

Part 29 Surah 68 Al-Qalam Verse 4

A Testimony by God

This is followed by a great testimony and abundant honour: *"Most certainly, yours is a sublime character."* (4) The whole universe echoes this unique praise of the Prophet. No writer can describe the value of this great testimony by the Creator of the universe; no imagination can give it its worth. It is a testimony by God, according to His own measure, given to His servant, in His own words: *"Most certainly, yours is a sublime character."* (4) A sublime character has, according to God's measure, its own unique value which no other creature can imagine.

This testimony confirms Muhammad's greatness in several ways. First of all, by the fact that it is God's own testimony, given in His majesty, and appreciated by the whole universe and echoed by everyone on high. Secondly, his greatness is seen by virtue of the fact that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was able to receive God's testimony, live with it and know who was saying it. It was God Almighty, in His absolute power and knowledge, that stated it. The Prophet knew his own position in relation to such absolutely great power. He could appreciate this position as no one else could. The fact that Muhammad (peace be upon him) held his position firmly as he received this word, from its sublime source, without being crushed by the pressure it brought on him, and that he remained calm and stable is the best evidence of his own greatness.

There are many reports about the Prophet's greatness given by his Companions. Indeed, his practical conduct is better evidence than anything reported about him. However, this testimony, given by God Almighty, is greater still than any reported evidence. God knows best whom to entrust with His final message. Muhammad, (peace be upon him), in his sublime character, was indeed the one to deliver this message, which is the noblest in history. He was a match for it, and a living example of its greatness. The message of Islam is so perfect, beautiful, comprehensive and truthful that it could only be delivered by a man who deserved such testimony from God, and by one who would receive such divine testimony with confidence. At the same time, however, God remonstrated with the Prophet for some of his actions but all the while imbibing the same confidence and reassurance. He declared both aspects to all people, hiding nothing. In both situations, he was a noble Prophet, an obedient servant and a trusted deliverer of the divine message.

The greatness of Muhammad (peace be upon him) mirrors the greatness of the Islamic message: both go further in scope than the most powerful telescope can reach. The most that anyone who wants to monitor this dual greatness can do is to

look at it without assigning limits to it, and point to its field in the universe, without setting parameters on it.

Once more I feel the need to stress the broad significance of the fact that the Prophet received this testimony from his Lord and that he remained firm, confident and reassured. He himself, a human being, would praise one of his Companions and that person, as well as those close to him, would feel so excited and overwhelmed with joy. Yet all involved, the one making the statement of praise, the praised person and the ones who heard of it knew that the Prophet was human. It is true that he was a Prophet, yet he remained within the human circle, with its well-known limitations. In his case, the praise came from God Almighty, and he knew of God what no one else could know. Yet he remained firm and continued his mission. How this must have felt is beyond imagination.

It was Muhammad alone who could attain such a sublime level of greatness and human perfection that matched the spirit God breathed into man. Muhammad alone matched this ultimate divine message to mankind so that it is reflected in him alive, taking the form of a man. Muhammad alone was the one God knew to be worthy of this position and further knew that his character was sublime. It was God who declared here His testimony that he had a sublime character, as also declared elsewhere in the Qur'an that He, the Lord of all the worlds, showered His blessings on him: *"God and His angels bless the Prophet. Believers! Bless him and give him greetings of peace."* (33: 56) Only God can grant one of His own servants such a great and unique favour.

Emphasis on Morality

We also note here that the moral element is given considerable weight in God's measure. It is a fundamental element in the Islamic message, just as it is fundamental in the Prophet's own character. Indeed, we note its prominence in both. In fact, both legislative and educational aspects of the Islamic message rely on moral values. The strongest emphasis in what it advocates is laid on purity, cleanliness, honesty, truth, justice, mercy, compassion, kindness, fulfilment of promises and commitments, actions matching words and both consistent with intentions and thoughts. It forbids injustice, dishonesty, cheating, taking other people's property unlawfully, violating other people's rights and honour and spreading immorality in anyway or form. Its laws are geared to protecting these principles and safeguarding the moral element in people's consciences and behaviour, as well as in personal, social and international dealings.

The Prophet says: "I have been given the message that perfects noble morality." He thus sums up the objective of his message. His teachings are highly consistent in emphasizing the importance of morality and good manners. His own behaviour

provides a shining picture as well as a practical noble example that merits a record in God's eternal book: *"Most certainly, yours is a sublime character."* (4) Thus God praises His Messenger as well as the morality aspect of His message. With such praise God sets out a strong bond pulling the earth towards heaven. He makes this aspect the one to which believers' hearts, those who look up to His reward, are strongly attached. He thus identifies for them which values He would like them to possess. This is the unique aspect of Islamic morality. It does not stem from the local environment, or indeed from any earthly consideration. Nor does it draw on any tradition, interest or bond that was at play in that generation. Instead, it comes from heaven and relies on it. It responds to the call coming from heaven so that those on earth look up to a high horizon. It derives from God's own absolute attributes, which people are asked to emulate. This so that ordinary human beings can achieve their utmost level of humanity and be worthy of God's honour, bestowed on them as they are placed in charge of the earth. It is in this way only that they will merit a more sublime life, *"in a seat of truth, in the presence of an all-powerful Sovereign."* (54: 55) This means that Islamic morality is not restricted by any earthly limitation. It rather aspires to the highest level that people can achieve.

Moreover, Islamic morality is not a set of individual values, such as truthfulness, honesty, justice, mercy, kindness, etc. Rather, it is a complete system in which personal education collaborates with the legal code; a system that deals with life as a whole and defines its direction. It ultimately seeks God's pleasure, and nothing else. This morality, in its perfection, beauty, balance, consistency, straightforwardness and unity was reflected in the person of Muhammad, (peace be upon him), as he deservedly earned the praise granted by none other than God Almighty: *"Most certainly, yours is a sublime character."* (4)