

Comparative Evaluation of the Efficacy of Wisdom and Inspiration in Abu Hatam's and Zakariyya Razi's Opinions

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The question has always been raised throughout history whether human beings need to follow the prophets or divine revelation to achieve salvation. There will be no need, as some believe, to follow divine teachings once human beings reach intellectual maturity; however, others insist on the permanent need for Guidance from God due to inadequacy of human reason. In the third or fourth century AH, two thinkers from Rey with two different perspectives had a debate on the necessity of prophethood. One side of the debate was Abu Hatam Razi, the great Ismaili scholar who advocated the necessity of revelation and prophets; the other side was Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi, a rationalist physician and philosopher, who allegedly assumes that all human beings are the same in terms of reason and that is why he sees no need for prophets to guide them. This debate, which took place in the presence of the ruler of Rey, is recorded by Abu Hatam in his book *Proofs of Prophecy*. Given that he is an Ismaili scholar, we explore Ismaili tenets in the analysis of his opinions. We provide an analysis of this debate, in addition to a brief presentation of the ideas of both thinkers on the position of reason and revelation, which helps us understand whether Muhammad b. Zakariyya is truly a heretic.

Key words: prophecy, reason, Abu Hatam Razi, Zakariyya Razi, Ta'limiyya.

1. The Position of Reason for Each Thinker

The book *Proofs of Prophecy* by Abu Hatam³ (d. 322) records the

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debate that took place between him and Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi (d. 925) over dogmatics in the presence of the ruler of Rey, Mardavij. The thinking grounds of each thinker are fundamentally different. The belief in imamate and prophethood for Ismailis seems to encompass all their beliefs. This section serves to illuminate why Ismaili scholars continued to reject the ideas of Muhammad b. Zakariyya even after Abu Hatam.

In order to make a comparison between the viewpoints of these two thinkers from Rey and their difference regarding the issue of prophecy, it is necessary, first of all, to address their views on reason and its place in their worldviews. As will be mentioned, the main divergence is on this issue. Abu Hatam disagrees with Muhammad b. Zakariyya when the latter highly regards reason considering all human beings equal in terms of reason; Abu Hatam attributes such importance to the doctrine of imamate and does not consider all human beings as equal in terms of reason.

1.1. Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi's View on Reason

Muhammad b. Zakariyya dedicates the first chapter of his book *Spiritual Medicine* to examining the place of reason in the individual and social aspects of human life and stresses on the superiority of reason. He considers reason as the noblest gift of God. Reason, in his view, is the best guide for mankind (Razi 1379, 25). Muhammad b. Zakariyya distinguishes human beings from animals by the superiority of human faculty of reason and considers the achievement of worldly gains as one advantage of reason. He says,

The basic excellence of the human over animals was reason, so he dominated animals making them tame and using them in what is beneficial for him. (Razi 1379, 24)

He then goes on to explain the benefits of reason, concluding that

Now that we recognize the importance and greatness of reason, we are compelled not to degrade or deny its importance, not to condemn it while it is dominant, not to consider it as a follower while we follow it, and not to subject it while we are its subjects. We should refer to it in every occasion, we should consider a thing valid if it is so assessed by reason, and finally we are compelled to rely on reason in conducting our acts. (Razi 1379, 24)

Referring to *Spiritual Medicine*, one can summarize Razi's views regarding reason as follows:

1. Reason is the noblest gift of God.
2. Reason distinguishes human beings from animals; man dominates animal by reason.

3. Earthly and heavenly benefits are achieved by reason.
4. Raising living standards and developing science and technology are all attained by means of reason.
5. The most important advantage of reason is that man can know God with certainty by his reason.
6. Any action, before being done, is considered by reason.
7. Reason is the leader, and one must refer to it in all matters.
8. Desire damages reason and must not dominate it. (Razi 1379, 24-26)

The question can be raised regarding the viewpoint of Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi whether his perspective towards reason leads to denying revelation and prophecy.

Based on the account of the debate between Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi and Abu Hatam, Muhammad b. Zakariyya considers all men intellectually the same while assuming their difference only in their effort. He raises a question as to the necessity of prophecy based on the same ground: "On what ground do you deem it necessary that God should select certain individuals by giving them prophecy and make people dependent upon them?" Muhammad b. Zakariyya not only questions the foundation for the necessity of prophethood but also considers prophets as the very reason behind disagreement and adversary among people, since everyone follows a certain prophet and rejects other prophets, and this leads to mutual hostility and conflict.

