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Shia Theology and Beliefs Vol. 1

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“He who dies in his bed while he recognizes the rights of his Lord and the rights of His Messenger and his household, has died a Martyr, and Allah will surely reward him.”¹ – `Alī b. Abī-Ṭalib

Foreword

It has been said that “A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes.” This statement isn’t completely true. Although the thoughts and beliefs of a man are some of the most important aspects of his identity and the fundamental building blocks of his life and reality, but man is a multi-dimensional being that has spiritual, moral, and innate aspects along with his thoughts and intellect.

Without doubt, most people act based on emotions instead of thought and reason. Thought and reason are a means of controlling one’s emotions and actions, however many actions and ambitions are born out of corrupt thoughts and incorrect reasoning. Although the different aspects of human reality influence man’s actions and his decisions in life and are the motivating forces that keep him going, it is correct beliefs and reasoning that results in the salvation of mankind.

The importance of having correct beliefs based on decent reasoning has been emphasized again and again in the teachings of God’s great Prophets and Messengers. The history of mankind testifies that only through correct beliefs and thoughts, men have ever made lasting changes in society. The distinguished and acclaimed figures that we know of today, were those who strived to renew the beliefs and thoughts of

¹ Al-`Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-shī`a*, vol. 15, pp. 55-56, no. 15

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the people of their times and even created new schools of thought altogether.

However, these new schools of thought have sometimes created new problems instead of solving the old ones. Many scientists put aside their common sense and conscience and opted to follow deductions based on wrong assumptions that sometimes lead to catastrophic results. It is here that the mission of God's Messengers begins. By using intellect and the springs of common sense, they open a window to eternal and enlivening truths. In the school of the Ahl al-Bayt, the best means of recognizing the truth is the use of common sense in light of the Quran and pondering on religious scripture.

To reach this goal, and by the use of the same method that has been experienced and perfected in the science of discourse, the current lessons have been prepared in two volumes to be studied in two semesters by freshmen Islamic seminary students. The following points have been considered during the preparation of these lessons:

1. The intended goal of the current course is to provide a general and concise outline of the most important beliefs of Shia Islam. The students are expected to gain an overall and rudimentary insight into Shia theology. The same topics will be examined in detail in subsequent volumes that will follow.
2. Based on the planned curriculum, the topics that will be studied will help the students familiarize themselves with core Islamic concepts and beliefs. However, justifications based on aql and scripture have been provided wherever necessary to be used by students in debate sessions. In some cases, controversial issues that are usually the topic of heated debates have been given special attention.
3. Textbooks must be developed using the results of contemporary research. The sources used in the current textbook are a mixture of

well-known Shia scripture and contemporary research treatises and works. These sources have been used and mentioned in the current book both as a gratitude to the authors of these works and as motivation for further research and study by the students.

4. A new teaching method has been employed in this textbook where each lesson starts with a very brief outline of the topic being discussed and at the end one or two research subjects are proposed. These subjects are appropriate for the more enthusiastic students and the teachers are advised to encourage them to make the results of their research available to the other students.

The current work was proposed and supervised by the “Office for Preparing Texts for the Islamic Seminary”¹ [in Qom] and is the first course on beliefs that is taught to the students. The “Committee for Islamic Discourse” at the Center for Preparing Texts has supervised all steps taken to create this work from beginning to end. The first edition of this book was taught in a limited number of centers and the subsequent feedback was used to make a number of changes and corrections to the first edition. What you are reading is the third edition. We will happily accept any suggestions that will improve the current edition.

We are very obliged to express our gratitude to Sayyid Hamid Jazayeri the current director and to Reza Habibi the previous director of the “Office for Preparing Texts for the Islamic Seminary” and their colleagues whose efforts played a great role in completing this book. We would also like to thank the members of the “Committee for Islamic discourse” specially Abd al-Rahim Sulaymani, Rasul Razawi, and Abd al-Majid

¹ *Daftar-e tadwin-e mutoon-e hauzeye `ilmiyye*

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Zahadat who assisted us with their suggestions in perfecting this book. We would also like to thank the authors Muhammad Taqi Sobhani and Reza Berenjkari who played the main role in creating this work and also their colleagues in the “Specialized Center for the Ma`arif of the Ahl al-Bayt” who were instrumental during the research and authoring phase of this work. The current work is the result of the group effort of all the aforementioned people.

We dedicate this work on behalf of all that had a role in completing this work to the greatest guide and teacher of humanity, Imam Mahdi. May God hasten his appearance.

The Committee for Islamic Discourse

The Office for Preparing Texts for the Islamic Seminary

Translators Foreword

Although utmost care has been taken to translate the hadiths and verses of the Quran quoted in this work in an appropriate manner, yet in some instances a precise translation that would be understandable for an English speaking audience could not be made. Thus in some minor cases, the meaning of the verse or hadith has been presented without a literal translation of the original Arabic. The same trend has also been used in translating the main text of the book.

Due to cultural differences between the audiences intended in the original Persian script of the text and the English translation, some sections of the book have been slightly modified to take these differences into account. Some small sections have also been removed.

The transliteration used is in accordance with the following table:

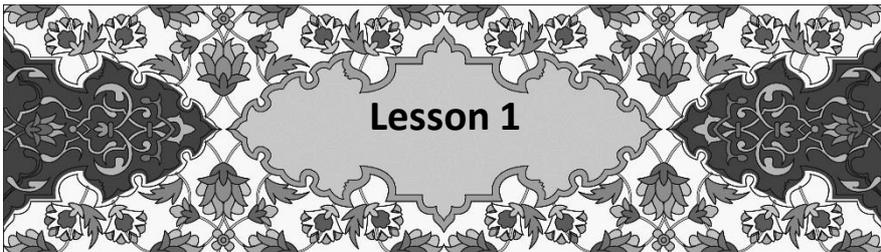
Symbol	Transliteration	Symbol	Transliteration	Vowels:	
ء	'	ط	ṭ	Long:	
ب	B	ظ	ẓ	آ، ا	ā
ت	T	ع	`	و	ū
ث	Th	غ	gh	ى	ī
ج	J	ف	f	Short:	
ح	ḥ	ق	q	ـَ	a
خ	Kh	ك	k	ـِ	u
د	D	ل	L	ـِ	i
ذ	dh	م	M	Diphthongs:	
ر	R	ن	N	أو	au, aw
ز	Z	ه	h	أى	ay
س	S	و	w		
ش	sh	ى	y		
ص	ṣ	ة	a, at		
ض	ḍ	ال	al-, l-		



CHAPTER 1:

Introduction





The science of *Kalām* and Theology



Subjects related to beliefs and theology are studied using a science referred to in Islamic circles as *kalām*.

We will briefly speak about this science as an introduction to the lessons in the current course.



The definition and scope of *Kalām*

ʿIlm al-Kalām literally means the ‘Science of discourse’ and in Islamic theology, is defined as studying Islamic beliefs and doctrines, extracting their true meanings from Islamic scripture, explaining and proving them, and finally responding to related questions, objections, and doubts.¹ A scholar that practices *kalām* is called a *mutakallim*.

As an example, consider the concept of *shafāʿa* (intercession). A *mutakallim* refers to verses of the Quran and traditions and after extracting the belief about intercession reaches the conclusion that some people have being given permission by God to intercede on behalf of others. He then continues to present a correct definition for intercession along with relevant explanations about its limits and conditions. The *mutakallim* explains that it is only possible to intercede on behalf of people who are on the right path but have for whatever reason been afflicted with sins. The *mutakallim* then uses reason and scripture to prove that intercession does and will occur and he responds to any questions that may arise in this regard.

The science of *Kalām* is mostly limited to beliefs and theology and rarely ventures into the arena of *aḥkām* (practices) and morals. In this context what we mean by ‘beliefs and theology’ are the Islamic teachings that a Muslim must believe and have faith in such as the fundamental belief in the Oneness of God.

¹ For a more detailed explanation in the science of discourse see Berenjkār, *Rawish shināsī ʿilm kalām*; Mutahharī, *Ashinaʿī bā ʿulūmi islāmī*; and Khosrowpanāh, *kālāmi jadīd*, p. 6.

The Importance of the Science of *Kalām*

The importance of any science depends on the importance of the subjects that it encompasses. *Kalām* encompasses religious beliefs. To realize the importance of this science we should first understand the importance of our religious beliefs.

Man is a combination of his beliefs and his actions. Actions usually stem from one's beliefs and thoughts and beliefs are the basis of our personality and manners. It wouldn't be too far-fetched to assume that all our actions are in some way or another related to our beliefs. Thus, the science of *kalām* which is concerned with our beliefs and thoughts, can be considered more important than other sciences that focus on our behavior.

The importance of the science of *kalām* can also be understood from another perspective. All schools of thought and belief systems claim that they are the correct way of attaining a better life and salvation. What is obvious is the fact that the only system of thought that can be true about this claim is the one that is based on God's Will and Message; for God has created humans and knows best what is good for them and what is not. On the other hand, not until God and his true Messengers have been recognized, can one truly have faith in a religion that claims to be from God. The Creator, His Messenger, and theological beliefs can only be proven through discourse, dialogue, and correct reasoning which are all encompassed by the science of *kalām*.

Sources Used in the Science of *Kalām*

Every science is based on facts that are derived empirically, using logical thinking, deductive reasoning, scripture and etc. *Kalām* is based

on two main sources: `aql¹ and scripture (the Quran, the sayings of the Prophet, 12 Imams, and Lady Fatima, peace be upon them).

`Aql

Once man proves that he has a creator using his `aql, he then strives to find the reality of other things in the world. He seeks to find the answer for many questions such as: Where have I come from? Where will I end up at? What is my current status? Why am I here? Using `aql we are able to answer some of these questions that are fundamental in understanding the realities of religion and the world we live in.

¹ Although `Aql is usually translated to 'intellect', this is not entirely correct for `Aql does encompass intellect but it is not intellect itself. `Aql is a blessing from God –where in the most general sense - we use to discern between what is right and what is wrong. A somewhat better translation for `aql could be 'common sense' or even 'conscience' (the part of your mind that tells you whether your actions are right or wrong [Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th Edition]). Even though a clear-cut definition for `aql cannot be found in the scripture, however, using a few traditions one can come to a rough conclusion of what `aql is and what it encompasses or what role it has in our being. For example it has been narrated from the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, that “`Aql is a light in the heart by which it is discerned between truth and falsehood (al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb*, vol. 1, p. 198).” Or “God created `Aql from a hidden treasured light in his ancient knowledge that he did not disclose to neither his messengers nor his closest angels. He made knowledge its spirit (*nafs*), comprehension (*fahm*) its soul (*rūḥ*), abstinent (*zuhd*) its head, modesty (*ḥayā*) its sight, wisdom its tongue, compassion its concern, and mercy its heart. He then filled and empowered it with ten things: certitude, faith, honesty (*ṣidq*), serenity, sincerity (*ikh-lās*), lenience, beneficence, contentment, submission, and gratefulness ...” (al-Ṣadūq, *al-khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 427).” For more narrations on `aql refer to the first volume of the books *Biḥār al-anwār* or *al-Kāfī*. -- Translator.

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With all the limitations it has, `aql is still a cornerstone in forming our understanding and comprehension concerning many different matters, and is thus considered as one of the most important proofs of God over us. `Aql is like a window that allows us to gaze outside ourselves and is a first tool used by man to understand the world.

Ibn Sikkīt asked Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} about God's proof over the people in a time when there is no apparent Prophet or Messenger among them. The Imam replied:

“[The Proof] is `aql, by which he who speaks the truth about God is recognized and acknowledged and he who makes fraudulent claims about God is recognized and refuted.”¹

Scripture: Quran and Hadith

After man recognizes the principle truths of the world by using his `aql, he strives to make himself familiar with the details and characteristics of this world. He looks for another source to fulfill this desire. It is here that he tries to connect to God and worship him but he realizes that these acts cannot be performed in a correct manner by solely relying on `aql. For we neither know how to worship God nor know which from our actions have His approval and which He considers unsatisfactory. Thus man feels the need to refer to his Creator and His religion for assistance.

All true religions have been created by God for the sole purpose of guiding the people to His right path. Religious scriptures are filled with

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 24; Al-Harrānī, *Tuḥaf al-`uqūl*, p. 450; and al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 80.

statements that show this meaning. The Quran introduces itself as a guide for: the people¹, the Muslims², the faithful³, and the pious;⁴ a book that takes people out of darkness into light,⁵ and the resolver of differences.⁶ A book that is wisdom⁷, a reminder,⁸ and clarification⁹ for all things.

It has been mentioned in many hadiths that the Quran encompasses the knowledge of all things from the past to the future. It is fairly obvious that we as humans are completely limited in understanding this knowledge and must refer to the Prophet and his Family, peace be upon them, to comprehend it.

¹ “The month of Ramadan in which the Quran was revealed, a guide for the people and an explanation for guidance and a separator [between truth and falsehood],” Quran, 1:185.

² “And we sent down the Book unto you as a clarification for all things and a guidance, mercy, and good news for the Muslims,” Quran, 16:89.

³ “A guidance and good news for the faithful,” Quran 27:2.

⁴ “That Book is without doubt a guide for the pious,” Quran, 2:2.

⁵ “Alif, Lām, Rā. A Book that we revealed unto you so that you take the people out of darkness into light with the permission of their Lord,” Quran, 14:1 and “He is the One who reveals unto his servant clear signs so that he may take you out of darkness into light, and Allah is truly compassionate and merciful toward you,” Quran, 57:9.

⁶ “We did not reveal the book unto you but so that you may clarify for them what they differed in, and a guidance and mercy for the faithful,” Quran, 16: 64.

⁷ “That is part of the wisdom that Allah has revealed unto you, and do not consider beside Allah another God, or else you will be thrown into hell, blameworthy and expelled,” Quran, 17:39.

⁸ “And this is a blessed reminder that we have revealed, are you rejecting it?” Quran, 21:50.

⁹ “And we sent down the Book unto you as a clarification for all things and a guidance, a mercy, and good news for the Muslims,” Quran, 16:89.

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Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} speaks of the Quran and his knowledge about it using these words:

“I have the knowledge of the Book of Allah and there is within it the knowledge of the first creation and all that will occur until the Day of Rising (*yawm al-qiyāma*). Within it is the knowledge of the sky and the earth, Heaven and Hell, and the report about what has occurred in the past or will occur in the future. I know all of these in the same manner that I look at the palm of my hand. Verily Allah has said [the Quran] is a ‘clarification for all things.’”¹

It has been mentioned in many hadiths that the knowledge and science that people seek is available with the Imams and that we must refer to their words, ponder on them, and accept them with our hearts.² It has also been iterated that failing to follow this procedure and grasping to other schools of thought will result in deviation from the path of guidance.³ As an example we will mention one such hadith here. Imam al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, said to Salama b. Kuhail and Ḥakam b. `Utaiba:

“If you wish, travel to the east or to the west but you will not find a correct knowledge except something whose source is us Ahl al-Bayt.”⁴

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 61 and al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, p. 197.

² See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 399; Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 2, p. 81; and Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, p. 9.

³ See al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, p. 13 and Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 374.

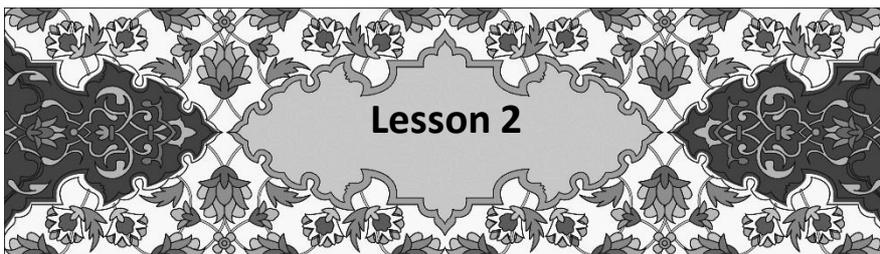
⁴ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 399.

Questions:

- 1- According to the definition of the science of *Kalām*, what does this science encompass and what does a *mutakallim* hope to achieve?
- 2- Explain the importance of the science of *Kalām* from two perspectives.
- 3- What role does `aql play in the science of *kalām*?
- 4- How do the Quran and hadith help in explaining theology and beliefs?

Research:

- 1- By referring to sources on Islam, find and compare the different definitions given for the science of *Kalām* in different Islamic schools of thought.



The Benefits of Religious and Theological Discussions



In the previous lesson we spoke about the importance and the role of *kalām* in our religion. We then introduced the two main sources used for understanding and learning Shia theology and beliefs.

In the current lesson we explain the benefits of the science of Kalām and continue to show why we must research about our beliefs and become deep in them.



While introducing the science of *kalām* we briefly spoke about the importance of religious and theological beliefs. In the current lesson we will study these topics in more detail.

In a general sense, learning religious beliefs in a correct and logical manner will result in steadfastness in our faith and will help in practicing our religious obligations.

Imam al-Kāẓim stated to his learned disciple Hishām b. al-Ḥakam:

“O Hishām! Allah, Blessed and Exalted be He, completed His proofs upon the people by the use of `aql. He assisted the Prophets by [clear] explanations and guided them to His Godhood by reason.”¹

Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“He who accepts this religion through people, then he will leave this religion by the very same people in the manner that they lead him into it. But whoever accepts it by the use of the Book (Quran) and scripture (*sunna*), then mountains will be destroyed before [his faith] is destroyed.”²

We will now speak about some of the main benefits of discussing and researching religious and theological issues.

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 13.

² Al-Nu`mānī, *al-Ghayba*, p. 22.

1- Gaining Greater Insight about Our Religious Beliefs

Everything is valued by a means and the value of mankind is based on his understanding and insight. Imam al-Bāqir, peace be upon him, has said:

“The price of every man and his stature is equivalent to his understanding (*ma`rifa*¹).”²

Our understanding and insight on any topic greatly helps us to decide how to approach that subject and use it to our benefit. It also helps us to avoid any mistakes and errors in this regard. This issue becomes even more important when we consider the fact that some mistakes and incorrect decisions that we make can change our destiny for the worse in forms that are at times totally or nearly impossible to compensate or can have catastrophic effects on our lives in the hereafter.

Researching religious issues and pondering on them gives us great insight into the reality of our beliefs and converts our shallow unstable understanding into a deep and permanent understanding of these topics. The Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, has said:

“The most faithful among you are those with the most understanding (*ma`rifa*)”³

The importance of having a deep understanding on religious issues is described in imam al-Bāqir's (peace be upon him) words:

¹ *Ma`rifa* does not have an equivalent translation in English. It can roughly be translated to knowing, recognizing, or understanding. When we say we have *ma`rifa* about God it means that we know or recognize him – translator.

² Al-Şadūq, *Ma`āni l-akhbār*, p. 1.

³ Al-Sha`īrī, *Jami` al-akhbār*, p. 5.

“Someone who has a deep understanding of religion is more burdensome on Satan than the devotion of one thousand devout worshippers.”¹

In the visitation prayers (*ziyārāt*) of many imams, statements like the following have been used to put more emphasis on our recognition and understanding of the Imams:

“I understand his rights (status)(`ārifan bi ḥaqqih)”

“I understand your rights (status)(`ārifan bi ḥaqqik)”

“I have deep insight regarding your stature (*muṣtabṣiran bi sha’nik*)”

The science of *kalām* plays one of the greatest roles in deepening our understanding about our beliefs and fundamental religious topics.

