

A Comparison of the Proofs proffered for the Institution of Prophethood by the Maturidi and Imāmīya Schools

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Abstract

Given the fact that the institution of prophethood is central to the religion of Islam and is its second creedal principle, using a method that is descriptive and analytical, this paper sets out to examine the reasons that are used for the proof of prophethood by the Maturidi and Imāmīya schools, which are two of the great schools of Islamic creedal theology and prophetology within Islam. An examination of the proofs proffered by the two theological schools yields the conclusion that the institution of prophethood is a phenomenon whose reality is undeniable both on rational and scriptural grounds. The two schools prove the principle of the commissioning of prophets [by God] by use of various principles and axioms. It will also be seen that both schools are in agreement that mankind can attain to an understanding of certain matters by putting his rational faculty of understanding to use, but that the understanding of many other matters are outside the ability of this faculty. The Imāmīya consider the principle of grace to be the best reason for the commissioning of prophets on the part of God, but they do not consider man’s faculty of

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rational intellection ('*aql*) on its own to be a sufficient authority (*hojjat*) that can be used to justify punishment [in the hereafter]. Contrarily, the Maturida consider reason to be a sufficient authority (*hojjat*) for the justification of such punishment, and consider the commissioning of prophets as a necessary component in ensuring that the duty of care is properly provided and executed (*e'temām-e hojjat*). The Noble Quran emphasizes the role of the prophets as being one of immaculate persons who have been commissioned from on high in order to solve the various problems which mankind faces which have arisen in the absence of prophets, and for the purposes of resolving these differences. The Noble Quran also characterizes the role of prophets as being divine agents who channel God's will and convey His message and ordinances and divine dispensation to mankind, and then act in the capacity of unimpeachable authorities (*hojjat*); thereby completing the duty of care and thus completing the argument in the case that is being prepared for use on the Day of Judgement (*e'temām-e hojjat*) against anyone who fails to abide by God's revealed will, ordinances and divine dispensation which were conveyed to mankind by God's prophets.

Keywords: Prophethood, Maturidi, Imāmīya, Rational Proofs, Scriptural Proofs

Introduction

God the Sublimely Exalted created mankind and the jinn, and then stated [in the Qoran]: [51:56] *And [tell them that] I have not created the invisible beings (the Jinn) and men to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me.* The human faculty of rational intellection on its own is not sufficient to the task of attaining to this knowledge, and of being able properly to worship and obey God. And this is because the efforts of this faculty are powerless against certain trivial matters, let alone to the greatest task of all, which is mankind's task of properly worshiping and obeying his Maker. It is this juncture whereat the necessity for the commissioning of prophets is obviated. And it is one of the great graces of Almighty God Who, when he places mankind on a path of seeking his own perfection and felicity, also places on this path the means for attaining to such perfection and felicity, one of the most important of which means is the commissioning and sending down from on high of His chosen prophets for the guidance of mankind.

The necessity of the discussion of the subject of prophethood is that in this day and age which is characterized by a plethora of different humanist thoughts and ideologies, the reality of the institution of prophethood is questioned and doubted by some, who strive to roll back the effects of this institution and of the positive effects of that special faculty of understanding known as revelation, and to roll back the whole *towhīdic*¹

1. *Towhīd* is usually translated as monotheism and is the general term that covers the Islamic conception of monotheism which posits not only that there is only one God, but that He has providential lordship over all of His creation, including that of man's affairs; and that all of the orders of creation, from mineral to vegetable to animal and to man, are seamlessly integrated into God's creation and innate will which, in the case of man who has been given limited free

world order altogether. And so given this state of affairs which has been brought about by the ascendancy of humanist thought, it is important to provide rational as well as scriptural justifications and reasons for the veracity of revelation and of the institution of prophethood, and to dispense with the spurious arguments which have been erected against this form of sacred knowledge, so that the intellectual tools that are necessary to disabuse the minds of those who are thirsting for the truth are placed at their disposal, in order that these baseless and ultimately nihilistic thoughts and ideologies are abandoned, and so that room is made in the hearts of men for the sacred revealed ideas of pure monotheism (*towhīd*) that have been imparted to mankind by the immaculate prophets and imams, to take their place.

The Maturidi school of creedal theology, like that of the Imāmīya school, will, is exercised through God's revealed sacred laws and His providential lordship. Man's fetric nature (his primordial or original disposition) is *Towhīdic*; that is, something that is in harmony with the ontic unicity or existential oneness of God; it is monotheistic: it is naturally inclined toward and accepts God's sovereignty over him and is innately inclined to serve only He who is his Maker. *Towhīd*: the Islamic conception of monotheism: 1. The unicity of the creatorship of the universe; 2. The unicity of the order of creation; 3. The exclusivity of providential lordship (*towhīd-e rūbūbiyat*). God's integral order of creation (*towhīd*). Fidelity (*towhīd*) and Infidelity (*sherk*) to the Exclusivity of God's Providential Lordship in the Social Order. *Towhīd* is the first principle of the Islamic faith and is usually translated as Monotheism or as the unicity of God. Here it refers to the unicity of God not just in His capacity as Creator (i.e. unicity of Creatorship), but also refers to the seamlessness of the order within creation (including man's social order) as a corollary of that act of creation. Thus, *towhīd* here refers to the integrality of creation with the social order that is intended for that creation by God: the integral (*towhīdic*) Islamic society. The Islamic vision of monotheism is an integral vision of the universe where belief in the unicity of creatorship is seamlessly intertwined and combined with the belief that providential lordship over the world and the individual and collective affairs of man are the exclusive domain of God. *Towhīd* is the primary tenet and creedal principle of Islam that holds that God is the sole creator of the world, and that the right of providential lordship over His creation belongs exclusively to Him. The exclusivity (*towhīd*) of this providential overlordship (*rubūbiyat*) encompasses all domains of creation including man's individual and social affairs.

places a great value on reason and the rational bases of intellection for the understanding and explication of matters pertaining to *kalām* or creedal theology (inclusive of apologetics as well as dogmatics). This emphasis and deferment to the rational understanding and proof of the creedal bases of religion in the face of aberrant and anti-religious ideologies is mandatory and vital. Thus, this discussion will be approached from the perspective of two major creedal schools within Islamic theology, namely, those of the Maturidi and Imāmīya schools. The subject of the institution of prophethood will be approached and discussed both on the bases of rational as well as of scriptural justifications and proofs, at the end of which certain conclusions will also be drawn.

