

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah,
most Kind, most Merciful



Surat al-Anbiya, 21:73

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا
وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ
وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ
وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ

We made them imams, guiding by Our command, and
We revealed to them the performance of good deeds,
the maintenance of prayers, and the giving of *zakat*,
and they used to worship Us.

Learning Objectives

- To define the role of the *anbiya*
- To explain the concept of *ismah* of *anbiya* and *a'immah*
- To evaluate the necessity of *ismah* in divine guides

Key Words

عِصْمَةٌ

Ismah
infallibility

مَعْصُومٌ

Ma'sum
a person who does not sin

Divine Guides are *infallible*

If we study the history of human beings we will realise that humans have always had faith in a Higher Power and a Creator. This is a part of our innate nature and instinct (*fitra*) built into our consciousness.

It is also this natural instinct to believe in One God only - the *fitra* of *Tawhid* – that the Qur'an refers to when it says:



Surat ar-Room, 30:30

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ
الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ
لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ
أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the instinct (*fitra*) of Allah according to which He originated mankind. There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know.

In other words, no matter what we do, as human beings, we will always instinctively want to believe in God because that is how Allah made us and the belief in *Tawhid* is built into us as a natural instinct.

However, this natural instinct is not sufficient for our guidance, and Allah has therefore sent Prophets (*anbiya*) and Imams (*a'immah*) to guide us to the right path. Our instinctive knowledge of God is like the raw material put at our disposal to build ourselves.

It is our capital. The divine guides are like instructors who tell us how we should use this raw material or invest our capital. We couldn't have been guided by the prophets if we didn't have our instinctive knowledge.



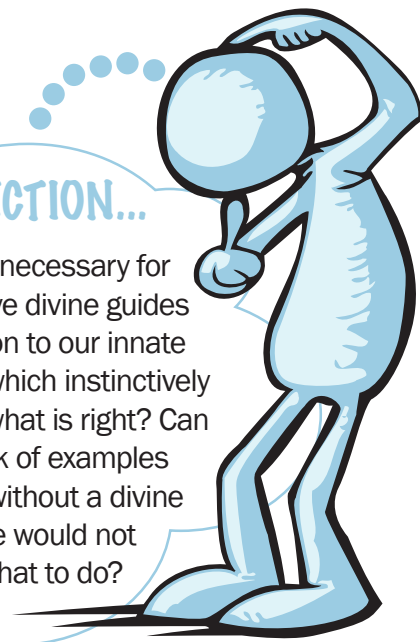
Surat al-Ahzab, 33:21

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن
كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

In the Messenger of Allah there is certainly for you a good example (to follow), for those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day, and remember Allah much.

REFLECTION...

Why is it necessary for us to have divine guides in addition to our innate nature which instinctively tells us what is right? Can you think of examples where, without a divine guide, we would not know what to do?



Allah sent 124,000 Prophets to guide us. The first Prophet was Nabi Adam, and the final Prophet of Allah was Rasulallah (s). All these Prophets played a crucial role in establishing Allah's religion on earth, and ensuring our guidance at all times. After Rasulallah (s), Allah appointed the *a'immah* as divine guides to uphold and protect the message of Islam.

The *anbiya* and *a'immah* guided people to the Right Path (*Sirat al-Mustaqim*) and were role models and examples for us. Allah tells us about Rasulallah (s):

The difference between a *nabi* and a *rasul*

All *anbiya* were sent with the same message of *Tawhid* to guide mankind. Allah says to Rasulullah (s) in the Qur'an:



Surat al-Anbiya, 21:25

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا
نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ

We did not send any apostle before you but We revealed to him that 'There is no god except Me; so worship Me.'

All *anbiya* are guided by Allah and are guides to the people of their times. However, some of them, in addition to that, are given special message from God to pass on to people. These are called Messengers or *rusul*. According to a narration Allah has sent 313 Messengers to human kind. Prophet Muhammad (s) was the last Messenger as well as the last Prophet.

However, most people did not listen to the *anbiya*, even after seeing clear proofs. Allah refers to them as 'deaf', because although they were not physically deaf, they decided not to listen to and follow the guidance of the *anbiya* and *rusul* who brought Allah's revelation.

DID YOU KNOW?

