beliefs*, p. 60.

1. In understanding all the ways of perceiving truths;
2. In comprehending the truths themselves;
3. In grasping all dimensions of vague truths;
4. In fully understanding the relationships between truths;
5. In understanding supra-rational truths (specifically);
6. In comprehending the influence of knowledge of supra-rational subjects on the knowledge of purely rational subjects;
7. In understanding the influence of knowledge of supra-rational subjects on the knowledge of empirical and sensory subjects;
8. In comprehending the impact of knowledge of supra-rational subjects on the understanding of mystical and intuitive subjects (in spiritual practices);
9. In discerning the correct method of using reason (the path of applying reason);
10. In understanding the factors that neutralise rational knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes, people become oblivious to the limitations of reason and imagine that they can attain all matters solely through their intellect. This delusion leads them to not submit to divine law. To demonstrate the error of this dangerous illusion, religious law enumerates some of the limitations of reason. For example, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) considers qadar (divine decree) to be one of the subjects that is beyond reason and not within the grasp of intellect:

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<sup>45</sup>Hakimi, Resurrection of the Body in Transcendent Philosophy, pp. 153-154.



أَلَا إِنَّ الْقَدَرَ سِرٌّ مِنْ سِرِّ اللَّهِ وَ سَيْئَرٌ مِنْ سَيْئَرِ اللَّهِ وَ جِزْرٌ مِنْ جِزْرِ اللَّهِ مَرْفُوعٌ فِي حِجَابِ اللَّهِ مَطْوِيُّ عَنْ خَلْقِ اللَّهِ مَخْتُومٌ بِخَاتَمِ اللَّهِ سَابِقٌ فِي عِلْمِ اللَّهِ وَضَعِ اللَّهُ الْعِبَادَ عَنْ عِلْمِهِ وَ رَفَعَهُ فَوْقَ شَهَادَاتِهِمْ وَ مَبْلَغَ عُقُولِهِمْ.<sup>46</sup>

"Indeed, qadar is a secret from among the secrets of Allah, and a veil from among the veils of Allah, and a stronghold from among the strongholds of Allah, concealed within the veils of Allah, beyond the reach of Allah's creation, sealed with the seal of Allah, predetermined in the knowledge of Allah, removed from the knowledge of the servants, and elevated beyond their witnessing and the capacity of their intellects."

Additionally, some narrations prohibit contemplation on the essence of God, deeming it beyond the capacity of human intellect:

قَالَ ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ إِنَّ قَوْمًا تَفَكَّرُوا فِي اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ تَفَكَّرُوا فِي خَلْقِ اللَّهِ وَ لَا تَفَكَّرُوا فِي اللَّهِ فَإِنَّكُمْ لَنْ تَقْدِرُوا قَدْرَهُ<sup>47</sup>

"Ibn Abbas, said: Indeed, some people began to ponder over Allah, the Exalted, and the Prophet said: Contemplate the creation of Allah, but do not ponder over Allah, for you will never be able to grasp His essence."

## Conclusion

The awakening of reason is one of the non-independent functions of revelation. Revelation influences reason in various ways and through different means. The significant role of revelation in stimulating reason should be viewed in the context of the needs and shortcomings of human intellect. Human reason is in need of revelation to understand many matters. On the other hand, revelation, through various methods, revives, purifies, and

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<sup>46</sup>Ibn Babawayh, Al-Tawhid, p. 383.

<sup>47</sup>Waram, Majmu'atWaram, Vol. 1, p. 250.

guides reason. Some of these methods include: increasing knowledge, identifying the pitfalls and limitations of reason, and analysing potential harms.

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