1. The Meaning of Prophethood

Any discussion of the reasons proffered for the proof of the institution of prophethood must necessarily begin with a discussion of how prophethood is defined and what it means, both etymologically as well as in its specific technical usage.

Nobowwa is a word which is derived from the triletteral root (*jazr*) *na-ba-a*, meaning to inform or to report. In its technical meaning, as used in the sacred jurisprudence of Islam, it refers to the bringing of a communique from God by a human being without any [other] intermediary; it is a grace that is bestowed by God [on His select emissaries, and the communication which also acts as a grace] on all mankind, and a mercy and virtue which Almighty God graces mankind with in order to explain His ordinances. According to Eben Manzūr, *nebāwa* is a name given to elevated ground such as a hilltop or plateau, and it is because of the elevated status of prophets relative to the rest of mankind that they are referred to as *nabī* and the institution to which they are commissioned is referred to as

nobowwa.¹

Prophethood is the second of the three creedal principles of Islam, the others being *towhīd*² and *ma'ād* or the return to God, and all of the beliefs having to do with the life of the hereafter. Of course it bears reminding that the principle of the institution of prophethood is one that all religions and peoples who follow religions – with the exception of the Brahmins – accept as a necessary part of the purposiveness of creation, and as necessary to the order of creation being an order which is established on the basis of wisdom and that which is for the best.³

In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* edited by John L. Esposito, under the heading prophethood, we see the following entry:

Nobowwa is the most frequent Arabic word used in the Qoran to convey the meaning of prophethood. The word is derived from the root *na-ba-wa* or *na-ba-a*, meaning to inform or to report. The Qoranic denotation for prophet takes on a specific meaning. Islamic scholars associate it with the elevated station which a prophet is bestowed relative to the rest of humanity by virtue of having been selected by God to convey His message to humanity.⁴

The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World continues the definition of prophethood with respect to its outer meaning as follows:

The institution of prophethood is the fulfilment of an absolute human

1. Ibn-e Manzur, 1414, vol. 1, p. 405/ Taftāzāni, 1407, vol.1, p. 189/ Ibn-e Sinā, 1326, p. 172/ Tusi, 1414, p. 103.

2. See footnote above.

3. Dashti, 1994, vol. 10, p. 67.

4. Esposito, 2012, vol. 4, p. 382 – 383.

need. It provides a tool by means of which humanity can respond to God individually or communally with a dynamic faith which enjoys correct guidance so that [3:104] *there might grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state!* Thus, a prophet is one who is a witness to *towhīd* or the Islamic form of monotheism, and the giver of glad tidings of the religion which God has determined for the world, and a warner about God's judgment on the Day of Judgment.¹

Prophethood is an institution that is instituted by God between Himself and rational human beings who are thus among His creatures who pay heed to and are devoted to their Maker, for the purposes of guiding them through the difficulties which exist in their lives on their way back to God. Thus, a prophet is someone who provides knowledge of that which rational beings and those whose faculty of rational intellection is pure and unsullied, partake of. Thus, the passive participle in this relationship, i.e. God's creatures, on whom revelation is imparted; need to participate actively [with their faculty of reason] and thus be active participants, [in order for the relationship to be complete and in balance]. Almighty God has stated, [15:49] *Tell My servants that I - I alone - am truly forgiving, and a true dispenser of grace;* and He has also stated: [3:15] *Say: "Shall I tell you of better things than those [earthly joys]? For the God-conscious there are, with their Sustainer, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and spouses pure, and God's goodly acceptance." And God sees all that is in [the hearts of] His servants.* And in the following verse, we see the prophet being used as the object (*maf'ūl*) of the sentence: [66:3] *And lo! [It so happened that] the Prophet told*

1. Esposito, 2012, vol. 4, p. 383.

something in confidence to one of his wives... Some have stated that *nabī* is derived from *nobowwa* meaning that which is exalted. Thus, Almighty God refers to the Prophet as one who is endowed with an exalted station and is of a higher [spiritual] rank than others, thus: [19:57] ... *whom We exalted onto a lofty station.*

Thus we can conclude that the triletteral root or *masdar* of the word *nabī* is *na-ba-ya* and not *na-ba-a*, which leads us further to conclude that *nobowwa* or the institution of prophethood can carry one or the other or both of the following meanings: (1) an institution through which someone who provides knowledge or imparts a communique or a series of communiqués from God the Sublimely Exalted for the purposes of guiding mankind of its intended purpose and final destination; or, according to others, (2) the elevation of the spiritual rank an individual by God due to that individual's innate affinity with and spiritual proximity to righteousness, piety and in sum, to God's Way, again, for the purposes of guiding mankind of its intended purpose and final destination; or (3) both of the above.

2. The Methodology of the Proofs of Prophethood in the Maturidī¹ and Imāmīya² Schools

1. Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Samarḳandī (853-944 CE), often referred to as Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturidī for short, or reverently as Imam Māturidī by Sunni Muslims, was a Sunni Hanafi jurist, theologian, and scriptural exegete from ninth-century Samarkand who became the eponymous codifier of one of the principal orthodox schools of Sunni theology, the Maturidī school, which became the dominant theological school for Sunni Muslims in Central Asia and later enjoyed a preeminent status as the school of choice for both the Ottoman Empire and the Mughal Empire. Al-Maturidī was born at Maturid, a village or quarter in the neighborhood of Samarkand.

2. Imāmīya refers to the Twelver Shī'a rite or *madhhab*, as well as to its school of theology. The name is derived from the Imams and means something like "having to do with the Imams".

Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE) has brought several reasons to bear for the proof of prophethood in his book *at-Towhīd*, where he proves [the necessity for the institution of] prophethood [by positing it] as a rational necessity. Māturīdī confers a special place for the use of reason for proving [the necessity for the institution of] prophethood. That having been said, we hasten to add that it should not be forgotten that the creedal prophetology of the Imāmīya school considered the use of reason as an indispensable requisite for proving the necessity of the institution of prophethood, and did so many centuries prior to Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, i.e. during the time of the presence of the Imams in the first three centuries of Islam; and they did so without going to extremes in this regard. Whereas the Ash‘aris, who generally speaking are scripturalists and consider themselves bound to scripture [where the letter of scripture is at odds with the dictates of reason], have established the necessity of the institution of prophethood by way of rational proofs. Thus, it can be said that the Ash‘ari position [with respect to the issue of prophethood] is the middle position between the [rationalist] Mo’tazelites and [the literalists or] the *Ahl al-hadīth*; and that the Māturīdī position [with respect to the issue of prophethood] is the middle position between the Mo’tazelite position and that of the Ash‘aris.¹

In any discussion concerning the necessity for the institution of prophethood, certain subjects automatically spring to mind, such as: the necessity of the commissioning of prophets; the purposes of the commissioning of prophets; humanity’s need for prophets; humanity’s need for religion; and other such topics. But because these topics are, strictly speaking, outside of the bounds of the subject of this paper – which is a comparison of the reasons for the institution of prophethood

1. Sobhāni, 1412, vol. 3, p. 20

from the vantage of the Maturidi and Imāmīya schools – these topics will not be discussed herein. But as for the other aforementioned subjects, while they are very important in and of themselves, they are discussed in detail in the gamut of the subjects of new theological approaches and of the philosophy of religion.

2.1 Rational Proofs

The first reason for establishing the necessity of the institution of prophethood for the Maturid school is the limitation of reason’s ability in understanding trans-rational subject matter, as we shall explain presently.

The stages which Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī proffers for establishing the necessity of the institution of prophethood starts with the following sentence: “The belief in the commissioning of prophets¹ is a rational necessity and [an] established [fact] as a consequence of its [= mankind’s] worldly and religious needs.”²

Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī begins his proof for the necessity of the commissioning of prophets and of the institution of prophethood by asserting their rational necessity, based on the fact that man’s faculty of rational intellection (*‘aql*) stands in need of a certain amount of knowledge concerning the world and of religion [i.e. how to live one’s life within the world], which knowledge reason cannot attain to by the application of its own faculty and by the examination of the world with the instrument of reason alone; and that there must therefore be a higher, trans-rational faculty with reliance upon and with the help of which it, reason, can attain to a proper interpretation, analysis and understanding of this knowledge – and it makes no difference whether this knowledge

1. Reading *be ‘that-e anbī’ a forresālat*.

2. Māturīdī, 1995, p. 134.

pertains to matters having to do with this world or having to do with the world of the hereafter (*okhravī*).¹

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī continues his dissertation in his *at-Towhīd* by explicating certain subjects which reason alone is powerless to comprehend, such as how properly to praise and worship the Lord of Creation, attaining to an understanding of the reason for creation, understanding what happens in the journey of the spirit after one's physical death, and so on. Māturīdī states that the faculty of rational intellection ('*aql*') is not independent when it comes to all of its needs, and thus with respect to certain requirements, it stands in need of the help of a truthful advisor which it can rely on. And this advisor is the self-same mechanism by means of which Almighty God provides mankind with the information that it needs about the world and how to transact his life in this world [in order to gain felicity in this world and in the world to come].²

God the Sublimely Exalted uses prophets [and the institution of prophethood] for provisioning mankind with the knowledge that he needs concerning the world and how properly to transact his life in it, as we have already discussed above. But for the Imāmīya, this rational proof starts with a principle known as the Principle of Grace. This principle elevates the bestowal of these divine bounties and blessings which Almighty God graces humanity with in order that we should have the knowledge to be able to understand the world and to live life in accordance with our created purpose to the level of a principle. Shaykh Tūsī (d. 460 HQ) says

1. I have made the juxtaposition here between matters of this world and matters of the world to come, as *okhravī* strongly connotes the world of the hereafter. But it can equally imply a juxtaposition of the matters of this sensate, physical world, with that of the meta-physical one, or of the one which the Qoran refers to the *ālam al-ghayb*, i.e. the world which is beyond the ken of ordinary human perception. Both juxtapositions are implied.

2. Ibid, p. 135.

the following concerning the Principle of Grace:

[The bestowal of] Grace is something that is obligatory upon God, because He created human beings and assigned lower instincts and drives to him, so that if it were not for the bestowal of grace [that teaches man how to live and transact his life properly], then trickery and deceit would become necessary, all of which is reprehensible and shameful, and reprehensibility and shame are things that are not fitting to God. Therefore, [the Principle of] Grace is at the head of the proofs for the commissioning of prophets.¹

One of the aspects of the use of the Principle of Grace is its use against [the belief of] the Brahmins. Explicating the position of the theologians by proffering a single reason, Shaykh Fadl Meqdād (d. 876 HQ) states:

Contrary to the position of the Brahmins who state that anything that goes against the dictates of reason is to be rejected, and anything that agrees with it is redundant, what should be stated is that there is also a third possibility, i.e. that the prophets have been sent in order to explain matters which are hidden [to reason].²

The basis of the reason which Shaykh Fadl Meqdād proffered is the nature of mankind's existence, which is communal. In other words, in their essential nature, people are social animals; in the sense that neither is man created individually, nor is his nature or way of life isolated and individualistic. Furthermore, this communal nature of man's existence has certain detrimental consequences which arise out of man's [individual] instincts and drives and desires. And it is these detrimental effects which prevent man from being able to forge laws which would provide security

1. Tusi, 1411, p. 247.

2. Fāzil Miqdād, 1405, p. 295.

and stability to his social existence. And this is why this responsibility must necessarily fall on the shoulders of others, which responsibility has been carried out through the ages by the prophets, whose obeisance requires a sign, which is the miracle (whose treatment, however, would take us outside the bounds of our discussion).¹

Having explained the above sociological reason for the necessity of the institution of prophethood, Shaykh Fadl Meqdād goes on to discuss the reasons which the theologians offer:

The reason of the theologians is founded on two footings. Firstly, the commissioning of prophets becomes necessary as a consequence of religious obligations which are due to the sacred law [of Islam]; and this is because such obligations reach us by way of prophets, and therefore, knowledge of these obligations depends on the commissioning of prophets. Similarly, the commissioning of prophets is necessitated (*wājīb*) as a result of a mandatory prerequisite (*moqaddame-ye wājeb*). Secondly, knowledge concerning right and wrong and their perpetuity are two graces which can in fact be [equated with] obeisance and the avoidance of sin. Therefore, every grace, including these two, are necessarily incumbent (*wājeb*) [upon God].²

As we just saw in the explication of the reasoning of the theologians, the Principle of Grace has been put to much use, and this fact indicates the importance of this principle for establishing the necessity of the commissioning of prophets.