2- An Increase in Faith and Motivation to Perform Righteous Deeds

Another benefit of studying beliefs is an increase in our faith and greater motivation to perform righteous deeds. One whose beliefs in God are not firm or has doubts about the concept of Prophethood usually has no motive to observe religious rituals and acts. By studying our beliefs, we become firmer in our faith and by resolving the fundamental issues that bug our minds, we are more inclined to observe our religious obligations. This is of greater importance in our time where all forms of media are spreading doubts and falsehoods about Shia Islam.

¹ Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, p. 7.

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Learning the correct teachings of our religion and responding to the allegations made against it, not only helps us become more steadfast, but also allows us to help fellow Muslims who have doubts and questions about their beliefs and to protect them from the darkness of deviation.

At times, even though we no longer have any doubts about our beliefs, we still lack the proper motives to observe Islamic rites and rituals. However, even in this state, we still refrain from committing many sins that we would have normally committed and will gradually adjust ourselves to observe our obligations.

Faḍl b. Shādhān narrates from Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} that if someone asks: why have the people been ordered to acknowledge God, His messengers, His proofs, and what he has sent, it is responded:

“For many reasons. For example if one does not acknowledge God, then he will not refrain from transgressions, and he will not avoid the major sins (*al-kabā’ir*), and he will not fear (*yurāqib*) anyone concerning his lusts and what he enjoys from corrupt and unjust acts.”¹

Furthermore, not until we have firm faith in God’s characteristics (*ṣifāt*), will we observe religious commitments that are related to these characteristics. For example, if we don’t believe in an All-Wise and Omnipotent creator we will not put our faith in Him and entrust our all to Him. If we do not believe in a Merciful creator we will never ask Him to forgive our sins, for it does not make sense to ask forgiveness from one who does not forgive. The more we find God’s mercy in our hearts, the more we will love Him and feel inclined toward Him. These feelings and understandings can have a very pleasant effect on our lives, especially

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 99.

when we realize that with our slightest attention toward God, He will assist us in finding the path to salvation and will immerse us in His Ocean of mercy and love for He says:

“God loves those who repent and those who purify themselves”¹

2- Responding to questions and Resolving Doubts

During our lifetime we all experience troubling thoughts, doubts, and unanswered questions about our beliefs. These usually stem from our lack of understanding of theological subjects. If we have a good understanding of our beliefs based on sound reasoning, not only will we not be troubled when faced with doubts and questions, but we will also respond to them and resolve them for other people who experience similar issues.

By having insight in theological beliefs, not only are we protecting ourselves from going astray, we are also protecting our fellow faithful brethren. A quick glance at Shia scripture shows that the people who perform this act have a very high stature in the view of God and the Imams.

A man from the followers of the tenth Imam ^{peace be upon him} debated with one of the Imam’s enemies and defeated him. The man entered the Imam’s company while a group of people from the followers of Ali ^{peace be upon him} and the Hashemite’s were in his presence. The Imam ^{peace be upon him} greatly respected him and sat him on his own seat. One of the Hashemite

¹ Quran, 2:222.

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leaders said in protest: “Why have you preferred an ordinary man over the Hashemites?” The Imam responded: “Let the Quran judge between us. Doesn’t the Quran say: ... ‘Allah elevates in rank those among you who believe and have been given knowledge, and Allah is well aware of your actions’? Allah has not been satisfied but to elevate the knowledgeable believers above the believers that are not knowledgeable in the same manner that he has elevated normal believers above non-believers ... the honor that he has received for defeating our enemy by the use of arguments that God has taught him, is greater than any honor one might have as a result of lineage.”¹

3- The Ability to Teach and Guide Others

Although all people cannot spend all their time researching their religious beliefs, but it is necessary for everyone to have a minimum amount of understanding and knowledge on these issues. Others who have the time and expertise to become well versed in these subjects, must make use of this opportunity and help and teach their brethren their core religious beliefs. Naturally, the more you learn and the deeper understanding you have, the more you will be able to guide the ones who are after guidance. In Shia hadith, the people and scholars who take up the task of guiding people have been greatly praised. Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} says:

“Whoever from among our followers that is knowledgeable about our religion and takes out our uninformed followers from the darkness of ignorance into the light of the knowledge

¹ Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 2, p. 454.

that we have bestowed upon them, will come forth in the Day of Rising (*yawm al-qiyāma*) with a crown of light on his head ... then he will take to heaven all the people in this world that he had taught a righteous act, had opened a lock of ignorance from their heart, or had dispelled a [religious] doubt.”¹

Reason and scripture both emphasize the importance of scholars that use their knowledge for the benefit of others and the betterment of society. Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} states:

“A knowledgeable person whose knowledge [people] benefit from, is superior to seventy thousand worshippers [who only worship].”²

Questions:

- 1- How can we gain greater insight about our religion by studying religious and theological topics? Explain using reason and scripture.
- 2- How do the subjects discussed in the science of kalām motivates us to perform righteous deeds?
- 3- How and why do doubts form in the minds of Muslims? How can we prevent these doubts from occurring and how can we dispel them?
- 4- Mention a hadith and a verse from the Quran that show the importance of having a good understanding of theological beliefs.

¹ Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, p. 16.

² Al-`Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, vol. 16, p. 347.

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Research:

- 1- By referring to Shia scripture, see what role religious scholars must play in guiding the people to the right path and how they will be rewarded.
- 2- Mention an example of the effect that sound religious beliefs have on our everyday lives.



CHAPTER 2:

Theology





Arguments for the Existence of God: The Argument from Design (1)



Many arguments are used by theologians to prove the existence of a Creator. The Argument of the unmoved mover, the argument of the first cause, and the argument from design are only a number of these proofs. One of the most commonly used arguments in the Quran and hadith, is the argument from design that we will study in the current lesson.



The first step in improving and correcting our beliefs, is to have a fair ma`rifa of our Creator and the Creator of the universe. It is after we gain this ma`rifa that the doors to other ma`rifas and understandings will open and the way to perfection will be paved for us. Human intellect by its understanding of the phenomena that occur around us gradually guides us to the infinite realities of the world. `Aql, by the help of fitra, familiarizes us with the wonders of creation and ma`rifa illuminates us with the light of God.

1- The Argument from Design (Teleological Argument or Intelligent Design)

The argument from design, also known as the teleological argument or the argument of intelligent design, states that objects without intelligence cannot become ordered by themselves and must be ordered by an intelligent entity. 'Order' itself is defined as "the arrangement or disposition of people or things according to a particular sequence or method."¹ For example a dictionary is a collection of definitions of words that have been arranged in alphabetical order.

For order to exist, certain conditions must be met. The lack of any of these conditions results in a loss of order. These conditions are:

- The existence of multiple different objects.
- The existence of a cause that connects these objects or defines the relation between them.
- The existence of a particular arrangement and formation that gives the ordered system a purpose.

¹ Concise Oxford Dictionary

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An ordered system can be defined as a system in which different components are connected with a predefined relationship to fulfill a certain goal or purpose.

The argument from design asserts that the harmony and design that we observe in the world are testament to a wise and powerful creator that has created this world. According to this argument:

- 1- The natural world has been created based on a precise and detailed plan and each and every one of its components are governed by a definite unchangeable set of rules.
- 2- Every ordered system testifies to a knowledgeable and wise designer that has created it.
- 3- The order and design in the natural world is proof that it has been created by a knowledgeable designer.

All things that we know of, from electrons to the largest stars in the galaxies, animals and plants, and all particles that make up the world, are governed by the laws of nature that God has bound on them. For example, every living cell has an abundant number of genes. Each one of these genes plays the role it has in the cell when the time is just right. The exact and harmonious interaction between the genes and their roles causes the cell to continue living a healthy life. By observing these processes, a rational human being realizes that this extraordinary order has not been caused by accident nor randomly; rather it has been created by a powerful and wise entity.

We will put forward another example to show why complex ordered systems cannot be created by accident:

When an author writes a book he thoroughly thinks over the issues that he is writing about. He arranges them in a manner that they would make sense and would convey his thoughts and results in a clear manner.

He reads his statements over and over again to correct all errors. These are then typed on a computer by a typist in the correct format of a book. If someone claims that the resulting book is merely the work of a child randomly punching a keyboard numerous times, would anyone believe him? The answer is obviously no.

Now, imagine if someone claims that a well written piece of literature is not the result of much thought and effort, but due to an accidental process where the letters have been placed next to each other and the script has randomly appeared on a computer monitor. And the computer itself was not made by a team effort of human beings, but it had accidentally formed by itself. Doesn't this sound ridiculous? In the same manner, isn't it unreasonable to claim that the letters of this world (atoms and molecules) have randomly come together and bonded in the most complicated manner to form extremely complex creatures?

Newton frequently used the argument from design in his scientific works. As an example:

“Whence is it that Nature doth nothing in vain; and whence arises all that Order and Beauty which we see in the World? To what end are Comets, and whence is it that Planets move all one and the same way in Orbs concentrick, while Comets move all manner of ways in Orbs very excentrick, and what hinders the fix'd Stars from falling upon one another? How came the Bodies of Animals to be contrived with so much Art, and for what ends were their several Parts? Was the Eye contrived without Skill in in Opticks, and the Ear without Knowledge of Sounds? ... And these things being rightly dispatch'd, does it

not appear from Phænomena that there is a Being incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent ...”¹

2- The Argument from Design in Scripture

As we previously mentioned, in Shia scripture, the argument of design is considered an important means for proving the Creator. Many examples from Natural phenomena have been put forward for this purpose. God states in the Quran:

“We will show them our signs in the horizons and their bodies so that it becomes clear for them that it is the truth.”²

When man pays attention to the details of the world around him, the plants, animals, and inanimate objects, he realizes that these have been created by a wise and powerful being.

Imam al-Riḍā peace be upon him stated in a lengthy sermon:

“God’s creations are used as arguments for His [existence].”³

This argument is applicable to all humans and has been used in Islamic circles to argue with those that didn’t even believe in God. According to the Quran, God’s Prophets would always point to His signs and acts in creation to make people aware of the True God and urge them to distance themselves from false deities.⁴ The Imams have also used this argument to prove the existence of God. An atheist called Abū Shākir al-

¹ Isaac Newton, *Opticks: Or, A Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflexions and Colours of Light. The Second Edition, with Additions*, pp. 344-345.

² Quran, 41:53

³ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 35.

⁴ See Quran, 3:191-192, 16:12, and 30:24.

Dayaṣānī came to Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} and said: “Guide me to my God.” The Imam asked him to sit. There was a boy playing with an egg beside them and the Imam asked him for the egg. The boy gave it to him. The Imam then turned to al-Dayaṣānī and said:

“O Dayaṣānī! This is a protected stronghold that has a hard shell and within the hard shell a soft membrane and within the membrane is a golden liquid and melted silver. Neither the golden liquid mixes with the melted silver, nor does the melted silver mix with the golden liquid and it is constantly in this state. Nothing has come out of it to inform us about its freshness, nor has a corrupter entered it to inform us about its corruption. It is not known whether it has been created to produce a male or female. It hatches [to expose] the likes of the colors of peacocks. Do you not see a designer for this?”

Al-Dayaṣānī gazed at the ground in silence for some time then said: “I testify that there is no God but Allah; He is One and has no associates and Muhammad is his servant and messenger; And you are an Imam and a proof from God over his creations. I repent from the state that I was in.”¹

When another atheist had asked for proof about God’s existence Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} had responded:

“The existence of made-things (*afāʿil*) are an indicator of something that has made them. When you see a tall building you know that it has [been built by] a builder even though you might not have seen the builder or witnessed it.”²

¹ Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 2, p. 333.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 80.

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Questions:

- 1- What conditions must be met for the creation of an ordered system?
- 2- Explain the Argument from Design.
- 3- Briefly explain how Imam al-Şādiq ^{peace be upon him} responded to al-Dayāşānī.
- 4- What important issues do scientists point to when explaining the argument from design?

Research:

- 1- Find three verses from the Quran that directly use the argument from design?



Arguments for the Existence of God: The Argument from Design (2)



In the previous lesson we briefly introduced the argument from design. We showed that this argument has been used in scripture to prove the existence of a creator. In the current lesson, we will put forward examples from the human body and nature to support this argument.



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We previously stated that the proof from design is based on two hypothesis. The first hypothesis states that the world has order. The second uses the first to argue about the existence of the Creator. In the current lesson we will show examples of order in the created world.

1- Signs in the human body

God says in the Quran:

“And in the earth are signs for those that have certitude. And in yourselves, do you not see?”¹

“And in your creation ... are signs for those who have certitude.”²

The signs of God's Omniscience and Omnipotence are so abundant in the creation of man that understanding one's self can be considered as the most useful tool for the recognition of God. Imam Ali peace be upon him says:

“The most beneficent form of understanding (*ma`rifa*), is understanding one's self.”³

When one gains a good understanding and knowledge about himself, he will have paved the way for higher levels and other forms of understanding and knowledge. One of the most important results of this knowledge and understanding is the recognition and *ma`rifa* of God. Imam Ali peace be upon him states:

¹ Quran, 51:20-21.

² Quran, 45:4.

³ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurur al-ḥikam*, no. 4640.

“He who recognizes himself, then he will also recognize his Lord.”¹

One of Imam al-Ṣādiq’s disciples narrates that he asked Hishām b. Ḥakam: “If someone asks you: ‘How did you recognize your God?’ how will you respond?” Hishām replied:

“I would respond: I came to know my God, Majestic be His Glory, by the use of my own ‘self’ for my ‘self’ is the closest thing to me. I perceive it as integrated parts and allied sections. Its composition is clear and its build is solid. It is based on different boundaries and shapes. It grows after diminution and diminishes after growth. Different senses and separate organs have been created for it: sight, hearing, smelling, taste, and feeling. But they have been created with inherent weakness, deficiency, and debasement. None of them can perceive what the other does nor can they attract to themselves what benefits them or repel what harms them. Those who possess conscience deem it impossible for a writing to exist without an author and an image without an illustrator. Thus, I understood that my body has been created by a creator and illustrated by an illustrator who is different from it in all aspects. God says in the Quran: ‘And in yourselves [are signs], do you not see?’^{2,3}

¹ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurur al-ḥikam*, no. 4637.

² Quran, 51:21.

³ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 289, no. 9.

1-1- The human body

The human body is a treasure chest of mysteries and magnificent delicacies. Scientists have devised different branches of science for the detailed study of the body. Each human organ is a trove of wonders:

- Each cell is a separate living organism. Different Cells come together and build muscles, bones, skin, and other parts of the body.
- The digestive system is tasked with preparing nourishments for the cells.
- The circulatory system pumps these nourishments and oxygen to the cells.
- The respiratory system refreshes the blood.
- The brain and nervous system control and pilot the body.
- The five senses provide the brain with information from the environment.

The eye by itself can be considered a miracle of the argument from design. The eye is made of many sections. The eyeball, the eye socket, eyelids, eyebrows, eyelashes, and the muscles and nerves that control them:

- Eye socket or orbit: Is made from a group of bones that create a spherical room for the eye to reside and be protected in.
- Eyelids: Are two curtains that protect the eye from foreign objects, heat, and cold. They also periodically moisten the eye.
- Eyelashes: Prevent debris from entering the eye and also act as proximity sensors activated by touch.
- Muscles: These delicately control the motion of the eyes in different directions making it possible for the eye to focus on a point of interest.

- Eyebrows: Prevent sweat and other liquids and debris from falling down into the eyes.
- Eyeball: a spherical object with an opening at the front that allows light to enter through the pupil. The pupil's size is itself controlled by the iris. The lens is then adjusted to allow light to form a perfect picture on the retina. The human eye can distinguish between hundreds of thousands of colors.

1-2- The Human Mind and Soul

What we mentioned in the previous section were merely a spec from the human body. The wonders in the human mind and soul are more mysterious and complex. These wonders include:

- Thought: A means for solving problems and devising solutions.
- Creativity: A means for fulfilling one's needs, tackling challenging events, and making inventions and new discoveries.
- Memory: A means for categorizing and storing different pieces of information and retrieving them when needed.
- Logic: A means for finding the causes of things by separating different facts and finding the connections between them.
- Imagination: A means for creating new concepts in the mind and using them outside the mind to solve problems.
- Will: A means for starting new tasks or putting them aside.
- Friendship, enmity, love, hatred, and dozens of other qualities that have a negative or positive outcome on our actions and behavior.

2- Signs in the Creation of the Earth, Sun, and Moon

The Quran cites the creation of the earth and the wisdom therein at least eighty times. It asks its followers to ponder on its wonders as a means of knowing and recognizing God:

“And in the earth are signs for those that have certitude.”¹

The earth is part of the solar system. The heavenly bodies that create this system have been designed in this manner to make life possible on earth. The Quran points to the different aspects of this system and this order. This system is considered a sign of God’s wisdom. God addresses human’s common sense and reminds them to think and ponder on these signs:

“For those who use their common sense, there are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth, the coming and going of night and day, the ships that sail in the seas for the benefit of the people, the waters God sends down from the skies that give life to the earth after its death, all forms of animals scattered on earth, and the motion of the winds and clouds that are held between the sky and earth.”²

“And from his signs are night and day and the sun and moon.”³

According to the Quran, the sun and moon are two clear signs of the world’s Wise and Omnipotent Creator. In this holy book, we have been ordered seventeen times using different wordings to ponder on these two celestial bodies.

¹ Quran, 51:20.

² Quran, 2:164.

³ Quran, 41:37.

The sun is about 1.3 million times larger than the earth and the moon is about 50 times smaller than the earth. However, both have submitted to the orders of their Lord and are at the service of mankind:

“And for you, he put under control the persistent sun and moon. And for you, he put under control the night and day.”¹

Life owes its all to sunlight. The creation of the sun was a first step for the creation of man. If the sun ever cools down then earth will fall into fatal darkness and cold. There will be no wind, no rain, and no snow. Streams will dry out. Rivers and waterfalls will vanish. No plants will grow and no food will be found. The earth will freeze over and then all forms of life will fade away.

What makes life possible on earth and the order we see on it, we owe to the delicate creation of the sun and moon. According to the Quran, the sun and moon both move on a predetermined path for a predetermined purpose:

“And the sun flows in its orbit, that is the planning of the Mighty and All-Knowing. And we destined stations for the moon until it becomes [a crescent] like an old date branch. Neither is the sun allowed to reach the moon, nor night day; and they are each floating in an orbit.”²

According to this verse, although the sun is the center of the solar system and looks stationary from our viewpoint, it too is floating in an orbit in space.

¹ Quran, 14:33.

² Quran, 36:38-40.

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Both the sun and moon are important time keeping tools. For thousands of years men have used these two bodies for the calculation of days, months, and years. If it were not for the sun, *age* would have been a meaningless concept since we wouldn't have a reliable means of calculating it:

“He is the Breaker of Dawn and [the One] who made night for resting and the sun and moon a means for calculating. That is the planning of the Mighty and All-Knowing.”¹

3- Signs in the Creation of the Galaxies

The world, as perceived by our feeble eyes, is a flat earth and a black sky dotted with tiny stars. However, the world is so great that it can neither be perceived by our eyes nor by our minds. The billions of galaxies, the stars they encompass, and the dazzling celestial bodies within them are all signs for those who have insight.