Razi asserts that God exists and believes that by His wisdom God directly inspires everyone as to what harms or benefits them, just as He inspires animals and obviates their need for any teachers.

The points which should be taken into account from what Muhammad b. Zakariyya says are as follows:

1. Men are equal in terms of their reason and understanding and what is bad or good for them. The only difference is in the amount of their effort.
2. God is Wise, and His wisdom requires that He should inspire every single person as to what benefits or harms him.
3. Sending prophets leads to disagreement and hostility among people (Abu Hatam 1378, 24).

It should be mentioned that a discrepancy exists between what Muhammad b. Zakariyya mentions in his book *Spiritual Medicine* on superiority of reason and what he says in this debate according to Abu Hatam's report.

Now, one has to examine what Muhammad b. Zakariyya precisely meant by reason in *Spiritual Medicine*. Is a thinker considered an

extreme rationalist only due to the importance he gives to reason? Some argue that *Spiritual Medicine* which is written for general public and starts with praising reason is mainly dedicated to diagnosis, explanation, prevention, and treatment of the diseases of the soul. In this book, Muhammad b. Zakariyya has tried to simply express his theory with the least philosophical grounds possible (Gharameleki 1391, 94). A recognition of the objectives intended in the book can help us understand the position of reason in his thought. Muhammad b. Zakariyya considers reason as against desire, claiming that ethical diseases stimulate from the influence of desire on reason, and he considers the dominance of reason over desire as a treatment for mental illness (Gharameleki 1391, 165). Therefore, it can be said that his sense of reason in *Spiritual Medicine* is not theoretical reason exploring external realities, but practical reason (Gharameleki 1391, 160).

However, what Abu Hatam asserts about Muhammad b. Zakariyya in *The Proofs of Prophecy* implies that the latter believed in the absolute leadership of reason and that divine revelation was unnecessary. In the following section, in addition to presenting Abu Hatam's perspective on reason and prophecy, more aspects of their debate will be discussed, especially whether Muhammad b. Zakariyya was a pure rationalist, as some have claimed (Sharif n.d., 633).

1.2. The Position of Reason for Abu Hatam

In order to understand the position of reason for Abu Hatam Razi, we should first study the position of reason in the Ismaili worldview. Salvation and perfection, they hold, is the sole purpose of creation, but no one can attain salvation by relying only on his own abilities. The means of reaching perfection are the prophets (Soltani 1384, 85). Their view on human salvation and benefiting from reason is closely associated with dividing history into different periods. In their perspective and especially in the view of Abu Hatam, man is able to benefit from reason only through the “speaker” of the period in which he lives (Daftari 1375, 281). Thus, what is understood from an examination of Abu Hatam's views on reason is that the truths and benefits of reason are transmitted to human beings only through prophets and it is impossible for men to achieve salvation without their help. This view totally contradicts with that of Muhammad b. Zakariyya who considers reason as the only means of knowing God and attaining salvation.

Additionally, Abu Hatam does not consider human beings as equal in terms of their reason; rather, he considers it obvious that some people are more intelligent having more understanding than others.

Hence it is natural that there should be a leader or teacher to guide them in both earthly and heavenly matters (Abu Hatam 1378, 22-24). In response to Muhammad b. Zakariyya's assertions regarding the necessity of sending prophets, Abu Hatam explains that no one has ever been able to learn an industry without being taught only through his own reason. Man is able to extend and improve his knowledge only after learning it from a teacher (Abu Hatam 1378, 25-26).

Abu Hatam rejects Muhammad b. Zakariyya's perspective on the equality of human beings in terms of reason. He says to Muhammad b. Zakariyya that if you claim to be superior to others in terms of philosophy, then you should accept that some men are superior to others in heavenly matters and are their leaders. He also states that people are naturally different from one another, and their intellectual difference as well as their dependence on each other in what they lack is obvious (Abu Hatam 1378, 31). The doctrine of imamate is also highly significant in Ismaili thought, according to which the essence and truth of religion is its inner meaning and the interpretation of the inner meanings is the Imam's task. A prominent aspect of their thought is to emphasize on Imamate while they consider no place for reason in interpreting divine teachings. In other words, the importance that others attribute to reason, Ismailis attribute to Imamate (Daftari 1375, 276). That is why Razi's thoughts on religion and reason provoked Abu Hatam's anger.