The great dogmatic theologians of the credal school of the Maturida consider the commissioning of prophets as a matter which is logically

1. *Ibid* 296-298.

2. *Ibid* pages 299-300.

necessary and as a matter which is accepted and established within all of the creedal schools within Islam. But rather than approach it from the angle of the Principle of Grace, they do so from the vantage of the provisioning by God of the requirements [of man] of attaining to the purpose of creation. Abū ath-Thanā al-Maturidi writes:

The commissioning of prophets is established by virtue of the fact that [the institution of prophethood] is a requirement of wisdom [= an all-knowing and wise Lord] according to that which the scholars [of religion] and the leaders of guidance and the sages of mankind maintain. And this is because as God the sublimely Exalted created mankind, He must therefore [necessarily] provide [guidance] to him concerning how he is to abide by the ordinances [of the sacred Law and dispensational order] which He has made incumbent upon mankind, such as [how to maintain one's] faith, and [how to] avoid that which has been forbidden such as the worshipping of idols and partaking in one's base desires and urges (*shahawāt*). And it is for this reason that the commissioning of prophets is an [obvious] rational [necessity] (*ma'qūlāt*) to the majority of dogmatic theologians (*motekallemān*).¹

Taftazani² writes in his *Sharh al-Aqāed an-Nasfīa* (A Commentary on the Creed of Najm od-Din an-Nasafi)³ as follows:

He [Najm od-Din an-Nasafi] then points to the commissioning of

1. *Ibid*, p. 86

2. Sa'ad al-Din Masud ibn Umar ibn Abd Allah al-Taftazani, also known as Al-Taftazani and Taftazani (1322[4]–1390[3]) was a Muslim Persian polymath. He also wrote a commentary on the Qur'an in Persian called the "Kashf-al-Asrar".

3. Al-Taftazani, Sad al-Din Masud ibn Umar ibn Abd Allah (1950). *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sad al-Din al-Taftazani on the Creed of Najm al-Din al-Nasafi* (Earl Edgar Elder, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.

prophets, to the principles [of the institution of prophethood], to the ways in which it is to be proven, and to identifying some [of the theologians] who have proffered such proofs. [...] [The Creator] similarly created things which are beneficial and things which are harmful [to mankind], but He did not provide [a means] by which these were to be understood independently [i.e. by way of man's own reason, independent of the need for revelation].¹

One of the most important facets of this framing of the proof of prophethood is its use of expressions such as “Heaven and Hell”, “faith in God”, “avoiding the *tāghūt*”, and so on; and it is clear that reason alone has no purchase on understanding these terms, but stands in need of guidance. These concepts only take on meaning and significance when prophets explain them to people. Now if the people who are the object of the address of the prophets are indifferent to their glad tidings and warnings, then their exhortations will be of no avail to them. Therefore, as we stated above, the subject matter of the call of the prophets is something of which reason stands in need, but which it does not have the wherewithal to comprehend if left to itself. On this basis, therefore,

1. Taftazani, 1408, pages 85-86. Earl Edgar Elder's translation renders the passage as follows: “He also created useful and harmful bodies and He did not give Reason and the senses complete independence for knowing them. And he also made some propositions that are possible, there being no way of [knowing for a] certainty which one of the two alternatives [is right]; and some propositions that are either necessary or impossible, but which are not clear to Reason until after endless speculation and complete investigation.”

2. *Tāghūt*: the false or illegitimate authority of anything or anyone other than God; the social orders established and maintained by illegitimate powers; forms of idolatry and heathenism; hegemonic powers and the forces of idolatry; imposter powers who are pretenders to the throne of legitimate sovereignty supposedly sanctioned by God; social orders based on idol worship of any kind: : [16:36] And indeed, within every community have We raised up an apostle [entrusted with this message]: “Worship God, and shun the powers of idolatry and false deities (*at-tāghūt*)!”

using the expression *māyahtājūnilayh min ūmūr ad-dīn wa'd-dunyā*(that which mankind needs in terms of worldly affairs and in terms of his religious needs), we can arrive at the conclusion that reason is incapable of understanding these matters and stands in need of guidance.

Another reason is that one cannot make the assertion that right and wrong stand out clearly for everyone. In this event, [therefore,] this [clarity must necessarily] exist with God, Who sends it down to His creation by way of His prophets.¹ And as to the proof of this subject, Imam Abū Maṣūūr al-Māturīdī states the following:

All of the world can be characterized as being one of three possible states: possible, impossible, and necessary. The necessary and the impossible are comprehensible by the faculty of rational intellection without recourse to information from a substance other than itself. But because of changes in the state of the third of these substances from one to another state, reason does not have the ability to understand their necessity or the impossibility; and it is with respect to these matters that prophets are commissioned and descend from on high.²

What this means is that there are certain aspects of the world and of religion concerning which reason does not have a perfect understanding. Naturally, this knowledge is not hidden from the Creator of the world, Whose knowledge concerning them is perfect. Human beings, on the other hand, do not have perfect knowledge of everything; as all of the substances of the world can be characterized as being one of three possible states: possible, impossible, and necessary. Man's faculty of intellection is capable of understanding [the necessity of] the necessary being without recourse to or help from another faculty of understanding, as God the

1. Māturīdī, 1995, p. 136.

2. *Ibid*, p. 137.