The word *samā'* (sky or heavens) and its derivatives have been mentioned 313 times in the Quran. The first thing that comes to the mind when one ponders on the sky is its dizzying and boundless size. Each galaxy has countless stars. The diameter of the Milky Way galaxy is about One hundred thousand light years. It takes the sun 350 million years to orbit it once. It is estimated that there are 200 billion to 2 trillion galaxies in the observable universe.

At first sight, it is impossible for us to guess how far away stars are from us. The closest star to us after the sun is 4 light years away. This

¹ Quran, 6:96.

means if we travel at the speed of light (300,000 KM/H) it would take us 4 years to reach this star. The nearest galaxy to us is located 800 thousand light years away.

When one meditates on the galaxies and the vast and limitless domain they are scattered in, he realizes that this great theater and the order and laws that it is bound by, have not come into existence without a creator. One's reason perceives that an Omnipotent and Omniscient deity has brought all these into being. Imam al-Şādiq ^{peace be upon him} stated to an Egyptian atheist:

“Do you not see the sun and moon, and day and night how they pass into each other without making a mistake and then they return again. They have no choice and they have no place [to go too] but their current place. If they had a choice then why do they return to the same place? And if they had a choice then why doesn't night suddenly change into day and day into night? By God, my Egyptian brother, they have no choice and the One who left them without a choice is greater than them and wiser.”¹

When an enquirer asked Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} for proofs about the existence of God, he replied and gave examples from the human body. He then continued:

“Apart from these when I see the rotation of the heavens by His Might, the formation of clouds, the blowing of winds, the motion of the sun, moon, and stars and other clear and strange

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 73.

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signs, I become certain that this [world] has a planner and creator.”¹

Celestial bodies float in the heavens bound by gravity and motion. This mechanism is referred to in the Quran as the effect of invisible pillars:

“He is the one that has raised the skies without pillars that you can see.”²

“He has created the skies without pillars that you can see.”³

If it were not for these pillars the earth would either collapse into the sun or break free from its gravity and float into space. Both cases would make life on earth impossible.

4- The spiritual Effects of Pondering on God’s Signs

God has commanded us in the Quran to ponder on the marvels of the universe and the world around us. A greater emphasis has been put on pondering on the heavens and the phenomena that occur therein:

“Do they not gaze upon the sky above them? How we have established and decorated it while there are no openings in it.”⁴

Due to these verses, the Imams held a special place for the heavens. During their supplications and at night they would gaze in the horizons

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 78 - 79.

² Quran, 13:2.

³ Quran, 31:20.

⁴ Quran, 50:6.

and ponder on God's signs.¹ Every time the prophet would rise for his night prayers he would turn towards the sky and recite these verses:²

“For those who possess intellect, there are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth and the passing of night and day. Those that remember God while they are standing, sitting, or lying on their sides. They ponder on the creation of the heavens and earth [and say:] ‘O our Lord! You have not created these in vain. You are exalted above all things! Protect us from the torment of hellfire. O Lord! You have disgraced those who you put in hellfire and the evil-doers have no one to help them. O our Lord! We heard a caller calling [us for] faith [stating] “Believe in your Lord,” so we became believers. O Lord! Forgive our sins and cover our bad deeds and make us die with the righteous. O Lord! Fulfill for us what you promised through Your Messengers and do not disgrace us on the Day of Rising for you do not break your promise.””³

One of Imam Ali's disciples called Ḥabbat al-`Uranī narrates that:

“I and Nauf were sleeping in the palace courtyard late one night when Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} entered leaning against the wall in sorrow like someone who had lost a child. He was continuously reciting the aforementioned verses while walking back and forth like someone who had lost his mind. He then said to me: ‘O Ḥabba, are you sleeping or awake?’ I replied: ‘Awake,’ then said: ‘When you [with all your virtues] act like this then how should we act [while we have performed many sins]?’ He lowered his gaze and started crying then said: ‘O

¹ A narration has been omitted from this section – translator.

² Al-Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-wasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 156 & al-Tamīmī, *Da`āim al-islām*, vol. 1, p. 211; Also see al-Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 445.

³ Quran, 3:190-194

Ḥabba, God has a station where we will be present before him. Nothing from our actions will be hidden from Him. O Ḥabba, God is closer to you and me than our jugular veins. Nothing can hide us from him.’ He then said: ‘O Nauf! Are you sleeping?’ Nauf replied: ‘No, I am not sleeping. I have cried much this night.’ Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} said: ‘O Nauf! If you have cried much this night due to fear of God, then tomorrow (meaning on the Day of Judgment) your eyes will be delighted in the presence of God. O Nauf! No tear drops from one’s eyes due to fear of God but that it will put out seas of [hell] fires. O Nauf! Those that cry for the fear of God, love for the sake of God, and hate for the sake of God, have the greatest station in His sight ...’ He then said to us: ‘Be careful about God for I have warned you.’ He then walked away from us saying ‘I wish I knew whether You turn away from me when I am not paying attention to You or You still face me. I wish I knew how [You regard] me when I sleep too much and thank you too little.’ By God, he was constantly in this state until the sun came up.”¹

Questions:

- 1- How can one argue that the earth is a divine sign?
- 2- What is the relation between the sun, the earth, and the creatures that flourish on it?
- 3- Mention a few wonders of the universe.

¹ Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 41, p. 22.

Research:

- 1- Do a research on the life of ants and present it to your friends.
- 2- Find out how far away from us is the farthest galaxy that has been discovered to date?



Arguments for the Existence of God: The Testament of Innate Knowledge (1)



In the previous lessons we explained the argument from design as the foremost and most common argument for the existence of God. In the current lesson we will speak about another argument that is considered the cornerstone of Shia theology.



‘Innate knowledge’ is one of the best arguments for the existence of God. Innate knowledge has been used as a basis for the arguments of the Quran, Prophets, and the Imams. Innate knowledge alongside the argument from design are considered the most important tools for knowing and recognizing God.

1- The definition of Innate Knowledge

When we are inflicted with a great misery and lose all hope, we pay attention with all our hearts to a Limitless Power. In these situations we clearly understand that that Limitless Power can save us from our afflictions. These states that all people experience in times of extreme hardship and when all hope is lost, occur due to an innate knowledge of God that He Himself has placed inside us.

The innate knowledge of God resides within us from the day we are born. According to the Prophet of Islam all infants are born with this innate¹ knowledge until they decide themselves to ignore this knowledge due to what their parents or others teach them:

“All newborns are born with innate [knowledge]. It is their parents who make them Jews, Christians or Zoroastrians.”²

¹ In Islamic scripture and the Quran, innate issues are usually referred to using the word *fiṭra*. *Fiṭra* is derived from the root F-Ṭ-R which means to open or create.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 19. This narration has also been mentioned in Sunni sources such as p. 168 of the first volume of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

2- Innate knowledge in the Quran and Hadith

According to Shia belief, the only reason that we know God in this world is due to the innate knowledge that He has placed inside us:

“Place your face faithfully toward the true religion, the nature by which he has originated the people. The creation of God cannot be altered. That is the valid religion but most people do not know.”¹

According to this verse, the valid religion is one that has been innately placed inside all men. In the school of the Ahl al-Bayt, there is a direct and vital connection between our ability to know God and His innate knowledge bestowed to us during our creation.

When Zurara asked Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} to explain the aforementioned verse he replied:

“He created them with [the knowledge] of Oneness [of God], when he took the oath² from them that He is their Lord.”³

If it were not for this original knowledge, knowing god would be impossible for us. Imam al-Baqir ^{peace be upon him} explains the aforementioned verse in this manner:

“In the nature [of people], He placed [for them] the knowledge about Himself and that He is their Lord when he created them. If it were not for this [knowledge], they would not know [what

¹ Quran, 30:30.

² See Quran, 7:172.

³ Al-Şadūq, *al-Tawhīd*, p. 330.

to reply] when they are asked about their creator or the One who gives them sustenance.”¹

According to Shia teachings, all people possess the innate knowledge of God and no one is devoid of this blessing. Imam al-Bāqir peace be upon him explains the Prophet’s statement “All newborns are born with innate [knowledge]” in this manner:

“It means [they are created] with the knowledge that Allah, Mighty and Majestic be He, is their creator.”²

3- Innate knowledge Among Non-Muslims

The innate knowledge of God has also been emphasized in the works of non-Muslim authors especially those with Christian backgrounds. Christian theologians present sections of the Bible as proof of our innate knowledge of God:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became

¹ Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, vol. 1, p. 241.

² Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 331.

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futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”¹

John Calvin states in the beginning of the third chapter of his seminal work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

“That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service. Certainly, if there is any quarter where it may be supposed that God is unknown, the most likely for such an instance to exist is among the dullest tribes farthest removed from civilization. But, as a heathen tells us, there is no nation so barbarous, no race so brutish, as not to be imbued with the conviction that there is a God. Even those who, in other respects, seem to differ least from the lower animals, constantly retain some sense of religion; so thoroughly has this common conviction possessed the mind, so firmly is it stamped on the breasts of all men. Since, then, there never has been, from the very first, any quarter of the globe, any city, any household even, without religion, this amounts to a tacit confession, that a sense of Deity is inscribed on every heart. Nay, even idolatry is ample evidence of this fact. For we know how reluctant man is to lower himself, in order to set other creatures above him. Therefore, when he chooses to worship wood and stone rather than be thought to have no God, it is evident how very strong this impression of a

¹ Romans, 1:18-21 (English Standard Version).

Deity must be; since it is more difficult to obliterate it from the mind of man, than to break down the feelings of his nature,— these certainly being broken down, when, in opposition to his natural haughtiness, he spontaneously humbles himself before the meanest object as an act of reverence to God.”

This following statement has been recorded from Pascal:

“The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things. It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason.”

Professor Justin L. Barrett states in his book *Born believers: the science of children's religious belief* that children believe in a Deity from birth. Although the mechanism that he explains for this belief differ with that of the Islamic belief, nevertheless the statement about children believing in a deity seem to be in accordance with the hadith that we mentioned at the beginning of this lesson:

“All newborns are born with innate [knowledge]. It is their parents who make them Jews, Christians or Zoroastrians.”¹

3- The Characteristics and Effects of Innate Knowledge

One of the most important effects of innate knowledge is the ability to believe in and bond with God without the need for any external knowledge about Him.

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 19.

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This knowledge stems from the heart and influences our mind, body, and our decisions in life. However, in many instances we are unaware of God's presence. We sometimes forget about God and believe our problems can be solved by the hands of God's creatures: maybe someone in a position of power, wealth, or influence. We must always consider God in the manner that He has described Himself:

"He does what He wills."¹

"He judges how He desires."²

We must always have in mind that God can solve our problems and change the path of our life in an instance, regardless of what and how we had planned. We must trust God more than we trust any of His creations. The God that we find in our hearts has Power over all his creations and nothing can do us good or harm except by His permission.

Questions:

- 1- What is 'innate knowledge' and what does it refer to in the hadith "All newborns are born with innate [knowledge]"?
- 2- Mention a verse of the Quran that speaks about our innate knowledge of God.
- 3- How have the Ahl al-Bayt interpreted 'the nature by which he has originated the people' in verse 30:30 of the Quran.
- 4- What is the most important result of having innate knowledge about God?

¹ Quran, 3:40.

² Quran, 5:1.

Research:

- 1- Find verses in the Quran that speak about remembering or being reminded (search for words with the Arabic root Dh-K-R). What results does the Quran mention for remembering or being reminded about God or what relates to Him?



Arguments for the Existence of God: The Testament of Innate Knowledge (2)



In the previous lesson we briefly introduced the innate knowledge of God that we all possess. In the current lesson we will speak about the different ways by which this knowledge is made manifest in the heart or exposed after being covered due to our sins.



Although we are born with an innate knowledge of God, this knowledge is sometimes covered up and hidden due to our sins or is forgotten due to us not paying attention to it. There are many ways to make this knowledge manifest in our hearts. This manifestation can occur due to external sources that we have no role in or due to our own actions. We will mention here some of the different ways that the innate knowledge of God is made manifest and uncovered in our hearts.

1- Reminder by God’s Prophets and Messengers or their Successors

One the most mentioned topics in the words and writings of God’s Messengers and their successors, is the innate knowledge of God. This knowledge is considered a basis for all our religious beliefs. This is how Imam Ali peace be upon him explains the duty of God’s messengers and prophets in this regard:

“And He dispatched His messengers among the [people] and sent them one after the other, to request them to fulfill their pledge of obeying Him when they were created and to remind them about His forgotten blessings and to reason with them by preaching.”¹

According to this statement, the first duty of the messengers is to uncover for the people their innate knowledge and request them to fulfill their pledge of obeying God. The existence of God and our knowledge about him is considered so obvious that according to the Quran, the Prophets would preach the people in this manner:

¹ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, sermon no. 1

“The messengers that were sent to them said: ‘Is there any doubt about God, the creator of the heavens and the earth’?!”¹

This method of reminding people about God shows that if people refer to their inner selves and at the same time pay attention to the signs of God in nature, they will remember the knowledge they had about God that they had forgotten and their sleeping consciences will be awakened and illuminated by the knowledge of God. For God has never been unknown in the nature of any man.

2- Calamities, Afflictions, and Tribulations

During calamities and situations where one loses all hope of being helped through normal worldly means, he discovers the knowledge of God that has been entrusted within him. In these cases man plays no role in uncovering the innate knowledge of God that he possesses, rather he finds this knowledge inadvertently without any effort. The condition in which this process occurs is referred to in the Quran as *al-ba’sā’ wa l-darrā’*² meaning ‘times of affliction and tribulation.’

It is during the times of afflictions and tribulations that we lose all hope and when things become more severe we even lose the ability to think and act properly. When these states of turmoil peak, we find within

¹ Quran, 14:10. What we have provided here is a strictly literal translation of the verse. When a question is worded in this manner in Arabic, the speaker intends to receive a negative reply. This verse intends the following meaning: “The messengers that were sent to them said: ‘There is absolutely no doubt about God, the creator of the heavens and the earth.’”

² See Quran 2:177, 2:214, 6:42, 7:94.

ourselves nothing but pure destitution, and at the same time we find God's absolute wealth and power.

The phenomena that we described does not usually occur during normal everyday events or hardships, rather it occurs during times of extreme pain and misery where we lose all hope and fear imminent death like when we are drowning, riding an airplane that is about to crash, or are lost in a hot desert. It is in these times that the innate knowledge of God is uncovered and made manifest.

According to the Quran, it is during 'times of affliction and tribulation' that we accept Allah with all our heart, although when we are saved many of us go back to our old ways:

"And when you are stricken with harm at sea, all those that you would call are abandoned but He. But when He saves you and delivers you to land you turn away [from Him] and man is verily ungrateful."¹

"And when they board the ship [and a calamity befalls them] they call out to Allah with pure faith, but when He delivers them to land they [return] to their polytheistic beliefs."²

In the hadith and scripture, the connection between calamities and afflictions and the knowledge of God have been mentioned. It has been narrated from Imam al-`Askarī peace be upon him that:

"Allah is the one that all creatures are inclined to worship during calamities and times of need, when they lose hope in all but Him"³

¹ Quran, 17:67.

² Quran, 29:65.

³ Al-Şadūq, al-Tawḥīd, p. 230.

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A man came to Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} and asked:

“O son of the Messenger of God! Guide me to God for many have argued with me and they have bewildered me.’ He replied: ‘O servant of God! Have you ever boarded a ship?’ The men replied ‘Yes.’ The Imam continued: ‘Has it ever sunk in a manner that there were no ships close-by to rescue you and swimming wouldn’t help you?’ The man responded: ‘Yes.’ The Imam said: ‘In that situation, did you not feel in your heart that there is something that can save you and free you from this critical situation?’ Again the man responded ‘Yes.’ The Imam then said: ‘That thing is God who has the might to save you when there is no savior and relieve you when there is no reliever.’”¹

3- Meditating on God’s Signs

Pondering and meditating on God’s signs is another means by which we can uncover the innate knowledge of God. According to Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} God is:

“Described by His signs (*al-‘āyāt*) and known by His marks (*al-‘alāmāt*).”²

As we previously mentioned, due to a multitude of reasons the innate knowledge of God can become obscured or forgotten. When this happens, the knowledge of God has to be uncovered and made manifest. Every divine sign and mark in the world of creation is a guide toward our

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 231, no. 5.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 97.

creator and a basis for the manifestation of the knowledge of God that can neither be perceived nor imagined by ordinary means.

4- Worshipping and Obeying God

After God makes his knowledge manifest and introduces us to the path of guidance, He asks us to serve and obey him:

“And I did not create the Jinn and Mankind but to worship Me.”¹

God then rewards us due to this devotion. One of these rewards is a greater level of *ma`rifa* and knowledge of Himself that He bestows upon us. This higher degree of *ma`rifa* then becomes a cause by which we are inclined to worship and serve God in a more sincere manner.

Among the many forms of worship and devotion, prayers (*ṣalāt*) and supplications (*dua*) have a special place. The Messenger of God ^{God's} blessings be upon him and his progeny states:

“Prayers (*ṣalāt*) are parts of religious law by which the satisfaction of the Lord, Mighty and Majestic be He, is achieved. They are the lamp of the prophets and whoever performs them will be loved by the angels, will receive guidance, faith, and the light of knowledge [of God] (*ma`rifa*).”²

According to many traditions one who performs his prayers (*ṣalāt*) will attain nearness to God. Nearness to God cannot be attained but by the

¹ Quran, 51:56.

² Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 522.

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increase of *ma`rifa*. It has been mentioned in a hadith narrated from Imams Ali, al-Ṣādiq, and al-Riḍā, peace be upon them, that:

“For all the pious, prayers (*salat*) are the cause of nearness [to God].”¹

The midnight prayers (*ṣalāt al-layl*) also play a great role in increasing our knowledge of God:

“The midnight prayers ... are the light of *ma`rifa*.”²

Supplications and dua are another means for increasing our *ma`rifa*. This act of devotion was never forsaken by any of God’s messengers or Imams and they would spend lengthy sessions supplicating to God.

Supplicating to God and reciting duas is considered such a great act of worship that it has been described in this manner:

“Supplicating is the core of worshipping.”³

It is during supplications and shedding tears for God that our *ma`rifa* is increased. In the context of some duas we also ask God to increase our *ma`rifa* and knowledge of Himself. Imam al-Riḍā interpreted the verse “Guide us to the straight path”⁴ as being a dua that means:

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 265; Al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍurhu l-faqīh*, vol. 4, p. 416; Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, Wisdom no. 136.

² Al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb*, vol. 1, p. 191.

³ Al-Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-shī’a*, vol. 7, p. 28 (citing the Messenger of God, God’s blessings be upon him and his family).

⁴ Quran, 1: 6.