A question here is whether Abu Hatam considers any place for reason in discerning worldly and otherworldly matters. How much does the attitude of the two scholars differ from one another in this regard?

What is understood from the works of Abu Hatam is that he attributes the development of all sciences to prophets. Abu Hatam and Ismailis in general highly value the interpretation of the inner meanings in religious teachings and attach high importance to Imams' teachings. To put it more precisely, they consider God as unknowable and believe that all things should be learned from Imams. Therefore, with such attitude, Ismailis are more traditionists than rationalists. They are in fact opposed to the rationalism of the Mu'tazilites, based on their belief that everything such as knowing God and inner meaning of religion is dependent on Imams' teachings.

Therefore, the difference in the attitudes of Muhammad b. Zkariya and Ismailis towards rationalism is obvious. While the latter consider rational interpretation to be solely the task of the Imam, the former considers every person rational enough to find his own worldly and heavenly salvation. Although Muhammad b. Zakariyya believes in the

self-sufficiency of human reason, he apparently means that the reason is enough to guide man in knowing existence, God, and revelation, in contrast to Abu Hatam who believes in the rejection of reason when dealing with religion.

2. The Position of Prophethood for Each Thinker

2.1. Muhammad b. Zakariyya's Viewpoint on Prophecy

Before starting our explanation of the position of prophethood for Razi, we present a brief description of his theology at first, then clarify his belief system, and finally examine the heretical works attributed to him due to his belief in the five eternal principles.

We know that Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi is a theist. He wrote a book entitled *The Universe Has Indeed a Sage Creator* (Mohaqeq 1352, 112). In addition, at the end of the book *Philosophical Approach*, in order to express that his goal in philosophy is imitation of God Almighty and in order to defend his philosophical approach, he describes God as follows:

God is Wise with no ignorance, He is Just with no cruelty; and knowledge, justice, and mercy is predicated on Him, He is our creator and we are His servants. The best servant in the view of the Lord is he who follows Him best and submits to Him more. So he who is the most knowledgeable, the most just, the kindest, and the most merciful is the dearest one to God, This is consistent with the saying of some sages, "Philosophy is imitation of God Almighty as much as man can endure." (Razi 1343, 120)

He considers human beings as creations and servants of God, who must obey and try to imitate Him. As can be understood, Razi attaches such attributes as Just, All-Knowing, Merciful, Creator, and Owner to God, and considers human salvation and perfection in attaining these attributes.

The most important criticism against Muhammad b. Zakariyya derives from his upholding the five eternal principles. However, I think this can be explained by saying that Razi's belief in the five eternal principles is merely a philosophical comprehension expressed by him about the creation of the universe. Although discussing the viewpoint of Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi on the creation of the universe is beyond the scope of this article, it can be understood from the above statements that upholding the five eternal principles does not show Muhammad b. Zakariyya's belief in polytheism. Rather, he seems to hold a theory similar to the pre-eternity of the world, which had been previously stated by scholars such as Farabi and Ibn Sina, and not a polytheistic theory as is clear from his *Philosophical*

Approach and also his *Inna li-l-'alam khaleqan hakim*. We have to observe ethical and scholarly caution and justice in our evaluation of such great thinker as Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi, and should not accuse him of heresy to criticize his philosophical viewpoints.

2.1.1. Necessity of Prophethood

Based on Abu Hatam's report, Muhammad b. Zakariyya considers all human beings the same in terms of their intellect and inherent reason but regards them different only in terms of their exercise of diligence, and thus refuses the necessity of prophethood. More precisely, he assumes that one can reach salvation in this world and the next by using his intellect and reason and that the presence of prophets only creates animosity among people without any beneficial influence (Abu Hatam 1378, 24).

In order to examine the reports of Abu Hatam about Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi, we refer to the latter's works:

1. Razi composed a book entitled "*No Skillful Physician Is Able to Cure All Diseases and This Is Not Within the Scope of Human Ability*" (Mohaqeq 1352, 76; Ibn Nadim n.d., 534). This book is not available to us but as can be understood from the title, he rejects self-sufficiency of intellect in attaining all the worldly and otherworldly blessings.