Sublimely Exalted has made knowledge of [the existence of] the necessary being possible. It is similarly the case with respect to impossible beings, in the sense that it is not possible for reason to imagine the existence of impossible beings [nor is it necessary for an outside agency to demonstrate for reason the impossibility of logically impossible beings]. Thus, the necessary being and impossible beings share a common trait in that no information concerning them reaches the rational faculty of human beings. But things are different in the case of possible beings. In this case, as is indicated by its name, it is possible for man's faculty of reason to attain to an understanding thereof; but the question of whether man's reason is capable of attaining to such an understanding on its own and unaided is another question altogether. By making this tripartite division, Māturīdī's intention is to demonstrate the necessity for the commissioning of prophets based on man's standing in need of being taught knowledge concerning certain aspects of the affairs of possible beings; because man's reason does not stand in need of any help with respect to understanding [the necessity of] the necessary being; nor is it necessary for an outside agency to demonstrate for reason the impossibility of logically impossible beings. But when it comes to understanding certain aspects of the affairs of possible beings, man's reason, unaided by any outside agency, is not capable of such understanding and stands in need of a guide.

Another reason that is proffered for the necessity of the commissioning of prophets and of the institution of prophethood and which is very important in this regard is the elimination of obstacles which act to prevent the faculty of rational intellection's understanding [of the world and of religious affairs]. Imam Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī presents the issue as follows:

God the Sublimely Exalted has provide every object of understanding

a faculty by which it can be understood; and these faculties each have their concomitant shortcomings and virtues. The faculty of rational intellection is no different in the sense that the wherewithal of understanding is at its disposal, but it also has some shortcomings which make its understanding abstruse and ambiguous. It is the mission of the prophets to eliminate the obstacles which act to prevent the faculty of rational intellection's understanding. In this event, the commissioning of prophets thus becomes an undisputable necessity of the faculty of rational intellection.¹

On the basis of the above, for the Maturidi School, the primary reason for proving the reality of the commissioning of prophets and of the institution of prophethood is that they are things that are logically necessary. And this is based on two things. Firstly, the fact that reason stands in need of assistance and guidance in understanding matters which transcend its limited capacity; specific guidance in the general purpose of creation of mankind, which is shunning all idols and everything other than God, in order to get closer to God. And secondly, there are obstacles in the way of reason for understanding reality, and the mission of the prophets is to eliminate these obstacles which act to prevent the faculty of rational intellection's proper understanding of reality; thus, the prophets have been commissioned in order to reform and perfect the imperfect understanding of the world which man has attained to by way of his reason alone. This is where the necessity of prophets and the institution of prophethood becomes abundantly clear.

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The application of the Principle of Grace can sometimes be inferred in some of the dogmatic sources of the Imāmīya School. In other words, sometimes certain reasons are proffered which reasons depend on the

1. *Ibid*, p. 136.

application of the Principle of Grace. Shaykh Ja'far Kāshef ol-Ghetā (d. 1228 HQ) says in this regard:

What is necessary for every community or nation (*ommat*) is the identification and comprehension of the message of the prophet who has been commissioned and sent to them as an intermediary between the people and their Lord and Maker, for the purpose of explicating the ordinances [of their religion and dispensational order], and for explaining that which is licit and illicit according to the sacred law. This is because providing guidance to God's devotees is a duty that is incumbent on God[’s grace].¹

In effect, Shaykh Ja'far Kāshef ol-Ghetā has arrived from the signified to the signifier, i.e. the proper understanding of the ordinances of the law and the exalted divine sciences, entering into obeisance to God, understanding the difference between that which is licit and illicit according to the sacred law, and so on, is the purpose and objective of the commissioning of prophets. And this is a duty that is incumbent on God's grace towards His obedient servants, which He must perform so that His servants can move in a purposive direction away from sin and moral corruption, toward all that which is good and which thus draws them closer to their Lord and Maker.

Shaykh Mohammad Hosayn Āl-e YāSīn, a contemporary scholar of the Imāmīya School, also posits and applies the Principle of Grace for the purposes of proving the necessity for the commissioning of prophets, and for establishing the reality of the institution of prophethood:

It becomes incumbent upon the grace and munificence of God the Sublimely Exalted to place at the disposal of mankind that which establishes

1. Kāshef al-Ghetā', 1425, p. 21.

it and ensures its security. An example of this is the commissioning of prophets to mankind for the purpose of delivering the ordinances of the sacred law.¹

Shaykh Mohammad Hosayn Āl-e Yāsīn continues as follows:

The above passages established the fact that the commissioning of prophets is something that reason dictates is incumbent upon the grace and munificence of God the Sublimely Exalted. This necessity also demands that these apostles be immaculate (i.e. inerrant as well as sinless) in their capacity as messengers of God's messages.²

In the Imāmīya School of dogmatic theology and prophetology, the basis which necessitates the incumbency of the Principle of Grace is man's inability to be able to comprehend that which he needs in order to attain to the purpose which God the Sublimely Exalted has, in His grace and munificence, intended for him, without the institution of prophethood. His Eminence Imam Ali has stated the following in a sermon concerning the shortcomings of man's faculty of rational intellection:

... So He commissioned His prophets for them and sent them down in order that their *fetric*³ covenant is fulfilled, and that they are reminded of the blessings which they had been heedless of, and to promulgate [God's message] and demonstrate proofs [of His existence], and to revive (*ehyā*) for them that which was [heretofore] hidden from their minds (*dafāen*)

1. Āl-e Yāsīn, 1413, p. 189.

2. *Ibid*, p. 201.

3. *Fetric*: having to do with one's primordial disposition and orientation; relating to the way in which man has been created (*fatara*). Man's *fetric* nature (his primordial or original disposition) is *towhīdic*; that is, it is in harmony with the ontic unicity or existential oneness of God; it is monotheistic: it is naturally inclined toward and accepts God's sovereignty over him and is innately inclined to serve only He who is his Maker.

ol-oqūl).¹

The revival of that which was hitherto hidden from their minds (*ehyādafāen ol-oqūl*) means that man's mind does not have the capacity of understanding many matters; matters which are a part of that which it is possible for the mind to understand, but which are part of matters which apostles and prophets must explicate for mankind, as these are parts of man's fetric infrastructure and part of his religious intellectual apparatus whose understanding is neither impossible (*momtane'*) nor necessary (*wājeb*), but which fall in the category of possible knowledge [which has not yet been realized], and which stands in need of supernatural powers (*nīrū-ye gheybī*) in order to make that which is hidden within the depths of man's *fetric* underpinnings readily comprehensible.²