“Asking for an increase in the *ma`rifa* of His Lord.”¹

We have been advised to recite the following dua during the occultation of Imam al-Mahdi ^{peace be upon him} as a means of receiving *ma`rifa*:

“O God! Make me recognize You for if You do not make me recognize You I will not recognize Your Prophet. O God! Make me recognize Your Messenger for if you do not make me recognize Your messenger I will not recognize Your Proof (*hujja*). O God! Make me recognize your Proof for if you do not make me recognize your proof I will go astray.”²

Questions:

- 1- Which method for manifesting our innate knowledge of God and His *ma`rifa* does the verse “The messengers that were sent to them said: ‘Is there any doubt about God, the creator of the heavens and the earth’?!”³ refer to?
- 2- Use verses from the Quran and hadith to explain how calamities and afflictions, make manifest the knowledge of God bestowed within us.
- 3- In a detailed manner explain the hadith: “Described by His signs (*al-`āyāt*) and known by His marks (*al-`alāmāt*).”⁴

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍurhu l-faqīh*, vol. 1, p. 310.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 337.

³ Quran, 14:10.

⁴ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 97.

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- 4- How do acts of devotion and supplications increase our *ma`rifā* and knowledge of God?

Research:

- 1- By pondering on the different aspects of prayers (*ṣalāt*) explain how they can help to reveal our innate knowledge of God and develop it.



The Oneness of God



In the previous lesson we spoke about the ways of expanding our ma'rifa and knowledge of God. In the current lesson we will speak about God's most important characteristic: Oneness (*Tawhīd*). The topics that we will cover will include the definition and different aspects of Oneness.



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The most important belief in Islam and divine religions, is the belief in the Oneness of God. This belief is the most emphasized in the words and actions of all divine guides. The Quran has given special attention to this belief.

1- Oneness of God in the Quran and Scripture

In the Quran, on one hand the oneness of God has been emphasized and on the other the existence of other deities has been denied:

“And your God is One God. There is no God but He, the Beneficent, the Merciful.”¹

In this and many other verses, mankind is ordered to believe in only one God and to know that He is Kind and Merciful to all that he has created. This is the message of all Prophets. The Prophet of Islam, God’s blessings be upon him and his progeny, preached this very meaning in his first public proclamation:

“O tribe of Quraysh! O group of Arabs! I invite you to worship Allah and cast aside those that you equate with Him and the idols. I invite you to testify that there is no God but Allah.”²

In the scripture of no religion can one find more emphasis on the oneness of God than in Islam where it is considered the cornerstone of faith. Imam al-Ṣādiq peace be upon him states:

¹ Quran, 2:163.

² Faḍl b. Hasan al-Ṭabrisī, *l’lām al-warā*, p. 39.

“The foundation of religion is the Oneness [of God] and His Justness.”¹

The oneness of God is the pillar and main slogan of religion and all religious beliefs stem from or are ultimately rooted in this single belief. The archangel Gabriel spoke of this matter in this manner to the Prophet:

“The basis of religion and its foundation is the statement ‘there is no God but Allah.’”²

2- The Definition of Oneness

Oneness is literally defined as ‘believing in God and that he is One and has no partners.’³ However, believing in Oneness can have different levels. The first level of Oneness that comes to mind is to believe He has no associates. However, in the Quran and hadith, a more precise definition has been introduced for Oneness. In many traditions, Oneness has been defined as “having no equal or similitude.” According to this definition, Oneness of God means nothing is similar to Him and none of His qualities and characteristics are like those of His creations.

Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} further defines oneness in this manner:

“[Believing in] Oneness means you do not attribute⁴ to your Lord the things that are attributable to yourself.”¹

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Ma`āni l-akhbār*, p. 11.

² Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 23, p. 247.

³ Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-`ayn*, vol. 3, p. 280 and Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-`arab*, vol. 3, p. 446.

⁴ The original Arabic uses the word ‘*yajūzu*’ which literally means ‘to allow’.

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This hadith is a very precise definition for Oneness and shows that the belief that God is similar to his creations in any of his characteristics, will ultimately lead to associating others with God. This definition of Oneness can also be found in many duas and supplications. We read in the dua of Iftitāḥ:

“All praise is to God who has no opponent that is His equal, and there is nothing like Him that can be considered similar to Him, and there is no helper that can assist him.”²

3- The Degrees of Oneness

To gain an in depth understanding of the oneness of God, we must first understand the degrees of God’s Oneness. In the same manner that God is One in his essence (*dhāt*), he is also One in his attributes (*ṣifāt*) and actions (*af`āl*) and has no similitude. Thus three degrees of Oneness can be understood: Oneness in essence, Oneness in attributes, and Oneness in actions. Since the truth of Oneness can only be made manifest in our relationship with God, a fourth degree of Oneness can be defined that is called Oneness in devotion (or servitude). We will now briefly explain each degree of Oneness.

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 96.

² The original Arabic reads: «الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَيْسَ لَهُ مُنَازِعٌ يُعَادِلُهُ وَ لَا شَبِيهٌ يُشَاكِلُهُ وَ لَا ظَهِيرٌ يُعَاذِيهِ» (Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 3, p. 110)

3.1. Oneness in Essence

As we already explained, Oneness in essence means God's essence has no similitude or equal in any of its aspects. God's essence has no limit, no size, and no composition. The essence of no other creature is similar to this and thus God is one in His essence.

3.2. Oneness in Attributes

Like His essence, God has no similitude in his attributes. He is devoid of the attributes of His creations. Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} states:

“There is nothing like Him and He has always been higher than the attributes of the creations.”¹

Imam al-Ḥusayn utters a similar statement:

“He cannot be described by any of the attributes of the creations.”²

Thus God has no similitude in his attributes such as Knowledge and Power and none of his creations share any attributes with Him or are similar to Him:

“There is nothing like him and he is the All-Hearing and All-Seeing.”³

3.3. Oneness in Actions

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 50.

² Al-Ardabīlī, *Tuḥaf al-`uqūl*, p. 244.

³ Quran, 42:11.

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God has no exemplar nor similitude in His actions. Oneness in action encompasses two different aspects. The first aspect relates to God's Omnipotence and states that God has no need for help from anyone or anything in order to perform an action. The Quran refutes the polytheists by referring to this aspect of oneness:

“Say: ‘Call upon those that you considered [as deities] beside God. They do not possess the amount of the tiniest particle in the heavens and earth and they have no share in it. And He does not have an assister among them.’”¹

No action can be imagined that God is incapable of performing by Himself. Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} states:

“He initiated everything without thought, assistance, helper, or deputy.”²

The second aspect states that every creature in the world needs God to perform the tiniest of actions and without the power bestowed upon them by God, they are completely helpless. In the same manner that all creatures are completely dependent on God for their being, they are also completely dependent on Him for their actions. Even though we act out of free will, but the power by which we act is completely dependent on God. God states in the Quran:

“Say Allah is the Creator of all things and He is One and All-Dominant.”³

¹ Quran, 34:22.

² Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 25, p. 25.

³ Quran, 13:16.

Thus, even though man is free to do as he pleases, but his power and will are still dependent on God.¹

3.3. Oneness in Devotion and Servitude

Oneness in devotion means we worship only God and submit to no one but Him. This has always been among the most important goals of all Prophets and Messengers:

“And we dispatched in every nation a messenger so that they would worship God and keep away from Satan/falsehood.”²

Worshipping God is interweaved with reverence and humility toward Him. Reverence has different degrees the highest of which results in worshipping God. This degree is reserved for God only and in no wise permissible for anyone or anything other than Him. Worshipping is the result of complete submission to God.

Not all forms of reverence are considered acts of worship. We revere different people like our parents and teachers and even ask them for assistance where we feel they can help us. These acts are never considered worshipping and we only ask them for assistance in places where there have been given power by God.

Unfortunately Salafi groups and Wahhabis, present a skewed definition for Oneness in Devotion and label many acts of reverence (such as visiting the tombs of the Imams, intercession, and asking them for assistance) as being instances of polytheism, even though these acts are

¹ Al-Şadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 125.

² Quran, 16:36.

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in complete accordance with the Quran and hadith from both Shia and Sunni scriptures.

What must be emphasized is that worshipping and devotion can only be performed for someone who is inherently worthy of being worshipped and that is no one but God. If one asks an Imam or the Prophet for assistance while considering their existence independent from God, then he has certainly committed an act of polytheism. But if he considers them as means that God has permitted us to ask for assistance, who then assist us by God's will, then this act isn't polytheism. Thus, acts like visiting the graves of the Imams, asking for intercession, or asking the Imams for assistance, are completely consistent with Oneness in Devotion.

Questions:

- 1- What role does the oneness of God play in our beliefs?
- 2- How has the oneness of God been defined in the ahadith?
- 3- Name the different degrees of oneness?
- 4- Explain the Oneness in Devotion in a few statements.

Research:

- 1- Why do Wahhabis consider visiting and revering the shrines of the Imams as polytheistic acts? Refute their claims using the definition of Oneness in Devotion.



Arguments for the Oneness of God



In the previous lesson we defined the Oneness of God and showed that to believe in the Oneness of God we must believe that God has no equal and nothing or no one is in the slightest manner similar to Him or has anything in common with Him. We also explained the different degrees of Oneness that encompassed Oneness in Essence to Oneness in Devotion. In the current lesson we will explore the arguments that prove God's Oneness.



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Different arguments have been used to prove the Oneness of God. What can be understood from the Quran and hadith is that the Oneness of God is an innate issue but one can still present arguments based on reason and `aql to prove it.

1- The Existence of Multiple Deities is Inconsistent with an Omnipotent God

To prove the Oneness of God it suffices to disprove the existence of multiple Gods. The belief in multiple Gods is rooted in a shallow understanding of God's attributes. Those that believe God has equals and similitudes, have an incorrect picture of God in their minds. Ever since antiquity, men have imagined God to be a creature similar to themselves that they have attributed associates with. If one were to comprehend God's attributes in their true manner, he would clearly see that God can neither have associates nor equals.

Hishām b. Ḥakam narrates that Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} responded in the following manner to claims of the possibility of two God's existing at the same time:

“These two [Gods] will have one of the following conditions: Both will have always been powerful, or both will have been weak, or one will have been powerful and the other weak. If both are powerful then why doesn't one cast the other aside and plan for the world all by Himself? And if you think one is powerful and the other weak, then it would be proved that

only one is God because of the obvious weakness of the other.”¹

2- The Harmony in the Created World

Another argument that is used to prove the Oneness of God, is the harmony we see in the world. God states in the Quran:

“If there was a deity in the [skies and earth] other than God then the [sky and earth] would have surely become corrupted.”²

The things that make up the created world are not independent from each other and influence one another in many ways. Suppose we were created by a deity other than the God that has created the skies and the earth. If that were the case then why would we be compatible with the skies and the earth and whatever is in them that have been created by another deity? Obviously, the One that has created us has also created the world around us as is evident in the relationship that we have with the ecosystem we live in. If this compatibility and harmony were not being managed by a single entity then the system would fall apart and become corrupt.

Hishām b. al-Ḥakam narrates that he asked Imam al-Ṣadiq ^{peace be upon him} to teach him an argument for the oneness of God. He replied:

“The planning [for the world] that is without interruption and the completeness of the creatures [and if there was more than

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 80.

² Quran, 21:22.

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one Deity] it would become how He, Mighty and Majestic be He, states 'If there was a deity in the [skies and earth] other than God then the [sky and earth] would have surely become corrupted.'¹²

He also replied in this manner to a similar inquiry from an atheist:

"When we see that the creations are ordered, the heavens are in motion, the world is under a single plan; and [what we observe in] night and day and the sun and moon; these are all testimonies that the order and plan is correct and we reach the conclusion that there is only One Planner."³

3- All of God's Prophets and Messengers Have Testified to the Oneness of God

If there were two Deities then each would send separate messengers with miracles and superhuman powers to cast aside the other. Each messenger would preach to the people to follow his God instead of the other. Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} said to Imam al-Ḥasan:

"O Son! Know that if your Lord had any associates then their Messengers would have come to you too."⁴

On the other hand, all Messengers have always spoken about the existence of a single Deity:

¹ Quran, 21:22.

² Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 250.

³ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 80.

⁴ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, letter 31.

“And [We sent] to the people of `Ād their brother Hūd. He said to them: ‘O my people! Worship Allah for there is no God but He.’”¹

“And [We sent] to the people of Thamūd their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said to them: ‘O my people! Worship Allah for there is no God but He.’”²

“And [We sent] to the people of Madyan their brother Shu`ayb. He said to them: ‘O my people! Worship Allah for there is no God but He.’”³

According to the Quran, the basis for the call of all prophets and messengers was to preach the Oneness of God:

“And We did not send any Messenger before you except that We revealed to him that ‘there is no God but I, thus worship Me.’”⁴

All of God’s great messengers like Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and the prophet of Islam, peace be upon them, have introduced the same One God and there has never been in the history of prophets any exception to this. This is evidence enough to prove the Oneness of God.

¹ Quran, 7:65.

² Quran, 7:73.

³ Quran, 7:85.

⁴ Quran, 21:25.

4- The Testimony of Innate Knowledge to the Oneness of God

We mentioned in the sixth lesson that at times of tribulation and extreme hardship or while worshipping God, our innate knowledge of God is manifested and we recognize God with all our hearts. When this event occurs we not only recognize God, but we also realize His oneness. It is in these times that people involuntarily cry out ‘O my God!’ and not ‘O my Gods!’ Some hadiths explicitly state that we have been created with the innate knowledge about the Oneness of God. Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace} be upon him states:

“He created them with [the innate knowledge] of Oneness.”¹

With this point in mind, we can claim that all other arguments are signs of the reality of His Oneness that God has placed within us.

Questions:

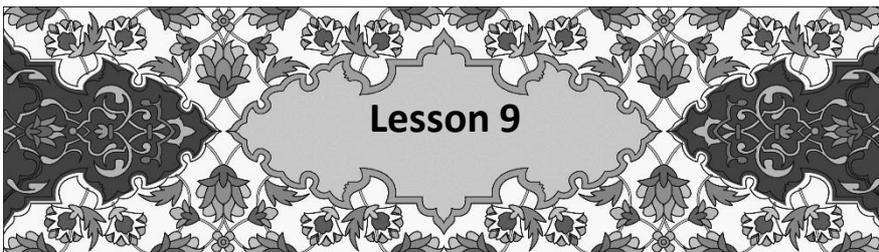
- 1- Which argument for the Oneness of God does the verse “If there was a deity in the [skies and earth] other than God then the [sky and earth] would have surely become corrupted”² refer to?
- 2- Explain how the innate knowledge of God testifies to His Oneness.
- 3- How can the dispatching of Messengers by God be used as an argument for the Oneness of God?

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 13.

² Quran, 21:22.

Research:

- 1- Refer to the book *al-Kāfī* (chapter on Oneness) and the book *al-Tawḥīd* (by al-Ṣadūq) and find a new argument for the Oneness of God.



Lesson 9

God's Omniscience



In the previous lessons we spoke about God's Oneness and its signs. In the current lesson we will speak about some of God's attributes (*ṣifāt*). One of God's most important attributes is Omniscience. We will introduce this topic in the current section and discuss its different aspects.



God's omniscience has been described in the Quran by the use of terms such as *al-`Ālim* (The All-Knowing), *al-`Alīm* (The All-Knowledgeable), *al-`Allām* (The All-Knower), *al-A`lam* (The One Who Knows Best), *al-Khabīr* (The All-Aware), and *al-Shahīd* (The Witness) in the most general sense. In a less general sense, terms such as *al-Samī`* (the All-Hearing) and *al-Baṣīr* (the All-Seeing) have also been used.

In the next sections we will first prove that God is Omniscient and then discuss the characteristics of God's Omniscience.

1- God and Omniscience

The created world, the harmony and correlation between its different parts, and the sophisticated and extraordinary systems that exist within it, not only prove the existence of a Creator, but also its Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Omnisapience.¹ When one ponders on the smallest particles in the universe like atoms and electrons or on large scale systems like the solar system, it becomes obvious that if the gravity between the components that make up these systems slightly decreases or increases, these components would either collapse or fly away from each-other, destroying the system that they had created. Only an Omniscient creator can bring together such components fixed with such harmony and create a sophisticated system governed by precise rules and regulations.

One could say, the creation of the world and the harmony between its components, isn't only proof of a Creator but also proof of His attributes like Knowledge, Power, and Wisdom. According to some verses of the

¹ The attribute of being all-wise.

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Quran, it is not possible for the creator to be ignorant about His creations. For example:

“Does He not know, He who has created? The One Who is the Subtle and All-Aware.”¹

In the treatise known as *Tawhīd al-Mufaḍḍal*, Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} states to Mufaḍḍal:

“I will mention for you many more examples of the relations between God’s creations so that you understand these are the handiworks of a Wise, Knowledgeable, Powerful, and careful Planner.”²

2- The Characteristics of God’s Omniscience

God’s Knowledge and Wisdom are in no manner comparable to that of His creations. But we as humans, albeit inadvertently, usually make an analogy between our knowledge and that of God’s. We imagine the same meaning and concept about God’s Knowledge that we perceive about our own knowledge. Our knowledge is a creation of God and is both limited and humanly. What we understand and perceive about knowledge, are all creations of God and a bestowment from Him and are strictly different from the reality of God’s knowledge, which we cannot as created beings comprehend.

¹ Quran, 67:14.

² Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 3, p. 189

From among the many different aspects of God's Knowledge that have been mentioned in the Quran and hadith, we will explain two in the following section.

2.1. God's Knowledge is Limitless

Unlike human knowledge, God's knowledge has no limit and no bounds. It encompasses everything including all things existing or non-existent, from microscopic to macroscopic scales, including the smallest details, and everything from the past and the future alike. The Quran testifies to this aspect of God's Omniscience in many verses:

“Say: Are you informing God about your religion even though God knows about everything that is in the heavens and the earth and He has knowledge of all things?!”¹

“He knows what goes through the earth and what comes out of it and what comes down from the sky and what ascends in it, and He is with you wherever you may be, and God sees all that you do.”²

God is even aware of our most closely kept secrets and what crosses our minds:

“Say: Whether you conceal what is in your chests [hearts] or you reveal it, God knows it.”³

God's Omnipresence and Omniscience are universal and encompass everything in the world. It is when we realize this fact and view God as a

¹ Quran, 49:16

² Quran, 57:4

³ Quran, 3:29

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witness to our thoughts, intentions, and actions, that we strive harder to do what our Creator and Lord expects from us and put aside many of our sins and pay more attention to the deeds that we might have carelessly performed on a daily basis.

2.2. God's Knowledge is Unchangeable

God's Knowledge does not change nor is it altered. What God brings into existence or annihilates have no effect on His knowledge. Imam Ali peace be upon him states:

"All knowledgeable become knowledgeable after being ignorant but God was never ignorant and never learned (any knowledge). His Knowledge encompassed all things before they came into being and when they came into being His Knowledge about them did not increase. His Knowledge about them before He brings them into existence is the same as after He brings them into existence."¹

He who believes God's Knowledge is unchangeable also believes that God forgets nothing and nothing from His Knowledge is nullified and our creator will not forget any of our actions on the day that we must all be judged in His presence.

Questions:

- 1- What is the difference between God's Knowledge and our knowledge?
- 2- How can one prove God's Omniscience?

