

Blessing the Prophet: Purifying the Heart

By Reza Shah-Kazemi

In any discussion of the revival of the Sacred within our lives and our souls—the theme of this conference¹—the starting point should be a statement of this axiomatic principle: the attainment of the immanent presence of the Sacred comes exclusively from the graces flowing from the transcendent Essence of the Sacred.² In Islam, these channels of grace flow from the Absolute to the relative through the twin sources of the Islamic revelation, the Holy Qur'an and the spiritual essence of the Blessed Prophet. In one particularly significant verse the Qur'an draws attention to the importance of the Prophet as both a recipient and a source of grace:

¹ *Editor's Note:* This paper was written for the Sacred Web Conference 2014, held in Vancouver, BC, Canada, on April 26th and 27th, 2014, on the theme of "Rediscovering the Sacred in our Lives and in our Times." Due to an illness the author was unable to travel to Vancouver to present the paper. It is therefore presented here for the first time.

² For Muslims, the Holy Prophet is the Created Logos and is therefore the manifestation and radiance of the Uncreated Logos whose graces are the operative means of the believer's spiritual reintegration. The Created Logos is the fundamental 'bridge' between man and God, and therefore the counterpart to this fundamental role of the Holy Prophet is found in each of the faith traditions. William Stoddart explains:

"...within creation there is a reflection of the Uncreated (the Absolute) in the form of Truth and Virtue, Symbol and Sacrament, Prophet or Redeemer.

...“Being” (the *prefiguration* of the relative in the Absolute) is the uncreated Logos, whereas the *reflection* of the Absolute in the relative (namely: truth, beauty, virtue, Prophet, Savior) is the created Logos. Without this “bridge” (the Logos with its created and uncreated aspects), no contact whatsoever between created and Uncreated, between man and God, would be possible.” (‘Mysticism’, *Sacred Web*, Volume 2, December 1998, pp.65-77, at 71)

Verily God and His angels bless the Prophet. O ye who believe, invoke blessings upon him and give him greetings of Peace. (Sūrat al-Aḥzāb [‘The Confederates’], 33:56).³

When this verse was revealed, the companions of the Prophet asked him what it meant: how were they to invoke blessings upon him? In reply, he told them to repeat the following formula: ‘Our Lord, bless Muḥammad, and the progeny (*āl*) of Muḥammad, as Thou hast blessed Abraham and the progeny (*āl*) of Abraham...⁴ Truly Thou art the Praised, the Glorious’.⁵ But in addition, and most revealingly, he also said, on many occasions, that whoever blesses him once receives a tenfold blessing as reward. We shall focus in this essay on the relationship between invoking blessings upon the Prophet and the graces that ensue from this blessing, looking in particular at the modalities of one of these graces; that is, purification of the heart, one of the essential conditions for an authentic realization of the immanence of the Sacred.

One way of exploring the meaning of this tenfold blessing is to look within the Qur’an itself. We can do this by applying the hermeneutic principle articulated thus by Imam ‘Alī: ‘The Book of God is that by means of which you see, speak and hear [the ultimate truths]. Parts of it speak through other parts, and some parts of it bear witness to other parts (*yanṭiqu ba’ḍubu bi-ba’d, wa yashbadu ba’ḍubu ‘alā ba’d*).⁶ To appreciate the meaning of a theme, an idea or a principle expressed in one part of the Qur’an, one needs to study many other verses of the Qur’an touching on the same theme, idea or principle. This mode of exegesis places a high premium not only on knowledge of the Qur’an as a whole, but also on the discernment of the intellect, and on the

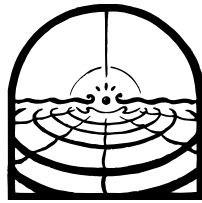
³ All translations of the Qur’an are based upon that of M. M. Pickthall, with certain modifications.

⁴ What is omitted in this ellipsis is a repetition of the formula, but using the word *bārik* instead of *ṣalli*, both words meaning ‘bless’, in the imperative.

⁵ See the third part of this article for the significance of the mention of the Prophet’s *āl* in this formula.

⁶ See for further discussion of the place of the Qur’an in Imam ‘Alī’s spiritual perspective, our *Spiritual Quest: Reflections on Qur’anic Prayer according to the teachings of Imam ‘Alī* (London, 2011), especially pp.2-12. As regards the Imam’s principle of exegesis—commentary of the Qur’an by the Qur’an—one should mention the most important recent work of *tafsīr* which employs this principle, that of ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī, entitled *al-Mizān*. The extraordinary on-going multi-volume Persian commentary by the contemporary scholar, Ayatollah Javādī-Āmulī, entitled *al-Tasīm*, follows in the footsteps of *al-Mizān*, and is already one of the most monumental, multi-faceted, and indeed ‘encyclopaedic’ works in the tradition of *tafsīr*.

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