Many Shi'a scholars, such as Mollā Sadrā (d. 10050 HQ) have used the above statement of Imam Ali's in order to prove the necessity and reality of the institution of prophethood.³

On this basis, the Shi'a believe that God, Who is all-knowing and all-wise, selects certain persons who are worthy of the task of guidance for the purpose, and in order to ensure man's felicity. And these are the self-same prophets through whom the grace of divine guidance is channeled to those of His creatures who have the ontic capacity to pay heed. The commissioning of prophets is necessary in order for man to reach his perfection, which is the purpose of his creation; because no matter how useful and effective man's faculty of rational intellection is in his progress

1. Mu'tazili, 1404, vol. 1, p. 111.

2. Shaykh Tūsī has brought this exact same reasoning to bear in the chapter on prophethood. Cf. Tūsī, 1406, p. 248.

3. Āl-e Yāsīn, 1413, p. 189 / Sobhāni, 1412, vol. 3, p. 45 / Kharrāzi, 1417, vol. 1, p. 229 / Shirāzi, 1366, vol. 1, p. 75.

to his perfection, it is not sufficient.

It seems that the most widespread rational rather than scriptural reason Shi'a dogmatic theologians use to prove the necessity of the commissioning of the prophets and to prove the veracity of revelation and the institution of prophethood is the Principle of Grace. In fact, from the vantage of rational proofs, the Principle of Grace is the most basic reason for proving the necessity of the commissioning of prophets in both the Maturidi as well as in the Imāmīya Schools. The difference is that the Imāmīya School uses the principle under its name and in a more robust and widespread manner, whereas the Maturidi School applies the same principle, but uses different nomenclature for it, such as "logical necessity", "the shortcomings of the faculty of intellection in knowledge having to do with worldly matters and religious affairs", and so on.

That having been said, we should also add that there are, of course, other differences between how the two theological schools express their rational proofs, and that has to do with the extent of the scope which each school gives to reason in its role as completing the argument (*e'ṭemām-e hojjat*)¹ against each soul for his or her appearance in the final court of judgment on Judgement Day. Imam Māturīdī has personally stipulated that the unimpeachable authority (*hojjat*) which man's faculty

1. *Hojjat* and *e'ṭemām-e hojjat*: The Noble Quran also characterizes the role of prophets as being divine agents who channel God's will and convey His message and ordinances and divine dispensation to mankind, and then act in the capacity of unimpeachable authorities (*hojjat*) by being the clear and perfect embodied evidence of and unimpeachable authority for all truth on Earth, and therefore the conclusive argument and evidentiary proof against all falsehood on the Plain of Assembly on Judgement Day; thereby completing the duty of care and thus completing the argument in the case that is being prepared for use on the Day of Judgement (*e'ṭemām-e hojjat*) against anyone who fails to abide by God's revealed will, ordinances and divine dispensation which were conveyed to mankind by God's prophets.

of rational intellection (*'aql*) provides suffices for justifying his or her punishment.¹ But this does not mean that the commissioning of prophets is something that is superfluous and hence meaningless. Rather, Imam Māturīdī considers the commissioning of prophets as necessary in matters which are trans-rational and whose understanding would otherwise elude mankind. In other words, in so far as and to the extent that man's reason is capable of understanding the principles [which pertain to how he is to live his life in this world in accordance with the divine dispensation, and in order to attain to felicity in the hereafter,] and to abide by these principles, then this faculty of understanding suffices to give the court of final judgment standing and to enable God's angels to make a case against those who have disobeyed the dictates of their reason and sinned against themselves and against their fellow man, or against the rights of God, as in the case of environmental degradation, for example. But the commissioning of prophets for the purposes of providing guidance out of the grace and bounty of God, and for completing the duty of care and thus completing the argument in the case that is being prepared for use on the Day of Judgement (*e'ṭemām-e hojjat*), is still in full force and effect for Imam Māturīdī and his school.

2.2 Scriptural Proofs

In addition to rational proofs, both the Maturidi and Imāmīya Schools have availed themselves of scriptural proofs for proving the necessity and reality of the institution of prophethood.

1. Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, 1427, vol. 7, p. 324.

There are numerous verses in the Noble Qoran concerning the reality of the institution of prophethood, to which we shall now turn in this section. The Noble Qoran states:

[2:213] All mankind were once one single community; [then they began to differ -] whereupon God raised up the prophets as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, and through them bestowed revelation from on high, setting forth the truth, so that they would decide between people with regard to all on which they had come to hold divergent views. Yet none other than the selfsame people who had been granted this [revelation] began, out of mutual jealousy, to disagree about its meaning after all evidence of the truth had come unto them. But God guided the believers unto the truth about which, by His leave, they had disagreed: for God guides onto a straight way him that wills [to be guided].

Shaykh Tabarsi (d. 548 HQ) relates a hadith report from Imam Ali in his book *al-Ehtejāj*, in which report the necessity for the institution of prophethood and for the completing of the duty of care and thus completing the argument in the case that is being prepared for use on the Day of Judgement (*e'temām-e hojjat*) can clearly be seen.

... And God severed the excuses of His servants with the revelation of His guidance and with the sending down from on high of His prophets so that there would be an unimpeachable argument (*hojjat*)¹ for God [against the people who went against the exemplary model (*hojjat*) which He had provided] with the commissioning of prophets; and He did not leave the Earth empty of a successor (*khalīfa*) [to the Prophet] and a guide whose presence is the bare minimum of necessity [if one is to be able successfully] to traverse the path which leads to salvation.²

1. See explanatory footnote above.

2. Tabarsī, *al-Ehtejāj*, 1403, vol. 1, p. 148.

Allāma Hellī (d. 726 HQ) explicates the Qoranic verse which preceded the above hadith report of Imam Ali's (verse 2:213) with respect to the issue of prophethood, and in doing so, derives five reasons which indicate the necessity of the commissioning of prophets and of the necessity of the reign of immaculate guidance on Earth. Allāma Hellī reasons that in as much as mankind clearly stands in need of guidance, that therefore, all of the prophets must necessarily be immaculate (i.e. inerrant as well as sinless) if they are to "decide between people with regard to all on which they had come to hold divergent views". In fact, Allāma Hellī uses the above revelation to conclude that it is necessary for Almighty God to designate certain people to the difficult task of guiding mankind and "deciding between them":

The phrase "to decide between people with regard to all on which they had come to hold divergent views" means that the prophets were tasked with ruling between people on all that they disagreed on. This task is a grace whose general applicability is incumbent on God whose occurrence at any given time has obtained in practice for every nation. Therefore, the person who is tasked with carrying out this assignment must necessarily be one who can rule between all who disagree with each other, in accordance with the letter of the law as it appears in sacred scripture. Thus, it can only be one who is immaculate who can carry out this task; for otherwise, the possibility would exist for one who is fallible to issue an unjust ruling. Nor can one who is not immaculate make a ruling according to the ordinances of the law, and do so with the certainty (*yaqīn*) of knowing that he is in the right.