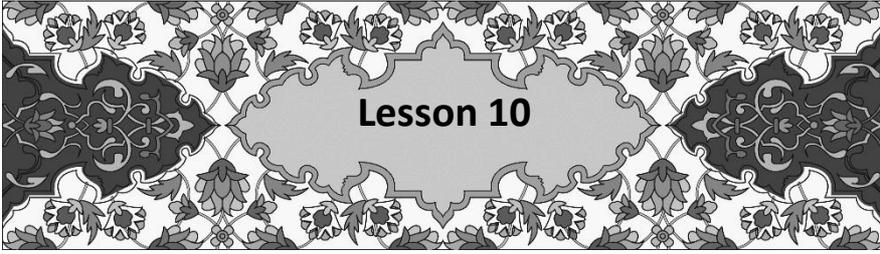
¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 135

- 3- Which characteristic of God's Knowledge does the verse "Say: Whether you conceal what is in your chests [hearts] or you reveal it, God knows it"¹ refer to?
- 4- What does it mean when we state God's Knowledge is unchangeable? How can this be proved?
- 5- How does the belief that God's Knowledge is unchangeable affect our everyday lives?

Research:

- 1- Find verses from the Quran where God's Omniscience has been described in a privative manner (i.e. find verses where it is stated that God is free from any form of ignorance).
- 2- Find verses of the Quran that express God knows about our future actions.

¹ Quran, 3:29



God's Omnipotence



In the previous lesson we spoke about God's Omniscience and its different aspects. We also explained how God's Knowledge is different from that of humans. In the current lesson we will speak about God's Omnipotence.



God's Omnipotence has been described in the Quran and narrations by the use of terms such as *al-Qādir* (The Able), *al-Qadīr* (The All-Powerful), *Dhu l-Quwwa* (The Possessor of Power), *al-'Azīz* (The Almighty), *al-Ghālib* (The Victorious), and *al-Qawī* (The All-Strong). We previously mentioned that God has no similitudes in His attributes in the same manner that He has no similitudes in His essence. In the current lesson after proving God's Omnipotence we will show that His Power is unlike that of any of his creations.

1- God and Omnipotence

As we previously stated, the wonders and complexities of the universe are by themselves a clear sign of God's Omnipotence in the same manner that they are a sign of His Omniscience and Wisdom. More than a hundred verses of the Quran directly speak about God's Power and Might in the creation of the earth and the heavens:

“Allah is the One who has created the seven heavens and from the earth like them. The command descends between them so that you know that God has Power over all things and that His Knowledge encompasses everything.”¹

“And from His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the creatures He has scattered in them, and He is most capable of gathering them again when He wills.”²

“I swear by the Lord of the easts and wests that We are certainly Able to replace them with better than them and We

¹ Quran, 65:12.

² Quran, 42:29.

will not be overtaken. Thus, leave them to chat and play until they meet their day that they have been promised.”¹

Statements like: “so that you know that God has Power over all things,”² “He is most capable of gathering them again when He wills,”³ and “We are certainly Able to replace them with better than them,”⁴ are clear examples that God is well capable of creating, changing, and even annihilating what He wishes.

2- The Characteristics of God’s Omnipotence

2.1. God’s Power is Limitless

One of the most important characteristics of God’s Omnipotence is that it has no limits or bounds:

“God has Power over all things.”⁵

However, ‘all things’ does not encompass things that are inherently impossible. Statements like: “Could God create a stone so heavy that even He could not lift it?” fall under this category. Questioning God’s omnipotence on the Basis that he cannot create what is logically

¹ Quran, 70:40-42.

² Quran, 65:12.

³ Quran, 42:29.

⁴ Quran, 70:40-42.

⁵ Quran, 65:12. This statement has been repeated in the Quran at least thirty-eight times using the same or similar wordings.

impossible is invalid.¹ According to the law of non-contradiction two contradictory statements cannot be true in the same sense and at the same time. For example, something cannot exist and not exist at the same time. Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} narrates that:

“The Commander of the Believers ^{peace be upon him} was asked: ‘Can your Lord fit the world in an egg without shrinking the world or enlarging the egg?’ He replied: ‘Weakness cannot be attributed to God, Blessed and Exalted be He. However, what you asked me is not doable/possible (*lā yakūnu*).”²

The same question was asked from Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} but the enquirer did not use the condition “without shrinking the world or enlarging the egg” that would make the event logically impossible. The Imam replied:

“Yes He has the power to do this and even in something smaller than an egg. [Can’t you see] how He has placed it in your eye that is smaller than an egg!”³

2.2. God’s Power needs no Apparatus or Instruments

One of the most important attributes of the power of created beings, is that they must always rely on an apparatus or instrument by which they

¹ However, what we perceive as impossible is based on our perception of the world and the laws of nature that God has bound to it. If God were to change these rules, many things that we deem as logically impossible might become possible. Our present state of mind cannot encompass such changes.

² Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 130.

³ Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 130.

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manifest and use their power. For example, for a carpenter to be able to build furniture, there must exist wood, power of the mind, and power of the body. The power of the mind and body is taken away from the carpenter while he sleeps and is returned to him when he awakens. The carpenter must also use all forms of tools to be able to cut, shape, and assemble what he is building.

Gods needs none of the above to impose or use His Power. Imam al-Riḍā peace be upon him states:

“The Creator of these creatures ... has created what we mentioned without planning, apparatus, or instrument.”¹

“When Moses went to Mount Sinai and spoke with his Lord, Exalted and Majestic be He, he stated: ‘O Lord! Show me your treasures.’ God replied: ‘O Moses! My treasure is that whatever I will, I [simply] say to it: “Be” and it becomes.’”²

God’s power is far more Exalted and Glorified for it to be compared with that of His creations. God needs no means or instruments.

Questions:

- 1- What things does God’s Power encompass? Is it correct to say that God has no power over things that are logically impossible?
- 2- What attribute of God’s Omnipotence does the verse “O people! You are in need of God and God is the All-Rich and Praiseworthy,”³ refer to?

¹ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 120.

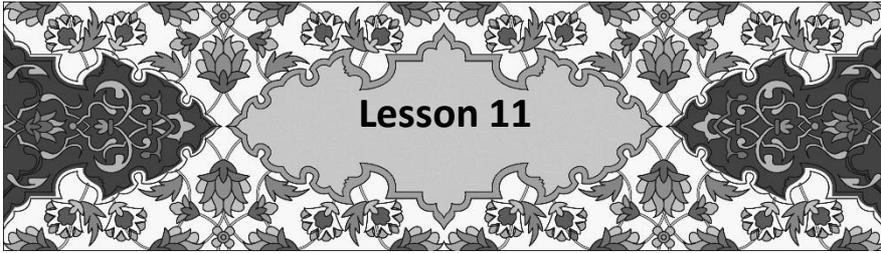
² Al-Ṣadūq, *Al-Ṭawhīd*, p. 133.

³ Quran, 35:15.

- 3- What do we mean when we say God's power needs no apparatus or instruments?

Research:

- 1- Use verses from the Quran to show the extent of God's Power and what it encompasses.



God's Privative Attributes



In the previous lessons we spoke about God's Omniscience and Omnipotence. These are considered as 'affirmative attributes' meaning that they are attributes that God possesses. In the current lesson we will speak about a second category of attributes called 'privative attributes' that are attributes that God does not possess.



God's attributes are divided into two categories: privative and affirmative. Affirmative attributes are those that are worthy of being attributed to God and privative attributes are those that cannot be attributed to God. All privative attributes show or describe weakness and are attributes of the creations not the Creator. In the next sections we will mention God's most important privative attributes.

1- Materialistic Characteristics

The Creator of the world is free from all forms of matter and embodiment, for matter has all forms of defects and limits and God is free from all limits and imperfections. In some verses of the Quran this fact has been indirectly mentioned:

“The sights cannot perceive Him but He perceives the sights and He is the Subtle and All-Aware.”¹

This verse refutes the possibility of God being viewed by any apparatus by which one can see by. This shows that God cannot have a physical body for if He did then He would be observable. This fact has also been emphasized in many narrations. Imam al-Şādiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“All praise is for He who cannot be felt, sensed, touched, or perceived by the five senses ... all things that can be sensed by the senses or be felt by the hands are created.”²

¹ Quran, 6:103.

² Al-Şadūq, *al-Tawhīd*, p. 75.

2- Composition

Being composite is an inherent quality of matter. God's essence is not composite because whatever is composite is bound by dimensions and components. Being composite is a sign of weakness because composite things need their compositions to exist and be complete, but God is free from all these attributes.

3- Dimension and Orientation

No dimension or orientation can be attributed to God for these characteristics are specific to created beings that are limited to specific boundaries in space and time. Some verses of the Quran point to this subject:

“And to God belongs the East and the West and in whatever direction you turn, God’s Face is there.”¹

In the hadith too, God is described as being void of dimensions and boundaries. A Rabbi came to Abu-Bakr and asked him about God's location. Abu-Bakr failed to respond. Imam Ali peace be upon him approached him and said:

“God is the creator of ‘location’ and He has no location. He is more exalted than to be encompassed by space. He is everywhere without touching or being beside anything and His Knowledge encompasses everything.”²

¹ Quran, 2:115.

² Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, p. 209.

Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“He cannot be described with [responses to] ‘how (*kayf*),’ ‘where (*ayn*),’ or ‘which (*ḥayth*)’. How can I describe Him with ‘how’ while He is the creator of ‘how’! The [definition of] ‘how’ is understood by the manner that He made us comprehend ‘how’. How can I describe Him with ‘where’ while He is the creator of ‘where’! The [definition of] ‘where’ is understood by the manner that He made us comprehend ‘where’. How can I describe Him with ‘which’ while He is the creator of ‘which’! The [definition of] ‘which’ is understood by the manner that He made us comprehend ‘which’.”¹

3- Observation by the Eye

God cannot be observed by the eye. For a thing to be observed by the eye it must be visible, have color, or dimensions. This is only possible for material beings and God is free from all these traits. Not only the eyes have no means of seeing God but also the thoughts have no way of comprehending Him. In many hadiths the verse “The sights cannot perceive Him but He perceives the sights”² has been interpreted as “The thoughts cannot perceive Him but He perceives the thoughts.” Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 103-104.

² Quran, 6:103.

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“‘The sights cannot perceive Him’ means ‘The thoughts cannot perceive Him’ ... for God is greater than being observable by the Eye.”¹

Imam al-Riḍā states:

“He cannot be perceived by the imaginations of the hearts, then how can He be seen with the sights of the eye?!”²

Questions:

- 1- What are affirmative and privative attributes? Mention three examples of each.
- 2- Why can't God have dimensions and orientations?
- 3- Why is it not possible for God to be observable?
- 4- Explain why God cannot be a composite being?

Research:

- 1- In some hadiths and supplications (duas) it has been mentioned that God can be seen. Find some of these hadiths and supplications and show that these statements are not speaking about seeing God by the use of the eyes.
- 2- Mention at least one more privative attribute of God.

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 98.

² Al-Amālī, *al-Ṣadūq*, p. 410.



CHAPTER 3:
The Justness of God





The Importance, Definition, and Sphere of God's Justice



From among all God's attributes, Oneness and Justice have been held with great importance and are considered the fundamental elements of religion. In the current lesson we will speak about the importance of God's Justice, its definition and sphere of influence.



1- The Importance of God's Justice

Justice is considered such an important topic in the Quran that the derivatives of the word justice (*`adl*) and injustice (*ẓulm*) have been mentioned more than three-hundred times. It has been denied at least thirty times that God is unjust. For example:

“Allah does not do injustice [even] the amount of a tiny particle.”¹

“God commands justice and goodness.”²

The same trend can also be observed in the hadith. According to Imam al-Ṣādiq peace be upon him Justice along with the belief in the Oneness of God are the most important basis of religion:

“The basis of religion is [the belief in] the Oneness and Justice [of God].”³

Some Shia theologians hold the opinion that many Islamic beliefs are built upon the basis that God is Just and many religious principles such as Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), Imamate (*imama*), and belief in the Afterlife (*ma`ād*) can only be understood and proved in light of this belief; for if it were not for God's Justice then there would be no need to dispatch Messengers and Prophets and then reward or punish people in the hereafter.

¹ Quran, 4:40.

² Quran, 16:90.

³ Al-Ṣadūq, *Ma`āni l-Akhhbār*, p. 11.

2- The Literal Meaning of Justice

According to Arabic lexicons, *ʿAdl* (justice) means to give a correct verdict (*al-ḥukm bi l-ḥaq*).¹ A correct verdict or judgment is one that is in accordance with the crime and the circumstances surrounding it. A just person (*ʿādil*) is one whose inner feelings do not influence his judgments.

When we use the adjective *Just* to refer to God, we intend the meaning that all of God’s judgments are correct and are not a violation of the rights of the one being judged.

3- The Conventional Meaning of Justice

The conventional meaning of justice (that usually comes to mind before other definitions) is a judgment that is “morally right and fair or appropriate or deserved.”² On the other hand, injustice is considered as the violation of justice. According to al-Mufīd:

“Justice means to reward for one’s deeds the amount that is deserved. Injustice means to deprive one of his rights. God, Exalted be He, is Just, Benevolent, Gracious, and Merciful. He has guaranteed reward and punishment for actions and compensation for calamities. He has also promised extra mercy as a bonus from Himself.”³

¹ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 11, p. 430.

² Concise Oxford English Dictionary (11th edition).

³ Al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ al-iʿtiqād*, p. 103.

4- The Sphere of God's Justice

God's justice encompasses a broad range of topics. We will mention two of the most important here.

4-1- Justice in Rewarding and Punishing

According to the definition of justice, the Justness of God means that He will give everyone what they deserve. If someone deserves to be rewarded then he would be rewarded accordingly. We must point out that if it were not for God's promise about rewarding those that do good deeds, then God had no obligation to reward anybody for their deeds because we are all His creations and have no duty but to serve and worship and praise Him. Justice in rewarding in this sense, means that God will fulfill His promise of rewarding us for our good acts.

On the other hand, when the time comes for the punishment of those that have performed bad deeds, God can forgive them due to His mercy or He can implement His justice and punish them accordingly. However, God never punishes someone more than that person deserves because this is unjust. The Quran states in this regard:

“Whoever brings a good deed will receive ten times as much [as a reward] and whoever brings a bad deed will only be punished equivalent to it and no one will be treated unjustly.”¹

¹ Quran, 6:160.

4-2- Justice in Legislation and Sharia

Justice in legislation and sharia means God does not order us nor expects us to do what we are not capable of for this would be cruel and unfair:

“God does not impose on anybody a task that is beyond its capability.”¹

This is evident in many Islamic laws. For instance although fasting is compulsory in the month of Ramadan, those that are incapable of this task are exempt from this law. Or the Hajj pilgrimage is only compulsory for those that have the ability and means to perform it.

5- Arguments for the Justness of God

5-1 The Moral Perfection of God

This argument is based on two presumptions:

- a- Reason dictates that injustice is an immoral act and justice is a moral act.

This presumption is even valid outside religious circles and is verified by common-sense. No matter what religious beliefs someone has (or doesn't have), this fact remains valid. Imam Ali peace be upon him states:

“Injustice is the mother of all vices.”¹

¹ Quran, 2:286.

“The ugliness of injustice, is equal to the beauty of justice”²

b- God’s actions do not conflict with the morals that are confirmed by `aql and common sense and God does not transgress them.

We can conclude from these presumptions that God will never act unjustly.

5-2- God Has no Reason to be Unjust

All unrighteous deeds are rooted in three things: ignorance concerning the unrighteousness of that deed, the need to perform that deed, or being incapable of not performing that deed. God due to being Omniscient, Self-Sufficient, and Omnipotent, has no reason to be unjust. Since God has no reason to be unjust we can conclude that he will never act unjustly.

Imam al-Kāẓim ^{peace be upon him} states in a prayer:

“O God! I know that you do not hurry to punish and there is no injustice in your ruling. He who fears losing an opportunity hurries and he who is weak acts unjustly. You my Lord are exalted above all these.”³

In this statement, weakness is considered the root of injustice. Since ignorance, need, and incapability are all instances of weakness, the above prayer can be taken as a confirmation of the argument presented in this section.

¹ Al-Āmidī, *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, p. 455, no. 10379.

² Al-Āmidī, *Ghurar al-ḥikam*, p. 455, no. 10391.

³ Al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, vol. 3, p. 88.

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Questions:

- 1- Why is the belief in the Justice of God the most important Islamic belief after the belief in the Oneness of God? How can Prophethood and Imamate be proved by the use of God's Justice?
- 2- What are the literal and conventional definitions of Justice and how are these two related to each other?
- 3- What is meant by 'Justice in Rewarding and Punishing'? Is it just to punish wrongdoers?
- 4- What is meant by 'Justice in Legislation and Sharia'? Is it just to force someone to do what he cannot?
- 5- How is the 'moral perfection of God' used as an argument for the Justness of God?
- 6- Why doesn't God act unjustly?

Research:

- 1- How is term justice used in the Quran and scripture? How can we relate this to the current lesson?
- 2- How does believing in the Justness of God influence our daily lives and interactions with others? Find some historical cases.



The Relationship Between the Justness of God and Free Will



In the previous lesson, we defined the Justness of God and spoke about the sphere that it encompasses. We showed that God is just in both His laws and His rewards and punishments. In the current lesson we will examine the relationship between free will and the Justness of God and we will introduce the concept of “An Affair Between Two Affairs.”



Shia Theology and Beliefs

The free will of man is a subject that is greatly discussed in religious and philosophical circles. The justness of God and free will have a very important relationship with each other. If we did not have free will and were forced in our actions, then obligating us to perform or set aside specific actions and then punishing us for failing to follow these orders would be very cruel and unjust. For example, suppose you force someone to kill another against his will. No one will approve of sentencing this person to life imprisonment as a punishment for this act because he had no choice. Because of these issues, proving God's Justness has great importance in Shia scholarship. Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“If [man’s actions] are a deed of God, then why does He punish His servants for what He Himself has committed, while He is Just, Merciful, and Wise?”¹

Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} was asked: “Has God forced His servants to sin?” He replied: “God will not do this because He is Just and Wise.”²

It is for this reason that it has been mentioned in many verses of the Quran that God will not act unjustly toward anyone in the hereafter and punishments will be in accordance with the actions:

“Today all souls will be rewarded/punished in accordance with their actions and no one will be treated unjustly.”³

The belief in predestination is not only inconsistent with God's Justness, it is also inconsistent with our conscience for we fully perceive our free will when making decisions and clearly understand that we are

¹ Al-Daylamī, *A`lām al-dīn*, p. 318.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 157.

³ Quran, 40:17.

responsible for our actions and no one else. The Quran refers to this using the following verse:

“Man is well-aware of himself. Even if he makes excuses.”¹

An Affair Between the Two Affairs (*Amrun bayn al-amrayn*)

Predestination being inconsistent with the Justness of God, some groups have preferred to believe in delegation (*tafwīd*). In this sense, delegation means God has given humans the power to decide and act and He does not (and according to some definitions He cannot) interfere in these matters in any way.

The belief in delegation and *tafwīd* bring about many problems. Delegation means God’s Power becomes limited and He becomes helpless in exerting any influence or power over His creations. This behavior cannot be attributed to an Omnipotent God.

According to Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} the belief in predestination and delegation are both incorrect:

“[God] has not delegated the affairs to His creations due to infirmity and weakness, neither Has He unjustly forced them to sin.”²

What is endorsed by the Ahl al-Bayt ^{peace be upon them} is referred to in Shia scripture as An Affair Between the Two Affairs (*amrun bayn al-amrayn*):

¹ Quran, 75:14-15.

² Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 5, p. 17.

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“There is neither predestination nor delegation, rather there is an affair between the two affairs.”¹

An Affair Between the Two Affairs means that on one hand humans are not forced to do what they do, because they have been endowed with the gift of free will; and on the other hand they have not been given complete and irreversible delegation. God can prevent them from doing anything or He can completely deprive them of any power they have. Thus, at the same time that the free will of man is recognized, the Omnipotence of God and His Sovereignty are not dismissed and nothing in the world occurs without his permission.

Questions:

- 1- How is free will related to the justness of God?
- 2- What is the relationship between the belief in the hereafter and free will?
- 3- What is the theory of delegation (*tafwīḍ*) and why is it unacceptable?
- 4- Explain the concept of An Affair Between the Two Affairs (*amrun bayn al-amarain*). How is it different from predestination and delegation?

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 160 (citing Imam al-Ṣādiq)

Research:

- 1- What verses from the Quran can be used to prove An Affair Between the Two Affairs (*amrun bayn al-amarain*)?
- 2- What do you personally think is the strongest argument for the free will of man?



God's Justice and Tribulations



In the previous lesson we showed that the Justness of God can only be understood in light of the balance between man's free will and God's Omnipotence. In the next three lessons we will address some common question that arise about God's Justice.



A dilemma that has always existed alongside the belief in the Justness of God, is related to calamities and tribulations and how one can justify these with the Justness of God.

In brief, if we accept God as a Just Being that does not oppress nor acts unjustly, then how is it that there exists in the world that He rules, ignorance, weakness, poverty, injustice, tyranny, and all forms of wicked things? Who is behind earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, plagues, and all forms of deaths? Aren't all these afflictions, injustice to God's creations? Wouldn't it be better if there were no evils and hardships in the world and the world was filled with joy and happiness?

Two responses can be given to the aforementioned questions.

First: God is All-Just and All-Wise and we observe His Justice and Wisdom on a daily basis. Everything that He does is due to a wisdom. The reason for this wisdom is not always clear for us but there is always a reason for everything. Just because we do not know the wisdom behind calamities that we see, it does not mean God is unjust.

Second: The calamities that we observe have very obvious causes that are at times rooted in God's Justice. These are explained in the next section.

1- Self-Inflicted Calamities and Afflictions

Many of the calamities that we are afflicted with are the direct or indirect results of our actions. Many of the miseries that we endure in this world are God's way of cleansing us from our sins so that we would not be punished for them in the hereafter. The Quran states:

“Corruption has become manifest in the lands and seas due to the actions of the people; so that He gives them a taste of the [results] of their deeds, perhaps they might return [to God].”¹

“What calamities you are afflicted with are the result of your actions and He forgives many [of your sins].”²

Thus many disasters such as draughts, floods, and earthquakes can be punishments for our sins if not due to natural causes. In these cases God cannot be accused of injustice for we are simply receiving the punishment of crimes that we were warned of beforehand. However, according to the aforementioned verse, there is another wisdom in these punishments: they are a means by which God helps us repent and put aside our bad habits.

2- Calamities and Afflictions Due to External Causes

Some calamities that befall us are not the result of our own actions. For example, if we study the lives of God’s Messengers and Prophets, we realize that many of them were afflicted with unspeakable tragedies and disasters. Since God’s Messengers and Prophets are immaculate and have no sins, then there must be another reason for the afflictions that they have endured. This is how Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} explains it:

“Although they have no sins, God has set aside afflictions for his friends (*auliyā*) to reward them for enduring these [afflictions].”¹

¹ Quran, 30:41.

² Quran, 42:30.

God's Prophets and Messengers and their successors are the only people that are afflicted in this manner because they have no sins. These forms of afflictions, although not obvious at first sight are blessings that result in everlasting salvation. It is for this reason that the closer that someone gets to God, the more calamities he is afflicted with.

We must always have in mind that regardless of the cause for our miseries, when we have patience and endure them, these limited hardships eventually give way to limitless goodness and can become the source of greater good if managed and approached properly.

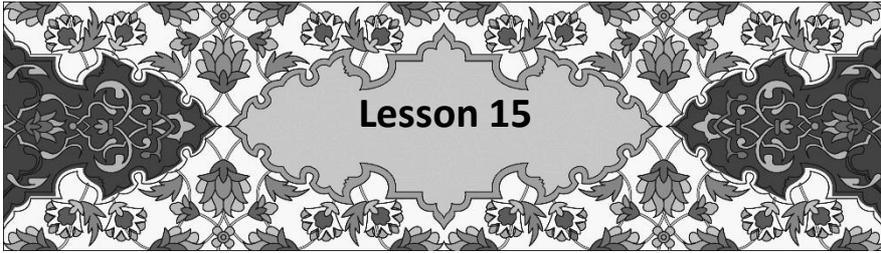
Questions:

- 1- What is a common misunderstanding related to calamities and the Justice of God?
- 2- What is the wisdom behind calamities and afflictions?
- 3- What is the difference between the calamities afflicted on immaculate and non-immaculate people?
- 4- How is it possible to use calamities to our advantage?

Research:

- 1- List some of the different afflictions that God's Prophets and Messengers have endured. See if you can find the wisdom behind these afflictions?
- 2- Why are believers afflicted with more hardships than non-believers? What do the Quran and hadith state about this matter?

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 450.



God's Justice and Differences



In the previous lesson we spoke about the general wisdom behind many calamities and hardships and how these are not in conflict with God's Justness. Another issue that is usually brought up in this regard, is the difference between God's creations, specially those that we are born with. In the current lesson we will explore these matters and their relationship with the Justness of God.



Why are there differences between creatures? Even among those from the same species. Why do some have virtues that others don't? Aren't the differences between humans unwise and unjust?

These are only a few of the Questions that we will try to answer in the current lesson.

1- The Relation Between Justice and Similarities

Equality and similarity are not signs of justice in the same manner that inequality and differences are not signs of injustice. If we were to suppose that for justice to be fulfilled all creatures must be equal, then in that case it would be correct to assume that creating creatures with differences is an unjust act. However, the former supposition is incorrect. Having differences isn't injustice, rather it is a sign of an intelligent creator that has harmonized the components of the world in a detailed and sophisticated manner. It is due to these differences that each creature can have a unique role in this complex system, thus making it possible for the different needs of the other creatures to be fulfilled. Such a system could not be possible if all creatures were created with the exact same shape, color, and functions.

As an example consider the different physical and emotional characteristics between men and women. These differences complement each other and make it possible for humans to reproduce and sustain their population. Men usually have a stronger build that allows them to protect the family and provide sustenance, while women have specific organs that are needed for the growth and birth of new members of the family.

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These differences cannot be considered unjust. They are due to different needs and responsibilities needed to sustain the current world that we live in. Injustice occurs where God demands tasks from one of his creations that he was not designed to or cannot perform.

Our intellects do not have the capacity to discover or even understand the wisdom behind many of God's Actions. However, some of the wisdoms behind these differences have been explained in the hadith and others have been discovered through experience.

As we already mentioned the differences and variations between God's creatures are for the purpose of sustaining the system that we live in. This system will necessarily end up with differences of all sorts. If everyone was equal in their traits, capabilities, and characteristics then the social systems that we thrive in would become jeopardized, for such systems rely on different participants with different capabilities and roles each fulfilling their tasks. God states in the Quran:

“Are they the ones that share-out your Lord’s Mercy? We share-out their sustenance between them in the worldly life and we exalt some above others in rank, so that some might take others into service and your Lord’s Mercy is better than what they amass.”¹

Yes it would be unjust to expect from someone more than he is capable of. But differences by themselves do not mean the Creator has acted unjustly. According to the Quran:

¹ Quran, 43:32.

“God does not impose on anybody a task that is beyond its capability.”¹

“God does not impose on anybody more than He has given it.”²

On the other hand, every creature is only liable and responsible for what he has been bestowed with by God and God expects all and tests them according to these bestowments. For example, God expects those that have been given more wealth to be more thankful and grateful and at the same time he warns them about being arrogant. He also expects those that have been given less to pray more and supplicate to God so that they too are blessed with God’s favors.³

2- The Handicapped and Disabled

Some people are born with disabilities and deformations. Who is liable for these disabilities and who is to blame?

Except in cases where someone’s disability is the direct result of another person’s actions, then no one is to be blamed for the handicapped person’s disabilities. However, as we stated in the previous section:

“God does not impose on anybody a task that is beyond its capability.”⁴

¹ Quran, 2:286.

² Quran, 65:7.

³ See Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 8.

⁴ Quran, 2:286.

God does not expect from a handicapped person what he expects from a normal person. God will also show the handicapped person great mercy and blessings in the hereafter because of his sufferings and conditions that he has endured in this world and no one will be dealt with unjustly.

3- The Creation of Disbelievers

God does not create any person for the purpose of burning that person in hellfire. God has created people to reward them with his eternal bounties in heaven. We are the ones that choose to stroll on a path of unrighteousness instead of one that leads to salvation. God is not at fault here nor can He be blamed for the decisions of His creations. All children are born believers but choose later on in their lives to become disbelievers. Imam al-Ṣadiq ^{peace be upon him} states in this regard:

“God created all His creations as believers (*muslimīn*).¹ He ordered and prohibited them. Disbelief (*kufr*) is a word that joins the act (of disbelieving) after (God’s) servant becomes a disbeliever. God did not create (His) servants disbelievers when He created them. [A servant] becomes a disbeliever after a time comes where he is provided by proof from God and he is presented with the truth but he denies it. It is due to his denial of the truth that he becomes a disbeliever (*kāfir*).”²

If a man who is born a believer decides out of his own free will to become a disbeliever even after sufficient proof has been provided for him, then God cannot be blamed for his decisions.

¹ Literally submitters.

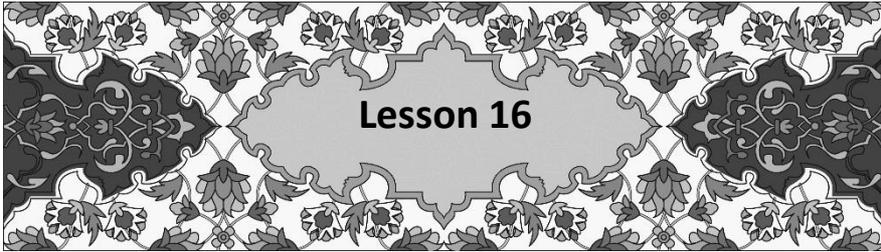
² Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 5, p. 18.

Questions:

- 1- Which one of God's attributes can be used to explain the differences among God's creations?
- 2- How do you explain the difference between the capabilities and capacities that different people are born with? Are these differences a violation of God's Justness?
- 3- Are handicapped people and those born with disabilities compatible with a Just God?
- 4- Who is to blame if a non-believer is punished in the hereafter?

Research:

- 1- Find different books and articles that have spoken about the relationship between God and evil (*al-sharr*) and separate them into different categories.



God's Justice and Punishment in the Hereafter



In the previous lesson we responded to some common misconceptions about God's Justness. In the current lesson we will address issues related to God's punishments in the hereafter.



Humans sin during the small limited time that they live in this world until they pass away. However, if these sins are not repented for, a long and sometimes eternal punishment awaits the wrongdoer in the hereafter. Why does a limited sin result in such a long or even eternal punishment? Isn't this an act of injustice? In the current lesson we will address this issue.

1- Eternal Reward and Eternal Punishment in the Hereafter

In Arabic Lexicons the hereafter is sometimes referred to as the eternal abode (*dār al-khuld*), because that is the place that all humans will live in for all eternity.

According to Shia teachings, the righteous will be rewarded in the hereafter with the eternal blessings and bounties of Heaven. On the other hand, those that are worthy of hellfire will be temporarily punished according to the severity of their sins and the greater the sin, the greater the punishment. This continues to a level where some sins are punished by eternal hellfire.¹

Many verses in the Quran refer to the hereafter as being eternal:

“Those that believe and perform righteous deeds are the people of heaven who will dwell therein eternally.”²

¹ A similar procedure is practiced in the laws of many countries where those found guilty of crimes are given life sentences while others are freed from prison after finishing their sentence – Translator.

² Quran, 2:82.

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“Those that believe and perform righteous deeds and are humble before their Lord are the people of heaven who will dwell therein eternally.”¹

“Whoever performs a bad deed and his wrongdoings engulf him; those are the people of fire who will dwell therein eternally.”²

“Those that disbelieve and deny our signs are the people of fire who will dwell therein eternally.”³

2- Eternal Reward and Punishment and God’s Justice

Eternal rewards or punishments can be suitable outcomes for limited acts of righteousness or wickedness. We will justify this statement using the following points:

a- Our reasons cannot perceive the extensive results of our sins

We may never know the outcome of our actions even though they might seem insignificant at first, but God does. A simple statement by one man might influence the lives of millions in a positive or negative way. A single spark might ignite an infernal fire that engulfs cities and vast forests; on the other hand a small fire that is extinguished by a small amount of water can save the lives of millions. Taking your eyes off the road for a split second while driving might have disastrous consequences

¹ Quran, 2:82.

² Quran, 2:81.

³ Quran, 2:39.

that might affect generations of people. A step coming down in the wrong place on a mountain hike might result in death.

One can never judge beforehand the result of an act by the smallness or greatness of that act. The same can be said about righteous and wicked actions. An action that might seem feeble and insignificant might have significant and long lasting consequences that only God can encompass:

“I know that a single one of my sins is enough to make me deserving of your painful punishment and worthy of your severe retribution.”¹

Thus it is possible for a single one of our seemingly small sins to result in lengthy punishments.

b- The greater the Person that has been disobeyed, the harsher the punishment

The punishment for a crime depends on both the severity of the crime, and the status of the person that has been disobeyed. For example, the laws of many countries dictate harsher punishments for acts against public figures and government officials.

Without doubt, God is incomparable in greatness and stature to any of his creations. The punishment for disobeying God is proportional to his greatness. If a person is punished eternally for sinning and disregarding God’s orders he has not been wronged for he has disobeyed the greatest

¹ Imam al-Sajjād, *Sahifat al-Sajjādiyya*, Dua 21.

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of all beings. Imam al-Sajjād ^{peace be upon him} states in one of his supplications:

“You do not hurry to punish he that disregards Your orders and ignores Your prohibitions so that he might change from his state of disobedience to a state of obedience. He truly deserved every punishment that You had prepared for all [the sins] of your creations the moment that he intended to disobey You.”¹

He states in another supplication:

“Oh our Lord, Master, and Guardian. If we sobbed to such an extent that our eyelids fell off, and cried until no sound came out of our mouths, and we stood [before You] so much that our legs became stiff, and we bowed so much that our bodies fell apart, and prostrated until our eyes fell out of our eyeballs ... we would still be unworthy of having a single one of our sins forgiven by You.”²

It is for this very reason that we have been ordered to regard all sins as big even if to us, they seem small. Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“Protect yourselves from committing the sins that are considered insignificant, for they will not be forgiven.”³

He also states:

¹ Imam al-Sajjād, *Sahifat al-Sajjādiyya*, Dua 29.

² Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 91, p. 138.

³ Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 287.

“He who intends to sin should not commit it, for sometimes God observes a servant committing a sin and He states ‘By My Might and Magnificence, I will never forgive you after this.’”¹

c- Punishment is Proportional to Intention:

Intention (*niyya*) is considered in the Quran as one’s real purpose of performing an act. What is understood from Shia scripture is that people’s actions are judged by their intentions and purposes. Imam al-Şādiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“Intentions are more important than actions for [in reality] intentions are the actions. He then recited the verse: ‘Everyone acts according to his nature’² meaning ‘according to his intentions.’”³

It has also been narrated from the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family:

“Actions are [judged] by intentions and every person will receive what he had intended.”⁴

Our worldly lives are a chance to prove ourselves and our intentions. If we intend to disobey God forever then we will receive eternal punishment, and if we intend to serve him forever then we will receive eternal bounties. According to Imam al-Şādiq ^{peace be upon him}.

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 271.

² *Quran*, 17:84.

³ Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 16.

⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, p. 618.

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“The inhabitants of hell will reside therein eternally for it is their intention to disobey God eternally if they live in this world eternally; and the inhabitants of heaven will reside therein eternally for it is their intention to obey God eternally if they remain in this world eternally. Thus both groups will remain [in their states] eternally due to their intentions.”

The Imam then said:

“‘Everyone acts according to his nature’¹ meaning ‘according to his intentions.’”²

We can understand from this hadith that the intention to sin forever will result in a punishment that will last forever.

3- Forgiving Sinners

Although a single sin can have grave consequences and sometimes result in very long punishment, but according to Shia scripture, the only people that will receive eternal punishment are those that disbelieve in God or associate others with him. On the other hand, the sins of the believers will be either forgiven or they will be temporarily punished (sometimes for lengthy periods) until they are purged from their sins. The purging of sins can occur in this world due to different calamities and hardships, after death (*barzakh*), or in the hereafter. Regardless, the believers will eventually enter heaven.

¹ *Quran*, 17:84.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 85.

It should be noted that God forgives most of our sins and does not punish us for them. He states in the Quran:

“What calamities that befall you are the results of your actions and God forgives many [of your sins].”¹

After reciting the aforementioned verse Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} stated:

“The [sins that] God forgives are much more than those that He holds [sinners] responsible for.”²

When explaining the same verse, Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} said:

“God is more Magnificent, Benevolent, and Glorious than to punish in the hereafter those that He has punished in this world for their sins.”³

3- Reduced Sentences for those that Will Eternally Reside in Hell

Those that eternally reside in Hell receive different degrees of punishments. These punishments are in accordance with their actions. In some cases, those that dwell in Hell will not be tormented. For example, a disbeliever who befriends a believer and is lenient to him⁴ or one that

¹ Quran, 42:30.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 269.

³ Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 445.

⁴ See Al-`Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shi`a*, vol. 16, p. 289.

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gives refuge to a believer and saves his life,¹ will be protected in hell from hellfire and will receive sustenance that is forbidden for others that are in hell.

Even though Hell has been created to punish those that deserve to be punished, God's Mercy still encompasses its inhabitants and God reduces many of the sentences and sufferings.

Questions:

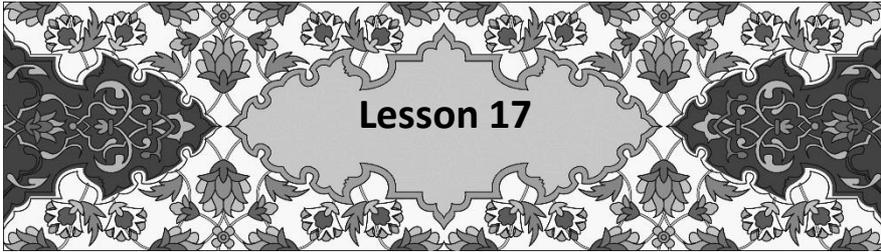
- 1- Why are heaven and hell referred to as eternal abodes?
- 2- Why can't our reasons encompass the severe consequences of our sins?
- 3- How are punishments proportional to intentions? Explain using an example.
- 4- Why is the status of the person being disobeyed important in deciding how to punish the offender? Is this form of punishing unjust?
- 5- What does the hadith "The [sins that] God forgives are much more than those that He holds [sinners] responsible for,"² imply? How can we use this hadith to respond to questions about eternal punishment?
- 6- Using common examples show that the social and political status of a person that is disobeyed or is offended can change the punishment of the offender.