2. In Muhammad b. Zakariyya's books that are available today, such as *Spiritual Medicine* and *Philosophical Approach*, those heretical ideas are not found, unless Abu Hatam observed the ideas in two of his lost books. However, there are some doubts regarding the attribution of those two books (i.e., *Naqd al-adyan* and *Makhariq al-anbiya'*) to Muhammad b. Zakariyya al-Razi. Some even believe that these two books are written by his adversaries. In this regard, Ibn Abi Usaybi'a says, "Muhammad b. Zakariyya's enemies have written these two books and have falsely attributed them to him; Razi is nobler than penning these things" (Mohaqeq 1350, 104).

3. Additionally, some other books are attributed to Razi showing his belief in imamate and prophecy, such as '*Ala sahil al-Balkh fi tathbit al-ma'ad* and *Fi athar al-imam al-fadil al-ma'sum* and *Kitab al-imam wa al-ma'mum wa al-muhaqqiqin* (Ibn Nadim n.d., 534). One book mentioned among Muhammad b. Zakariyya's works is a book on refuting those who reproached the prophets. Abu Rayhan calls this book *The Necessity of Rejecting Those Who Reproached Prophecy*, a name which is totally at odds with attributions falsely given to Muhammad b. Zakariyya Razi (Ibn Nadim n.d., 534).

4. He also has a book on refuting the prophethood of Kyal (an Ismaili who claimed prophecy and then claimed to be the *qa'im*) entitled *Refutation of Kyal's Prophecy* (Ibn Nadim n.d., 534; Mohaqeq 1352,

48-49). This further shows his attention to the true imamat and prophecy.

All these examples testify against those who consider Muhammad b. Zakariyya a heretic. There are also further indications against these false attributions, which will be discussed in future. His novel philosophical thoughts along with his opposition to the teachings of different sects possibly earned him some enemies who went so far to call him a heretic.

2.2. Prophecy from the Perspective of Abu Hatam Razi

Before getting started on the ideas of Abu Hatam regarding prophecy, it is better to have a cursory glance at his belief in God and His attributes. According to the Ismaili belief in the transcendence of God, Abu Hatam negates God's attributes, even the attributes of Eternity and Word. Therefore, God in his view is absolutely pure. He considers the universe as created in time and considers the reason of its existence to be God's command (the word "Be") (Farmanian 1384, 46).

Previously, in addition to explaining Abu Hatam's view on the position of the reason, we said that he considers using the teachings of the Imams to be the only condition for salvation and benefiting from reason.

From Ismaili viewpoint, the prophets are absolute intellects and others are incomplete ones who are in need of prophets and their teachings to reach salvation. Only the prophet is able to receive reason and intellect from God (Soltani 1384, 96; Dinani 1387, 281). Concerning man's salvation and his need for prophets, Ismailis have a special view on history. They have divided history into seven periods, each of which begins with a prophet and Sharia. There exist one executor and seven Imams guarding his Sharia in each period. The prophet in each period (i.e., *ulu al-azm*) is the speaker in that period, who develops civilian life and possesses the highest rank of prophecy. He is wise and active for himself and in himself, and objects are actualized by him (Soltani 1384, 96). In their view, prophets bring Sharia and imams are the interpreters of its inner meaning. It is necessary to know the "speaker" of each period, since knowing the imams is dependent on knowing the speaker and his rank and acknowledging his position (Soltani 1375, 96; Daftari 1384, 162). The rank after speaker is that of the executor, whose essence of existence stems from the speaker and there is no medium between them (Soltani 1375, 96). After the executor, there are seven Imams in each period responsible for expressing religious truths. As they believe, this is

only the task of prophets' executors to interpret the true meaning of Sharia for those able to receive it (Soltani 1380, 270; Dinani 1376, 161). The prophet possesses interpretation and the imam possesses Tanzil (the actual text or the letter of the verse). In the view of Abu Hatam, the prophet is regarded as the father of his nation and the imam is regarded as the mother of his nation (Soltani 1384, 98).

According to the Ismaili viewpoint on the issue of imamate, Abu Hatam considers the salvation of human beings in following the imams, who are able to understand and relate the true meaning of Sharia. Therefore, in contrast to those who believe that humans are able to totally understand Sharia and its true meaning through using their reason and intellect, Abu Hatam believes that understanding the truths and hidden meanings of Islamic laws is possible only by following the imams and reason has no place in it.