And the passage "Yet none other than the selfsame people who had been granted this [revelation] began, out of mutual jealousy, to disagree about its meaning after all evidence of the truth had come unto them;"

means that people came to hold divergent views even after prophets were sent to them. And that their disagreements arose as a consequence of their divergence from the truth. And the way to the truth is either through reason or revelation. And because most of the ordinances of the sacred law are such that they cannot be understood by the faculty of reason, whose calipers do not have any purchase on them, then that only leaves revelation.¹

Imam Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333 HQ) has a book of Qoranic commentary called *Ta'wīlāt Ahl as-Sunna* in which he comments with respect to this same Qoranic verse as follows:

God the Sublimely Exalted graced a certain nation and sent down unto them prophets and a sacred law; and a prophet was sent to their respective nations, in which there are believers and unbelievers. And this is because [God's wisdom demands that] the Earth must not be empty of a *walī*² or *nabī* (prophet).³

Here we see Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī positing the commissioning of the prophets by God as a grace of God's for the benefit of mankind. This also implies that mankind has no right to turn its back on divine guidance, as, once this has been provided, there is no excuse for doing so, and that God the Sublimely Exalted has completed the duty of care and thus completed the argument in the case that is being prepared for use

1. Allāma Hellī, 1409, p. 148.

2. *Walīy* (regent, sovereign, lord and master; patron, guardian, protector, custodian). The plural form of *walīy* is *owlīā*: those of God's creatures who have spiritual proximity to Him, inclusive of prophets and Imāms and, to a lesser degree, the *olamā* and *foqahā*; in a distant sense: "saints". The *walīy* is usually an abbreviation of *walīy al-amr*, who is the Just Ruler and Guardian-Sovereign of the affairs of the believers.

3. Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, 1427, vol. 2, p. 109.

on the Day of Judgement (*e'temām-e hojjat*) against anyone who fails to abide by God's revealed will and ordinances; as with the commissioning of the prophets, God has sent down all that mankind needs to attain to his perfection.

A contemporary scholar, Ayatollah Sobhānī, has the following to say on the subject:

[With respect to the last sentence in the above verse,] "But God guided the believers unto the truth about which, by His leave, they had disagreed: for God guides onto a straight way him that wills [to be guided];" [Ayatollah Sobhānī states that] while it is true that the true Guide is God, but this guidance takes place at the hands of a prophet who acts as an intermediary. And in order for this guidance to reach its intended audience exactly as intended and without any distortion or falsification, it is necessary for the apostle to be immaculate both in terms of his ability to receive the message, and in terms of his ability properly to convey it.¹

Here we see the function of the prophets, whose purpose it is to guide mankind, being used for proving the commissioning of prophets. And this is done by posing the question: "If prophets are to be sent down from on high, what would the purpose of such a commission be?" And there are two possibilities here. If the purpose is to mislead mankind, or to lead humanity in a direction that contrary to the dictates of reason; or, if guidance is of such a nature as to be beyond reason's ability to comprehend it, then such guidance should not be sent down in the first place. But if this guidance is true, then it must be perfect and flawless. Thus prophets must come in order to establish that which is right so that humanity can be guided aright and be able to attain to its perfection thereby.

1. Sobhānī, 1412, vol. 3, p. 185.

The Imāmīya School considers the commissioning of prophets and the institution of prophethood to be necessary and proven on the basis that prophets are sent in order to “decide between people with regard to all on which they had come to hold divergent views” which stems from the inability of the faculty of rational intellection properly and fully to understand [the nature of the world and man’s purpose within it]. But the Maturidi School interprets this same verse as implying the Principle of Grace and considers this verse to be a scriptural proof for the commissioning of prophets and for the institution of prophethood.

In addition to the above verse, there are others which stipulate the purpose of the commissioning of prophets as being one of warning. The following is one such verse:

[4:165] [We sent all these] apostles as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, so that men would have no argument (*hojjat*) before God after [the coming of] these apostles.

In his commentary on this verse, Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī states:

... And it is possible that these words of God’s “so that men would have no argument (*hojjat*) before God after [the coming of] these apostles,” refer to an actual *hojjat*; but this *hojjat* has to do with [acts of] devotion and laws whose comprehension is by way of revelation rather than reason; because if they were understandable by way of reason, then there would be no reason for God to commission prophets in order to complete His argument (*hojjat*). But the commissioning of prophets in this verse [talks of] the preclusion of any and all arguments [which could conceivably be put forward on the part of the potential defendant on Judgment Day].”¹

We see in the above commentary that Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī is using

1. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, 1426, vol. 3, p. 421.

scriptural bases to put forward a rational argument or proof to the effect that the commissioning of prophets is for the purposes of the preclusion of any and all arguments which could conceivably be put forward on the part of a potential defendant on Judgment Day. And this preclusion (*e'temām-e hojjat*) pertains to subject matter which has to do with acts of devotion and laws whose comprehension is by way of revelation and which cannot be comprehended by reason alone. And as for subjects for whose comprehension reason alone suffices, then the people are not in need of a *hojjat* as this is something that they are already in possession of and is innate to them, in the form of the faculty of rational intellection. Prophets are sent for subjects concerning which reason has no purchase.

The following verse is another one which can be used as a scriptural proof for the necessity and reality of the institution of prophethood:

[20:134] For [thus it is:] had We destroyed them by means of a chastisement ere this [divine writ was revealed], they would indeed [be justified to] say [on Judgment Day]: “O our Lord of Providence! If only Thou hadst sent an apostle unto us, we would have followed Thy messages rather than be humiliated and disgraced [in the hereafter]!”