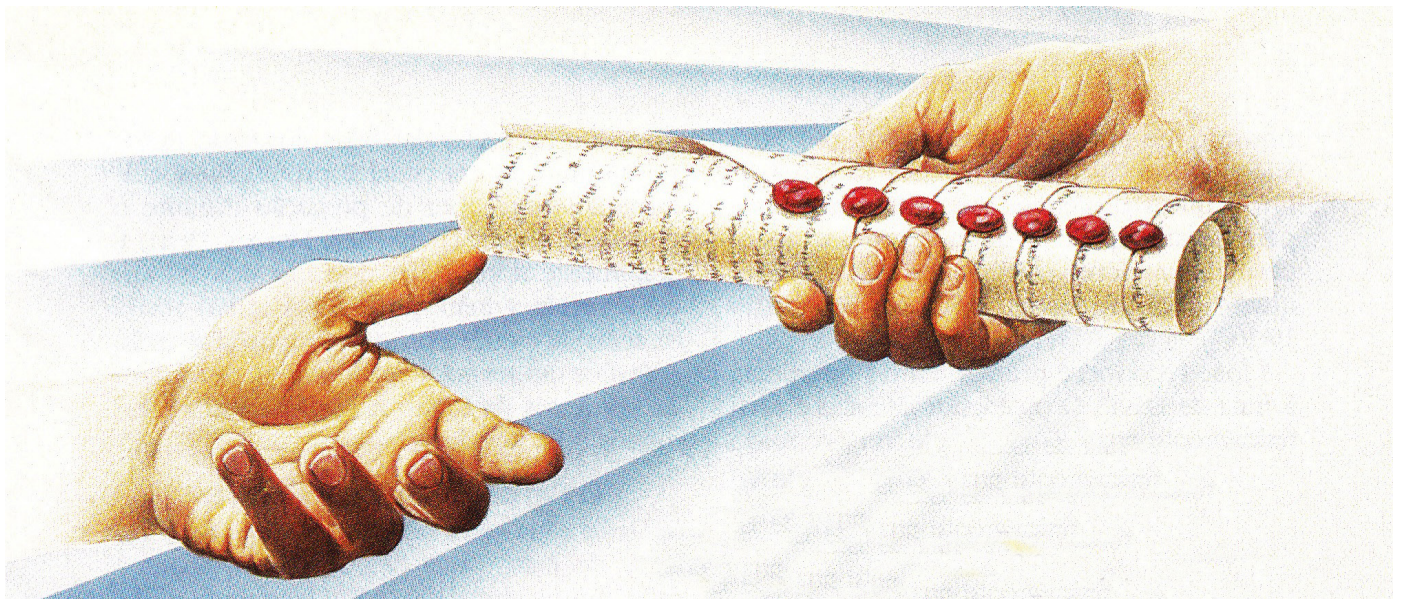
There is a whole *surah* in the Qur'an named after the Prophets. It is *surah* number 21 and is called *Surat al-Anbiya*. Sixteen Prophets have been mentioned by name in this *surah*.



Surat al-Anbiya, 21:45

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أُنذِرُكُمْ بِالْوَحْيِ وَلَا يَسْمَعُ الصُّمُّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا مَا يُنذَرُونَ

Say, 'I indeed warn you by the means of revelation.' But the deaf do not hear the call when they are warned.





ACTIVITY...

Sixteen Prophets have been mentioned by name in *Surat al-Anbiya*. Read the following verses of *Surat al-Anbiya* (Chapter 21) and list the *anbiya* mentioned in these verses

Verse Number	Names of <i>anbiya</i> mentioned
48	
69	
72	
74	
76	
78	
83	
85	
87	
89	
90	

Ismah of anbiya

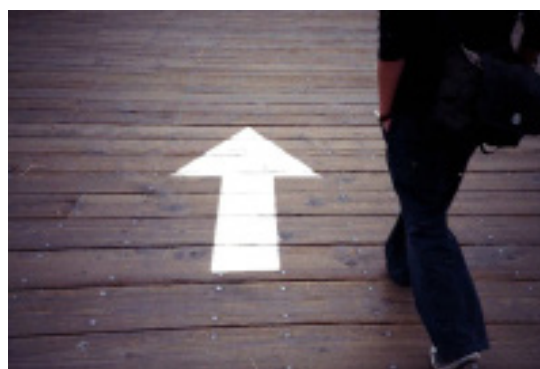
In order for them to carry out their function of guiding mankind, one of the most important qualities that all these divine guides possessed was *ismah* (infallibility). This is the Islamic concept that those who are appointed by Allah to guide others must be sinless and must never disobey Allah. A person who possesses *ismah* is called a *ma'sum*.

Why is it necessary for divine guides to be *ma'sum*?

The word *ismah* means a protection or a covering. It is therefore a special grace (*lutf*) of Allah that is given to a person so that he is able to keep away from sin out of his own free will.