¹ See Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 188.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 269.

Research:

- 1- By referring to scripture, investigate which groups of people will receive reduced sentences in hell?
- 2- Refer to scripture and see if those that are eternal hell might eventually get reductions in their punishments or not?



God's Wisdom



In the previous lessons we used the fact that God is Wise to respond to theological questions and misconceptions about the Justness of God. In the current lesson we will elaborate on God's Wisdom and speak about its role in God's actions.



1- The Definition of Wisdom

Many different definitions have been given for the word Wisdom (*ḥikma*). According to the Oxford English Dictionary wisdom is the "Capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends." In some Arabic lexicons, wisdom is considered as a knowledge that prevents one from performing objectionable actions.¹ A wise person (*al-ḥakīm*) is considered someone that makes things firm and sound.²

In many verses of the Quran, God's description of His Actions fit the many aforementioned meanings and aspects of wisdom. For example this is how God describes His creations:

"[God] is He who made in the best manner everything that He created."³

As we previously mentioned, everything in the world is bound by order and firm and solid compositions. If the order in any part of this world is disturbed it would result in chaos and destruction. The more that we observe the created world the more we see that it is free from disorder.⁴

Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} states about this matter:

"He knows what has passed by and what will come to pass. He initiated creation by His knowledge and created them by His

¹ Al-Ṭurayḥī, *Majma` al-baḥrain*, vol. 6, p. 43.

² Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-`arab*, vol. 12, p. 140.

³ Quran, 32:7.

⁴ See Makārim Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr nimūnih*, under verses 67:3-4.

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Wisdom without imitating or learning or copying from examples of a wise creator.”¹

One can conclude from these statements that someone who is wise refrains from doing what causes corruption and what is inappropriate. A wise person performs acts that have sound purposes and are not in vain. However, we must differentiate between the wisdom and purpose behind God’s actions and those of humans. Humans’ actions are usually performed with the intention of fulfilling their needs, making up for their losses, or reaching perfection. On the other hand, the wisdom behind God’s actions is usually to help His creations reach perfection.

The Quran reiterates that God’s actions are not in vain and have sound purposes:

“And we did not create the sky and earth and what is in between them in vain.”²

“Do you think that We have created you without purpose and you will not return to Us?”³

In some cases the purpose of God’s actions are explicitly mentioned. For example the purpose for the creation of humans is described in this manner:

“I did not create the Jinn and Humans but to worship Me.”⁴

¹ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, sermon 191.

² Quran, 38:27.

³ Quran, 23:115.

⁴ Quran, 51:56.

One of the purposes for the creation of the heavens and earth and His commands is to make us understand His Power and Might:

“God is He who created the seven heavens and from the earth likewise. The command descends between them so that you understand that God has the Power to do all things.”¹

The reason that we came into this world and will die one day is to be tested:

“He is the One that created death and life to test [how you act and] which one of you performs the best deeds.”²

The aforementioned verses explain to an extent the reason for our creation and our worldly lives. Imam al-Sadiq further explains:

“God, Blessed and Majestic be He, did not create His creations without purpose and did not abandon them ... He did not create them to benefit from them nor to repel a harm from Himself, rather He created them to benefit them and to make them attain eternal bounties.”³

2- The Results of Believing in God’s Wisdom

2.1. Having Purpose in Life:

¹ Quran, 65:12.

² Quran, 67:2.

³ Al-Şadūq, *ʿIlal al-sharāyi*, vol. 1, p. 9.

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Someone who believes in God's Wisdom and knows that the world has been created for a purpose, strives to find and follow that purpose. This person's attitude greatly differs from someone who doesn't have similar beliefs and sees the world without purpose. Those that see no purpose in the world will ultimately live a purposeless life although they might have short term goals. Having no purpose in life eventually leads to nihilism and all sorts of problems for the people with such beliefs and those around them.

2.2. Enduring Calamities and Hardships and Never Losing Hope

If we believe that there is a wisdom behind all calamities and hardships, it will be easier for us to bear these hardships because we know that ultimately, God wants the best of things for us and anything that happens to us whose reason we do not know or understand are all part of God's grand plan that will benefit us in the long run.

2.3. Scientific and Social Progress

Believing that the world has a goal and purposes aids us in finding the relationship between the creatures of the world and the laws that govern it and allows us to use these laws to create a better and more advanced world. One who believes in God's Wisdom, doesn't see life as only an opportunity for worldly gains, rather he strives to establish a society based on morals, faith, and righteousness.

3- Arguments for the Wisdom of God

a- God is Wise in the sense that all His actions are in the most perfect manner and without deficiency and fault. Imperfection and fault occur

when that act is performed without sufficient knowledge or without the means to properly complete that act. God is Omnipotent and Omniscient. His actions are perfect and without deficiency. This fact has been mentioned in the Quran in the following verse:

“You see the mountains and perceive them solidified while (in reality) they are moving like the clouds. They are God’s creations Who made everything perfect, He is verily aware of your actions.”¹

In this verse, apart from the emphasis on the perfection of God’s creations, it has also been noted that God is aware of all our actions (meaning He is All-Knowing), and thus knows best how to create His creations in a perfect manner.

b- God is Wise in the sense that His actions are not in vain nor without purpose. Purposeless acts and those that are in vain are mostly due to the ignorance of the one performing them. Even if such actions don’t result from ignorance, they are still against common-sense and objectionable and cannot be attributed to God in any manner.

This meaning can also be found in the Quran. In the previous sections we mentioned a number of verses related to this matter. We will mention two more in this section:

“And we did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for mere play.”²

“Does man think that We created Him without purpose.”¹

¹ Quran, 27:88.

² Quran, 44:38.

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c- The order and perfection of the universe is itself a sign of a Wise Creator. If the laws of physics and nature were random and without order, no scientific advancement could be made. The Quran wants us to see this very fact:

“You do not see any imperfections in the creations of the Merciful; look again, do you see any flaws. Keep looking and your eyes will return to you humbled and fatigued.”²

Questions:

- 1- What is the definition of wisdom?
- 2- How are the purposes of God’s acts different from ours?
- 3- What are the results of believing in the Wisdom of God?
- 4- What are some arguments for the Wisdom of God?
- 5- Explain the relationship between God’s Wisdom and attributes such as Omnipotence and Omniscient.

Research:

- 1- According to the Quran, what are the purposes of creation and how are these purposes related?
- 2- What are the traits of a purposeful person? Discuss your answer with your friends.

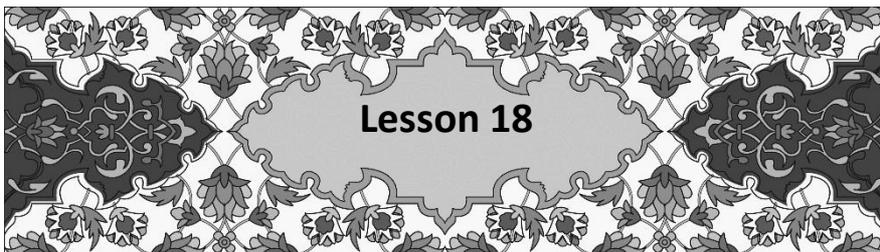
¹ Quran, 75:36.

² Quran, 67:3-4.



CHAPTER 4:
PROPHETHOOD





The Definition of Prophethood



After the belief in the Oneness of God (*Tawḥīd*), prophethood is considered the most important doctrine of Islamic theology. Even though we discover God by the use of reason and innate knowledge, but these two instruments alone cannot fulfill the purpose for the creation of mankind. To overcome this shortcoming God has sent his Prophets and Messengers to inform humanity about his plans and what He has desired for them. In the current chapter, the concept of Prophethood, its importance, conditions, and the responsibilities that accompany it will be studied. In this lesson we will speak about the definition of Prophet and Messenger in the most general sense.



Historically and throughout the ages many people have made claims of being prophets and messengers sent by God for the guidance of mankind. People have reacted differently to these claims. Some have believed and others have chosen not to. The sheer influence that these claimants have had on humanity and their claims are reason enough to study them in detail. In the current lesson we will take a detailed look at Prophets and Messengers from a Shia perspective.

1- The Meaning of Prophet (*nabī*) and Messenger (*rasūl*)

The Arabic word *nabī* (Prophet) has either been derived from the word *naba'* meaning *news*, or from the word *al-nabāwa* meaning *a high place*.¹ In the former case a prophet can be defined as someone who brings news or has news from God, and in the latter a prophet is someone who has a high status or stature that is above that of ordinary people.²

The word *rasūl* (messenger) is used to refer to someone who has been dispatched.³ In a religious sense, a *rasūl* or messenger is someone who has been sent by God to convey His message to a group of people and to

¹ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-`arab*, vol. 1, p. 162-3.

² See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-`arab*, vol. 15, p. 302.

³ Dispatch is defined as: "Send off to a destination or for a purpose" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary)

implement His laws. In this sense, a messenger is not simply a conveyor of a message but is also a teacher, educator, and administrator.¹

2- The Difference Between a Prophet (*nabī*) and a Messenger (*rasūl*)²

The Quran implies that there are differences between Prophets and Messengers. The very fact that Prophets and Messengers have been considered as two different entities in the Quran shows that there exists two different ranks for these two groups of people. The following verse is a good example:

“And we did not dispatch before you a Messenger nor a Prophet but that ... ”³

A messenger is also a prophet but the opposite is not always true. Abū Dhar narrates:

“I asked the Messenger of God, peace be upon him and his family: ‘O Messenger of God! What is the number of the Prophets?’ He replied: ‘one hundred and twenty four thousand.’ I asked: ‘How many of them were Messengers?’ He replied: ‘Three hundred a thirteen; a large group.’”⁴

The difference between these two groups can be examined from two perspectives:

¹ Mighdād b. `Abdullah, *Sharḥ bāb ḥādī `ashar*, p. 139.

² From hereon we will only use the English equivalents of these two words

³ Quran, 22:52.

⁴ Al-Ṣadūq, *Ma`āni l-akhbār*, p. 333.

a- Messengership is a station that is higher in rank than prophethood

Messengership is a rank that God appoints to special individuals among His prophets. Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} explains the order by which Abraham ^{peace be upon him} attained this position:

“God appointed Abraham as His servant before He appointed him as His Prophet, and appointed Him as His Prophet before He appointed him as His Messenger.”¹

This shows that an individual has a higher station when he is a Messenger than when he is a Prophet.

b- Different Responsibilities, Functions, and Assignments:

Messengers have a greater burden of responsibilities compared to Prophets. The inspirations that some Prophets receive are only applicable to themselves and they have no obligation to convey what has been revealed to them to other people. However, other prophets were obliged to preach the words of God to other people and advise them to obey His orders. A man asked Imam al-Baqir ^{peace be upon him} about Jesus and that if he was a proof of God (*ḥujjat Allah*) upon the people of his time when he spoke while an infant in the cradle. The Imam replied:

“At that time he was a Prophet and a Proof of God but not a Messenger. Have you not heard where he says: ‘I am God’s servant. He has bestowed me with a book and has appointed me as a Prophet ... ’² and he was a Prophet and proof upon

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 175.

² Quran, 19:30.

those that heard his words in that state. He (meaning Jesus) then became silent and did not speak ... and when his age reached seven he spoke as both a Prophet and a Messenger.”¹

3- The Different Ranks of Prophets and Messengers

According to the Quran Prophets and Messengers are not all equal and have different ranks:

“And we exalted some prophets above others and we bestowed David with the Psalms.”²

The same meaning can also be found in the hadith. Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} states that Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad

“Are the highest ranking from among the Prophets and Messengers peace be upon them.”³

Questions:

- 1- What are the differences between the definitions of Prophet and Messenger from linguistic and religious perspectives?
- 2- According to the Quran and hadith, what are the differences between Prophets and Messengers?
- 3- How are Prophets and Messengers different in the rank they have? Why do you think these differences exist.

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 382.

² Quran, 17:55.

³ Al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 80.

Research:

- 1- Find all the verses of the Quran that speak about Prophets and Messengers and use them to find the differences between them?
- 2- Find all the Prophets that have been mentioned by name in the Quran? Why does the Quran consider them different in rank.



The Need For Prophets



In the previous lesson, we defined what a Prophet and a Messenger are and spoke about their differences and that they have different ranks. In the current lesson we will speak about why we as humans need Prophets and how we can benefit from them.



We as humans need Prophets for many different reasons. However, two reasons stand out:

1- The Need for a Correct Worldview

Since the day that we are born, our minds are baffled with questions that result from observing our surroundings and the world around us. The answers we receive to these questions shape our minds, thoughts, and actions. Thus it is very important that we receive correct answers for the most important questions.

We as humans are inherently limited in our abilities to answer or find an answer to many of the questions related to the realities of nature and creation. However, Prophets provide us with answers to our most important questions. This is how Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} explains this role of the Prophets:

“And He dispatched His messengers among them and sent them one after the other, to request the [people] to fulfill their pledge of obeying Him when they were created and to remind them about His forgotten blessings and to reason with them by preaching and to uncover what has been buried within their reasons (*uqūl*).”¹

According to this statement, if it were not for the endeavors of the Prophets, many spiritual realities would have remained hidden and we would have remained in our state of ignorance about God and his plans for us. Many of us are unaware of our pledge to God to obey Him, the many blessing from God that we have neglected, and the treasures that God has bestowed in our reason (*aqīl*).

¹ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, sermon no. 1

2- Humans Need Laws and Regulations

Humans are constantly interacting with God, with nature, and with each other. These actions and interactions can result in major or minor gains and losses and not only influence the bodies but also the minds. The manner by which the minds and bodies are influenced can be as simple as one person being affected by another or as complex as complete societies being swayed by a single personality.

On the other hand, this influence is not limited by time and can span generations and centuries. We as humans are very limited in understanding how, to what extent, whether negative or positive, and how intensely our actions will influence the people and the world around us. Sometimes we even completely miscalculate the results of our actions or are completely ignorant about them.

Even with the advance of technology and millennia of experience, humans still cannot know for certain or predict the outcomes of their actions in many fields and domains. The only entity that can speak about these issues with certainty is God Almighty Himself. He has created us and everything around us and He solely knows what benefits us and what hurts us and He knows the outcome of our actions. Only He can regulate a series of laws for us that would result in the wellbeing of ourselves and our societies and ultimately our salvation.

When Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} was enquired about the prohibition of the consumption of pork, wine, and blood he replied:

“God, Blessed and Exalted be He, created the creations and knew what would make their bodies firm and what would benefit them so he made those things halal and permissible for

them. He also knew what would harm them and prohibited them [from eating it].”¹

Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} states about the same topic:

“We observed that whatever God, Blessed and Exalted be, has made permissible, it is for the wellbeing of the people and their survival and they will always be in need of it. And we observed the things that have been made prohibited are those that the people do not need and are causes of corruption that lead to death and destruction.”²

One can also argue for the need for divine laws and legislations from a social perspective. Humans are social creatures by nature and resolve their needs by interactions between members of the community. For a society to thrive, there must be law, order, and regulations that define each person’s role and rights. However, coming by these regulation is no easy task for different people and groups will try to change these laws in their favor and for their own benefits. And even if they don’t, humans due to their limited capacities cannot always come up with the best laws and regulations that would ensure the rights of all people are observed and a healthy community is created. The only person that can regulate correct laws, is the Creator.

The Question that remains to be answered is this: How are we supposed to access the laws regulated by God for we have no access to Him and no worldly apparatus to communicate with him? God sends His Prophets and Messengers to fulfill this very need. This is how Imam al-Riḍā explains it:

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yahḍurhu l-faqīh*, vol. 3, p. 345.

² Al-Ṣadūq, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi*, vol. 2, p. 592.

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“Since there was nothing in their character, language, and abilities [that they could use] to complete their interests and at the same time, the Creator was Exalted above being seeable, and their weakness and inability to perceive Him was obvious, and they had nothing in them by which they could recognize what benefits them and what harms them, there was no choice but for the existence of an immaculate intermediary between them that would bring to them His orders, prohibitions, and morals; and make them aware of the things by which they could achieve what benefits them and repel what harms them.”¹

Thus it becomes clear that humans not only need Messengers from God for their daily and basic needs, they also need them to explain the correct laws and rules needed to lead a normal life. Without Prophets and Messengers these issues will remain unresolved.

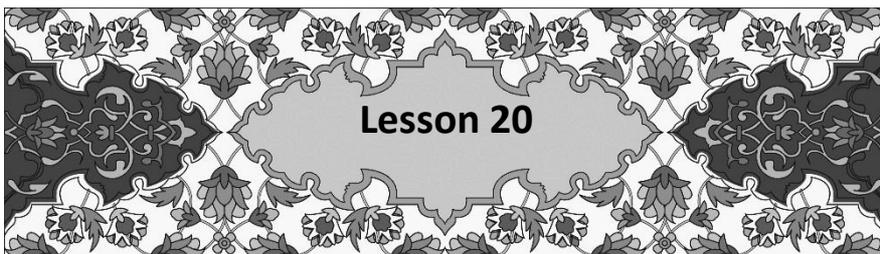
Questions:

- 1- Why do humans need God’s laws and legislations to lead a prosperous life and cannot suffice with man-made laws? Give two reasons.
- 2- Why can’t we use our own reasons and capabilities to discover God’s laws? Explain using the ahadith.
- 3- Why do we need prophets to understand the realities of creation?
- 4- Why do we need Prophets and Messengers? Explain from the perspective of *fitra* and *`aql* and a spiritual viewpoint.
- 5- Make a list of all the things we need Prophets for in this world, in the hereafter, individually, and socially.

¹ Al-Şadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 99.

Research:

- 1- Find verses of the Quran that emphasize the human need for law and order.
- 2- Work in groups to create a list of human made laws that have greatly harmed humanity.



The Means for Recognizing True Prophets (1) - Miracles



In the previous lesson, we spoke about the necessity of the existence of Prophets and Messengers and their role in the prosperity of humanity and society. We explained that God's grand plan for humanity will never be realized but by the dispatching of Prophets and Messengers. In the current lesson we will speak about the means by which true Prophets can be recognized.



When a man makes claims to Prophethood and states he has been sent by God, the first question that comes to mind is this: How do we know if he is telling the truth or is an impostor? This becomes more important when we pay attention to the fact that throughout the ages many false Prophets have made claims for their own worldly gains and desires and have succeeded in fooling large groups of people into believing in them.

God has always sent His Prophets with clear proofs and signs to make it easier for people to discern between true and false Prophets. The Quran states about Moses:

“We gave to Moses nine clear signs.”¹

These clear signs can be considered means by which Moses proved he was a true Prophet.

According to Islamic scholars, the following are the most important means by which true Prophets can be recognized with:

- a- The manifestation of miracles at their hands that are not physically possible.
- b- Prophecies of previous Prophets about the coming of a new Prophet in the future such as Jesus that spoke about the coming of Muhammad:

“And when Jesus son of Mary said to the Israelites I am God’s Messenger to you. I testify to what is in the Torah that is before me and I give good news about a Messenger that will come after me whose name is Ahmad.”²

¹ Quran, 17:101.

² Quran, 61:6.