MullaMuhsinFaydKashani (d. 1091 HQ) states:

There are certain matters which reason is not capable of comprehending, such as the prohibition of eating the flesh of swine, drinking alcohol, marrying those with whom marriage is forbidden, sexual intercourse during the menstruation period, and so on. These types of prohibitions and laws can only be understood in the greater context of the *sharī'a* or sacred law, because the *sharī'a* is [based on] a creedal order which is very sturdy and stable which guides people to the Straight Path, which guarantee those who follow it felicity in this world and in the hereafter. If

anyone turns away from the subject matter [of this guidance], he will be lost, as reason alone is powerless to comprehend them.¹

Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī comments with respect to this same verse:

... And [with respect to] God's words, "[20:134] *For [thus it is:] had We destroyed them by means of a chastisement ere this [divine writ was revealed], they would indeed [be justified to] say [on Judgment Day]: "O our Lord of Providence! If only Thou hadst sent an apostle unto us, we would have followed Thy messages rather than be humiliated and disgraced [in the hereafter]!"*" and "*If only Thou hadst sent an apostle unto us, we would have followed Thy messages*" [...] In the opinion of certain people, it is not right [to think] that God [would] punish [people] prior to commissioning prophets [as warners]; and [these people] use the following verse as their reason: "[20:134] *For [thus it is:] had We destroyed them by means of a chastisement ere this [divine writ was revealed], they would indeed [be justified to] say [on Judgment Day]...*" But in our opinion, the unimpeachable authority (*hojrat*) of reason (*'aql*) is sufficient [to justify] punishment [in the hereafter]; but God's grace and munificence does not administer punishment based only on the unimpeachable authority (*hojrat*) which has priority, which is [man's] reason; rather, He commissions prophets and sends them down from on high as a safety measure (*etqān*), and to ensure that the duty of care has been provided and the case has been made for the argument against any defendant on the Day of Judgment (*e'temām-e hojrat*).²

In his commentary on the above verse, Imam Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī considers the *hojrat* of the faculty of rational intellection for

1. MullaMuhsinFaydKashani, 1375, p. 195.

2. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, 1427, vol. 7, p. 324.

the commissioning of the prophets and possibly for the administration of punishment to sinners as sufficient; and so because of this sufficiency, there would remain no excuse or argument for sinners to use against God and His angels on the Day of Judgment; [thus, Maturidi posits that God] commissions prophets and sends them down from on high because of the superfluity of His endless munificence and grace. Thus the commissioning of prophets is necessary and proven on the grounds that there will be no [= even less grounds] excuse or argument for sinners to use against God and His angels on the Day of Judgment. In other words, the final words of this line of reasoning are the words of the following verse of the Qoran: [17:15] ... *And never do We punish any people until We send a Messenger (to make the Truth distinct from falsehood).*

Mohammad Ja'far Astarābādī (d. 1263 HQ) posits the following concerning the proof for the institution of prophethood and the commissioning of the prophets:

If we put aside the Principle of Grace [for the sake of the argument], then the question and argument (*hojjat*) is still an open one; because the administration of punishment without sufficient grounds is unacceptable.¹

In fact, the administration of punishment to an obligor (*mokallef*) is conditioned on the provisioning of guidance by a [divinely appointed] guide; for if this was not the case, the obligor would have grounds for complaint [as he or she would not be under the burden of duty toward any obligation]; in other words, “the administration of punishment without sufficient grounds is unacceptable”. Astarābādī’s intention here is to use this verse to explicate one of the bases for the Principle of Grace, which is a rational and epistemological basis. And the basis of the Principle

1. Mohammad Ja'far Astarābādī, 1382, p.459.

of Grace is that if there is [to be] such a thing as an obligor, then it is incumbent on the grace and munificence of God' that all of the portals and pathways of attaining to perfection must be opened and made available to him or her, so that in the event that he or she fails to act on these [opportunities], then that obligor would be deserving of punishment; and that if this opportunity was not afforded to a given person [and that he or she was punished regardless], then that [would be an act which goes against God's justice and] would hence not be acceptable. The above verse is a good representative of a scriptural proof which is rational at the same time.

Conclusion

Given all of the above, we can draw the following conclusions from this essay.

Concerning the quiddity and truth of the word *nobowwa* (prophethood), we can conclude that the triletteral root or *masdar* of the word *nabī* is *na-ba-ya* and not *na-ba-a*, which leads us further to conclude that *nobowwa* or the institution of prophethood can carry one or the other or both of the following meanings: (1) an institution through which someone who provides knowledge or imparts a communique or a series of communiques from God the Sublimely Exalted for the purposes of guiding mankind of its intended purpose and final destination; or, according to others, (2) the elevation of the spiritual rank an individual by God due to that individual's innate affinity with and spiritual proximity to righteousness, piety and in sum, to God's Way, again, for the purposes of guiding mankind of its intended purpose and final destination; or (3) both of the above.

The proofs that both the Maturidi and Imāmīya schools proffer concerning the necessity of the institution of prophethood and for the

necessity of commissioning prophets prove that this institution is necessary on both rational and scriptural grounds; because while man's faculty of rational intellection can understand certain matters, there are other matters which it cannot understand. Nevertheless, it has the capacity to understand these other matters [with the aid of that other special faculty of understanding called revelation], for if this were not the case, then that would mean that the institution of prophethood would be for naught.

The Principle of Grace is considered to be the best reason by the Imāmīya School for proving the necessity of the commissioning of prophets. In other words, they consider man's reason on its own (absent revelation) to be insufficient grounds for the administration of punishment in the hereafter, so that it is necessary for God to send prophets down from on high for the duty of care to be properly provided so that the argument can be made and executed (*e'temām-e hojjat*). But the Maturidi school maintains that while the institution of prophethood and the commissioning of prophets is necessary for the purposes of ensuring that the duty of care is properly provided so that the argument can be made and executed on Judgement Day (*e'temām-e hojjat*); they believe that reason alone can be sufficient for this purpose [in cases where the subject matter is not trans-rational and is accessible to the calipers of reason].

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