Now let us examine Abu Hatam's answers to Muhammad b. Zakariyya's objections against the necessity of prophecy. Abu Hatam proves the necessity of prophecy based on two premises:

Premise I. There is a difference among people in terms of understanding and finding truth and guidance.

Premise II. God is Wise and Merciful and the necessary corollary of His being Wise and Merciful is to show human beings the way to their salvation and guidance. In his book *The Proofs of Prophecy*, Abu Hatam also mentions another explanation for the necessity of prophecy.

One of Muhammad b. Zakariyya's objections to this issue, as Abu Hatam reports, is based on the fact that religion creates animosity among people leading to disagreement and fighting. In response to this, Abu Hatam says that the reason behind these fights and animosities among people is worldly affairs and following desires instead of reason, not religion or religious beliefs. He adds that one reason of sending prophets is to lay down laws to prevent anarchy and chaos. One goal of the prophets is to teach the ignorant and to protect the oppressed, in addition to laying down laws to punish the unjust (Soltani 1384, 338).

3. An Analysis and a Judgment between the Two Thinkers

Following an explanation of the viewpoints of the two thinkers, it can be asked why Abu Hatam attributes heresy to Muhammad b. Zakariyya al-Razi? Is Abu Hatam's report accurate or has he misunderstood Muhammad b. Zakariyya? Can the latter be considered a heretic due to the viewpoints attributed to him by Abu Hatam? What does heresy mean to Abu Hatam and Muhammad b. Zakariyya?

Answering the above questions helps us better analyze the topic of the research:

1. That Abu Hatam considers individuals to be intellectually in different stages is a reasonable point. In their debate, one can realize the reason why Muhammad b. Zakariyya is accused of refuting prophecy is not only the importance he gives to reason but also the fact that he considers all human beings equal in terms of reason and worldly and otherworldly salvation. Moreover, we also know that Ibn Tufayl, the Andalusian Muslim philosopher of the 6th century, attaches high value to reason just like Muhammad b. Zakariyya; however, he considers human beings intellectually different and proves the necessity of prophecy, so no attempts has ever been made to attribute heresy to him. One can ask how such a thinker as Muhammad b. Zakariyya denies the difference among people in terms of their reason. What Abu Hatam reports of Muhammad b. Zakariyya's viewpoint is not at all consistent with the status of such philosopher as Muhammad b. Zakariyya. One can say that Muhammad b. Zakariyya's praise of reason at the opening of his book *Spiritual Medicine* manifests only the high importance he attaches to reason and not the equality of people in terms of their reason and intellect (Razi 1379, 25-26).

2. According to the information given in the two previous sections, it seems that the words of Muhammad b. Zakariyya concerning the equality of people in terms of their intellect is neither correctly understood nor reported by Abu Hatam, and that Muhammad b. Zakariyya has referred to a special kind of reason and its guidance. He is a philosopher whose views on this issue may be different from that of a theologian. According to the philosophical belief in God's Absolute Grace, He is equally Gracious to all creatures, and if any difference exists, it is only a result of the difference in their individual capacities. In any case, it is very unlikely of Muhammad b. Zakariyya to be such close-minded to deny such obvious difference among people.

3. However, we cannot either accept the idea that Abu Hatam is a liar when he calls Muhammad b. Zakariyya a heretic, since we consider Abu Hatam an honest man in his beliefs (although some personal animosities between the two thinkers may not be unlikely, the current paper does not intend to address them). Probably, Abu Hatam has made some mistakes in interpreting some of Muhammad b. Zakariyya's viewpoints. As mentioned earlier, they totally differ in their understanding of reason, which makes misunderstanding between them highly probable.

Therefore, according to our analysis of the rationalism of Abu Hatam and Muhammad b. Zakariyya and clarification of their perspectives on this issue, and considering the fact that *The Proofs of Prophecy* is a self-written report by Abu Hatam and that no heretical book attributed to Muhammad b. Zakariyya is available, it can be claimed that attributing heresy and blasphemy to Muhammad b. Zakariyya is only a result of a misunderstanding by Abu Hatam and some others, and therefore one cannot regard Muhammad b. Zariyya as a heretic only based on those judgments.

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