It is important to understand that the *ma'sumin* are not forced by Allah or unable to commit sins. They keep away from sin by their own free will. A *ma'sum* keeps away from sin because of his or her deep understanding of how sin harms the soul of a person and also because he is aware and conscious of Allah's presence at all times. This is just like ordinary people who have the free will to hurt their bodies but they don't do it because they know how painful and harmful it will be. People commit sins because they don't realise how much they are harming their souls. If they knew that, they would not even think of committing a sin.

One can also think of *ismah* in this way: it is within your power to go naked in the streets. But have you ever thought of doing so? No. Why? Because it is far below your dignity to behave like that. Similarly a *ma'sum* does not even think of sin because it is far below his dignity.



Why is it necessary for the *anbiya* to be *ma'sum*?



Surat al-Ahzab, 33:33

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ
الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ
تَطْهِيرًا

Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification.

Allah sent the *anbiya* to guide us to the right path. He commanded us to listen to all their words and watch all their actions so that we may be guided by them. If a *Nabi* sometimes made mistakes or committed sins, how would we know what to follow and what to ignore?

That is why Allah also tells us about Rasulullah (s): Nor does he speak out of [his own] desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed [to him]. (*Surat an-Najm*, 53:3-4)

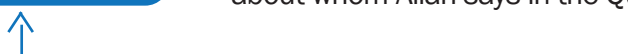
The *anbiya*'s role of guidance to humankind could not be achieved if the guides themselves had not been sinless (*ma'sumin*).

Also, suppose a man who commits sins like ordinary people claimed that he has been sent by Allah to lead the people to the Right Path, how would the people be sure that he is saying the truth?

Similarly, if the *anbiya* are to be obeyed and followed, how can we obey them unless they are sinless and free from committing errors and sins?

When Allah told Nabi Ibrahim that He was appointing him as an Imam, Nabi Ibrahim asked if his children will also be made Imams. Allah replied that the wrongdoers from his descendants will never be given this honour. This proves that Allah only chooses those who are *ma'sum* to represent Him as guides to the human race.

Some people quote examples from the Qur'an to show that the *anbiya* made mistakes. For example, the story of Nabi Adam eating from the forbidden tree. Such 'mistakes' made by the *anbiya* are not actually sins that affect their position as spiritual guides. Instead, such actions are called *Tark al-Awla* which means 'leaving the better option'. It is possible for the *anbiya* and *rusul* besides the fourteen *ma'sumin* to sometimes make a choice that is not the best even though it is not a sin, but the fourteen *ma'sumin* do not commit even *tark al-awla*. They are Allah's most perfect creation and about whom Allah says in the Qur'an:





HIGHER LEVEL

There are two types of infallibility (*ismah*)

1 General infallibility (*al-ismah al-ammah*)

This is a general kind of *ismah* that is accessible to everyone. For example, newborns and very young children are called *ma'sum* in this sense. Even if we protect ourselves from certain sins, we can be said to be *ma'sum* in a limited sense. For example, if we never steal or backbite, we could say we are *ma'sum* from stealing and backbiting. Similarly, some very pious individuals may have made mistakes when they were young but they learnt to become pious with time, knowledge and experience. When such pious individuals keep away from sin, it is very good but if they didn't, it would make no difference to us or the rest of mankind. Their *ismah* is only for their own sake.

2 Specific infallibility (*al-ismah al-khassah*)

This is a special and specific kind of infallibility that is a requirement of Islam for any prophet or Imam to have. This *ismah* is special because it affects everyone else as well.

If we want to reach perfection in our lives, it is important for us to work hard to acquire general infallibility. Create a personal development plan showing what steps you can take in the next three months to achieve this goal. You may also look for a mentor who can support you through this developmental journey.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT





KEY POINTS

- 1 Allah sent *anbiya* (prophets) to guide us to the right path.
- 2 All *anbiya* brought the same message of *Tawhid*, and acted as guides and role models for mankind.
- 3 *Ismah* is the Islamic concept that those who are appointed by Allah to guide others must be sinless and must never disobey Allah. A person who possesses *ismah* is called a *ma'sum*.
- 4 In order to perform their function of guiding others, divine guides must be *ma'sum* (sinless).
- 5 Sometimes *anbiya* may commit *tark al-awla* (leave the better option), but the fourteen *Ma'sumin* are Allah's most perfect creation and do not commit even *tark al-awla*.



TEST
YOURSELF

- 1 Why did Allah send *anbiya*?

- 2 What is the meaning of *ismah*?

- 3 Why is it necessary for divine guides to be *ma'sum*?

- 4 What would be the consequences of having Prophets and Imams who were not *ma'sum*?

- 5 What does *tark al-awla* mean?