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- c- Evidence and the circumstances surrounding their lives testify to the truth of their claims. The way they have lived their lives, their core teachings, the characteristics of the people that have believed in them, and the manner by which they have propagated their beliefs are a number of topics that can help in verifying their claims.

The first two means are usually only applicable to the people contemporary to the Prophets. The first means is so evident that it cannot be refuted nor repelled by the opposition and has always been a usual apparatus used by Prophets to prove their claims. We will now examine each of these means separately.

1- Miracles

1-1- Definition of a Miracle

A miracle is defined as: “an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws, attributed to a divine agency.”¹ Miracles have special properties that verify the claims of those producing them:

- a- No one can reproduce or imitate a miracle by using normal worldly means.
- b- No one can challenge the person that produces a miracle.
- c- A miracle is usually produced after a direct confrontation with the Prophet about his claims of Prophethood and is used by the Prophet to prove his claims.

¹ Concise Oxford English Dictionary

If a Prophet produces miracles that no one can challenge, then it can be assumed that the Prophet has really been sent by God and has been empowered by him to produce these miracles.

1-2- Are Miracles Really Possible?

Miracles aren't acts that defy reason and knowledge. When one considers God's infinite power, then miracles become totally possible. Jesus brought back the dead and cured the lepers. These might seem impossible from our perspective but for God, these are very easy. God gave Jesus the power to perform these miracles.

We as humans, even if we gather all our might and knowledge cannot bring back someone from the dead, but a single person empowered by God can easily perform such a feat and much more without effort.

If all the doctors in the world gathered in one place they would be incapable to give life to someone who has died. But is it impossible for someone who has been given power by God to perform such a task? Although such a feat is not possible by current scientific standards, one cannot deny that it is possible. Pay attention to another example. It is not possible to travel to the moon except by using rockets or spaceships. However, such a task can easily be accomplished without these vehicles using superhuman power bestowed upon someone by God.

Concerning miracles two extremist opinions exist. According to the first opinion, the occurrence of any miracle is impossible. The second opinion believe in miracles but in a superstitious manner, effectively mixing truth and falsehood. We must see miracles as they are, nothing more, nothing less.

1-3- Difference Between Miracles and Magic

In some occasions when a miracle was presented, the opponents would deny it on the basis that the miracle was an act of magic. Miracles differ from magic in a number of aspects:

- a- **Miracles cannot be taught:** Performing miracles isn't something one can teach or learn while magic is the result of learning. When Moses was sent to the Pharaoh, God ordered him to drop his staff and it suddenly turned into a serpent. Moses himself became startled for he had no prior knowledge of this ability and it was suddenly endowed unto him by God. On the other hand, the Quran mentions that Magic was a science that was transmitted through teaching: "They would teach the people magic ... and they would learn from them the things by which they could separate a man and his wife"¹
- b- **Miracles are Unchallengeable:** Miracles stem from God's Omnipotence and are unchallengeable, unlike magic that is created by the will and limited power of men. The Quran mentions the story of Moses where he overcame all the Magicians that had gathered to challenge his claims: "So they cast their ropes and staffs and said 'By the might of the Pharaoh we shall surely become victorious.' So Moses threw his staff and it swallowed what they had falsified."²
- c- **Diversity:** Miracles are diverse and vary greatly from each other. Moses miracles included his staff turning into a serpent, splitting the sea, making springs from hard rocks, and his hand that would shine. Jesus would mold a bird out of clay and it would become

¹ Quran, 2:102.

² Quran, 26:44-45.

alive, he would heal the blind and leper, and would inform people about the things that they had stored in their houses.

- d- **Different Intentions:** Prophets perform miracles to prove their prophet-hood and guide people. Those that perform magic or tricks usually do these to fool people into believing their falsehoods.

1-4- Difference Between Miracles and Extraordinary Feats Performed by the Righteous

Miracle-like feats can also be performed by righteous people but they do not make claims of Prophethood when performing these feats. Examples of these feats have been mentioned in the Quran. When Solomon asked who could bring him the throne of the Queen of a faraway land, his successor brought it to him in the blink of an eye. This is how it has been narrated:

“The one who had a knowledge from the book replied: ‘I will bring it to you before you blink.’ And when [Solomon] saw [the throne] resting before him he said: ‘This is from my Lord’s Grace.’”¹

Mary would also receive heavenly sustenance when engaged in worship and devotion:

“Whenever Zechariah entered her place of worship he would find sustenance there. He asked her: ‘O Mary! Where did you

¹ Quran, 27:40.

get this from?’ She replied: ‘It is from God. Verily God gives limitless sustenance to whoever He wills.’”¹

1-5- Different Miracles for Different Purposes

The Miracles that Prophets performed were proportional to the beliefs of the people that they were preaching to and the conditions of the societies that they lived in. For example Moses showed miracles that defeated magic or Jesus mostly cured the ill. Imam al-Riḍā peace be upon him explains why different Prophets manifested different miracles:

“God dispatched Moses in a time when sorcery was prevalent. So he brought to them from God what they were incapable of performing and what invalidated their sorcery and proved his argument in that manner. Jesus was dispatched in a time when illness’s had appeared and people were in need of medicine. He brought to them from God what they did not have and by which he would bring back the dead and cure the blind and the leper by His permission and proved his argument in that manner. God dispatched Muhammad in a time when speech and sermons were prevalent. [The narrator states] I think he also said poetry. He brought to them from God sermons and wisdoms that invalidated their statements and proved his argument in that manner.”²

The aforementioned hadith holds two important points:

¹ Quran, 3:37.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 24-25.

- a- There is a direct relationship between the events and prevalent customs or calamities in a society and the miracles that the Prophets sent there manifest.
- b- The reason the Prophets and Messengers performed these miracles was to prove that they were truthful in their claims and were real Prophets from God, so that the people would believe in them and enter the religion of God.

The relationship between miracles and the conditions they are performed in, makes it easier for the people to accept the claims of the Prophet and follow the commandments that he reveals from God.

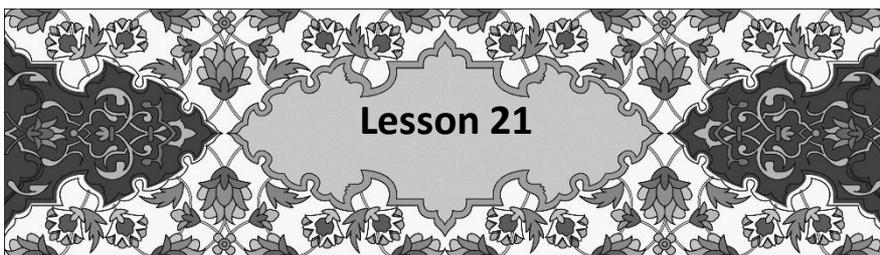
Questions:

- 1- What are the means for recognizing true Prophets? What makes miracles different from the other means?
- 2- What is a miracle? What do reason and scripture say about the possibility of miracles.
- 3- What is the difference between miracles and sorcery? Why can't sorcery be considered an extraordinary feat?
- 4- What is the difference between miracles and extraordinary feats performed by the righteous? Why can't these acts be considered signs of Prophethood?
- 5- How are miracles related to the events or difficulties that are prevalent in every age and how does this relationship affect the people being preached?

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Research:

- 1- Do miracles break or bend the rules that the world of nature is governed by? Find the responses that have been given to this question.
- 2- Make a list of the miracles mentioned in the Quran and show how they were related to the prevalent events of their times.



The Means for Recognizing True Prophets (2) – Prophecies of Past Prophets and Other Evidence



In the previous lesson we categorized the different means by which true Prophets can be recognized and then explained the role of miracles in this regard. In the current lesson we will explain the two remaining means by which prophets can be recognized.



1- Prophecies and Testimonies of Other Prophets

Another means by which true Prophets are recognized are the Prophecies of other Prophets or their testimonies about their veracity. We will show in the next lessons that one of the most important characteristics of Prophets and Messengers is their immaculacy. An immaculate being will only speak the truth and will never state false prophecies and testimonies about other Prophets.

Prophecies about the appearance of new Prophets must meet two criteria:

- a. The Prophecy of a past Prophet must be verifiable and must have reached us through authentic channels. For example, one might hear a Prophecy directly from the Prophet or multiple authentic sources state that the Prophet said so and so. Historically, many Prophets spoke about the Prophets that would be dispatched after them. David introduced Solomon as his immediate successor and John the Baptist spoke about the coming of Jesus in the future.
- b. The Prophet that was prophesied must be in accordance with what was prophesied about him. For example Jesus Prophesied the advent of Muhammad:

“And when Jesus son of Mary said: ‘O Israelites! I am God’s Messenger to you and I verify what is before me from the Torah, and I give glad tidings about a Messenger that will come after me whose name is Ahmad.’”¹

¹ Quran, 61:6.

It is understood from verses of the Quran and the hadith that the attributes of the Prophet Muhammad were so well known among Jewish leaders that they had no doubts about him being the last Messenger of God that they had been foretold about:

“Those that have been given the book recognize him in the same manner that they recognize their own sons, [however] some of them knowingly cover the truth.”¹

2- Other Evidence

Another means of recognizing true prophets is to examine the evidence that surrounds them. The evidences must only be used as guidelines for they can sometimes be seen in false prophets too. Some of the most important pieces of evidence in this regard are:

2-1- Past History of the Claimant

We all express different actions and attitudes when interacting with those around us. These actions reflect our thoughts, morals, and beliefs. By examining the actions and attitudes of a claimant to Prophethood, one can find signs and evidence that support or disprove his claims.

All true Prophets were known for their trustworthiness, righteousness, and good morals before they became Prophets. They had no past history of criminal offenses or immoral actions in their private and social lives. They were known for their intelligence, wisdom, and intellect and no one could accuse them of any wrongdoing in their words and actions. A

¹ Quran, 2:146.

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claimant long known for his truthfulness, good standing, and desirable morals is probably more truthful in his claims than one known for being immoral and corrupt and for this reason many people would believe in the claimant to Prophethood when observing these traits in him.

2-2- Culture and Society

If a claimant rises from a backward culture devoid of morals where corruption and immorality rule but and brings about teachings, wisdoms, and morals that takes the society from the darkness of ignorance into the lights of guidance, and claims that his teachings are divinely inspired, then such a person is most probably truthful in his claims.

2-3- The Teachings

A claimant to Prophethood necessarily invites people to beliefs, ideals, morals, and laws that he claims are from God. These teachings must conform with reason, common-sense, and conscience and must play an obvious role in the welfare of society.

2-4- The Believers and Followers

When people that are known for their truthfulness and sincerity believe in a claimant, this can be seen as sign that the claimant is telling the truth. This becomes even more important if those same people personally knew the claimant and have total confidence that he would not make up such a great claim.

2-5- Persistence in Face of Opposition

A claimant to anything will inevitably face opposition from different people in the society. A claimant to Prophethood is no different. How the claimant reacts towards opposition can be considered a criterion for discerning between true and false Prophets. A claimant that recants his claims after being threatened or after facing significant opposition, is not a true Prophet. On the other hand, a true Prophet will never take back his claims, even if the outcome is loss of great wealth, great bodily harm, or death itself.¹

2-6- Contradictions

Obvious and glaring contradictions are good clues that can point to the falsity of the claims of a fake Prophet. Although in the teachings of true Prophets one might encounter statements or actions that might seem contradictory at first, however a closer examination shows that the statements are not contradictions. The same cannot be said about the statements of false Prophets. The Quran points to this fact in the following manner:

“Do they not Ponder on the Quran! For if it was from anybody but Allah, they would have found many contradictions in it.”²

As we previously stated, none of the aforementioned subjects can by themselves be considered a criterion for accepting the claims of a

¹ This does not mean that anyone that acts in this manner is necessarily a true Prophet.

² Quran, 4:82.

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Prophet. However, having these in mind and with the help of *aql*¹ one can judge if a claimant to Prophethood is truthful in his claims or is not even in the absence of miracles. When an inquirer asked Imam al-Riḍā peace be upon him about the means of recognizing true Prophets in a time where we have no access to them (or their miracles), he responded:

“By the use of `aql by which he who is truthful about being [sent] by God is recognized and confirmed and he who is lying about being [sent] by God is recognized and refuted.”²

Caesar used the evidence surrounding Prophet Muhammad to judge if he was a Prophet or not. It has been narrated that when Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him and his family sent a letter to the Caesar, the Caesar asked for the merchants that had come from Mecca and asked them about the characteristics of Muhammad. When he heard their responses, he stated that these are the characteristics of a Prophet.³

Questions:

- 1- What limitations are there in the prophecies and testimonies of previous Prophets about the Prophets that will come after them?
- 2- Name some of the evidence by which true Prophets can be recognized.
- 3- How can the teachings of Prophets be used as a means to prove their truthfulness? Explain using verses of the Quran.
- 4- What role does `aql play in recognizing true Prophets.

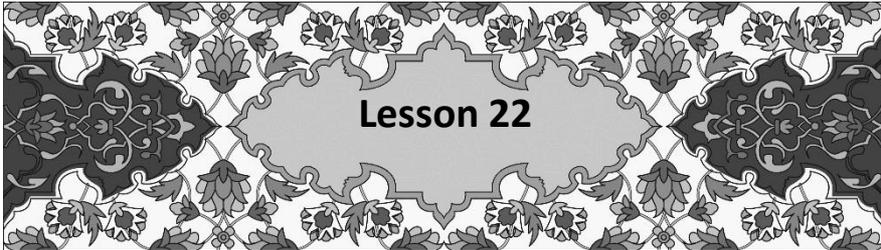
¹ For a definition of `aql refer to lesson 1.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 24-25.

³ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 20, p. 379.

Research:

- 1- Find statements from the New and Old Testaments that can be considered as prophecies about the Prophet of Islam.
- 2- In your opinion, how did Muhammad's closest companions reach the conclusion that he was a true Prophet?



The Attributes of Prophets and Messengers - Knowledge



In the previous lessons we spoke about the means by which true Prophets are discerned from impostors. We showed that there are other means other than miracles that can help us reach this goal.

In the current lesson we will speak about the traits that Prophets must possess. These traits help Prophets in performing the duties delegated to them by God. Knowledge, Power, and Immaculacy are the most important of these traits. In the current lesson we will speak about the knowledge of Prophets.



One of the most important attributes of Prophets, if not the most important, is having superhuman knowledge. The greatest difference between Prophets and normal people is the knowledge revealed to them by God. In the current lesson we will speak about some of the more important subjects related to the knowledge of Prophets.

1- Knowledge from the Viewpoint of Common-Sense

Common sense judges that the knowledgeable have a higher position than the ignorant. A learned scholar, knowledgeable in any science is preferred over someone that is not as knowledgeable or is completely ignorant about that science. This is how the Quran explains this point:

“Say: Are those that know equal with those that do not know! Verily only those that possess intellect take heed.”¹

2- Following the Knowledgeable

It is reasonable to follow someone who has knowledge about the things that he is being followed for. Again the Quran expresses this very meaning:

“Is the one who guides towards the truth more worthy of being followed or him who does not guide except after he is guided? What is wrong with you and how you judge?!”²

¹ Quran, 39:9.

² Quran, 10:35.

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Obviously, following ignorant people that need to be guided themselves will lead us astray and be futile:

“Do not follow the desires of those that do not know. They will never be able to help you against God in any matter.”¹

3- Prophets Must Receive Knowledge from God

Delegating a responsibility must be accompanied with capacities and facilities that help the delegate in performing his duties. For this reason, God gives Prophets the means and facilities to perform the duties that have been delegated to them. The first and foremost duty delegated to the Prophets is the guidance of mankind. One can only guide another if he himself is already guided. The Prophets can only teach God’s laws and Books, if they have already been taught them themselves. If a Prophet assigned to the guidance of people does not have the most important means for guidance, then why assign him with such a task in the first place?!

Normal human beings have no way of knowing God’s orders and prohibitions. The knowledge of these matters must necessarily be provided by God Himself and He provides this knowledge to His Prophets who then teach it to their followers:

“And we selected and guided them to the straight path ... They are those that we bestowed with The Book, Judgment, and

¹ Quran, 45:18-19.

Prophethood ... They are the ones that God has guided, so follow their guidance.”¹

According to the aforementioned verses:

- Prophets are selected by God, not people.
- They have been guided by God and have been given Books and means to make fair judgment.
- People must follow Prophets and accept their guidance.

According to Imam al-Riḍā Prophets must be given knowledge by God and this knowledge must be of a quality that clearly puts Prophets in a position of advantage when they are asked questions or challenged:

“The Prophets and Imams have been made successful by God and have been granted from his stored Knowledge and Wisdom what He has not granted to anyone else. Their knowledge is superior to the knowledge of the people of their time ... Whenever God chooses a servant for the purpose [of guiding] His creations, He increases that persons capacity of handling that task and fills his heart with springs of wisdom and greatly inspires him with knowledge. When this happens, he will never become helpless or confused in responding and giving a correct answer.”²

4- The Source of All the Knowledge of Prophets

God is the source of the Knowledge of all Prophets and society or the culture they have thrived in has no role in this knowledge. Prophets do

¹ Quran, 6:87-90.

² Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni`ma*, vol. 2, p. 680.

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not learn knowledge, rather they become learned in an instant by the Grace of God. Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“God, Mighty and Majestic be He, provided His Prophet’s from his stored Favor, Munificence, and Mercy and taught them from his stored Knowledge.”¹

Some Prophets also receive knowledge indirectly from God through other Prophets. Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} states:

“When the duration of the Prophethood of Adam came to an end, God, Mighty and Majestic be He, revealed to Him: ‘Your Prophethood has come to an end, and your days are over. Place the knowledge that you possess, the faith, the Most Great Name, the inheritance of knowledge, and the remnants of the Knowledge of Prophethood in the possession of your son Hibatullah, for I will not make your descendants empty of knowledge, faith, the Most Great Name, the inheritance of knowledge, and the remnants of the Knowledge of Prophethood until the Day of Rising (Judgment Day) and I will not leave the earth empty of a Knowledgeable person by whom my religion and orders will be recognized.”²

According to Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} the Prophet of Islam inherited all the knowledge of past Prophets:

“Muhammad, peace be upon him and his progeny, inherited the knowledge of [all] Prophets and Messengers that came before him.”³

¹ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 11, p. 37.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, p. 114.

³ Al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, vol. 1, p. 121.

5- The Different Degrees of Knowledge Possessed by Prophets

Different Prophets possessed different degrees of knowledge. From among all the Prophets, it was only Muhammad ^{peace be upon him and his progeny} that was bestowed with all knowledge. This is how Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} describes his knowledge:

“The Prophet knew the knowledge of all the Prophets and had the knowledge of whatever has occurred and whatever will occur until the Day of Rising.”¹

However, other Prophets did not possess this level of knowledge and only knew a limited amount about the future that God had informed them about. Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“Moses and al-Khidr were bestowed with the knowledge of whatever had occurred [before them] but they were not bestowed with the knowledge of current events (in their time) or what would occur in the future until the Day of Rising.”²

Questions:

- 1- Using the Quran and your `aql, explain why we must follow those that possess knowledge.
- 2- Give one argument about why Prophets must necessarily possess Divine Knowledge.

¹ Al-Şaffār, *Başā'ir al-darajāt*, vol. 1, p. 127.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 261.

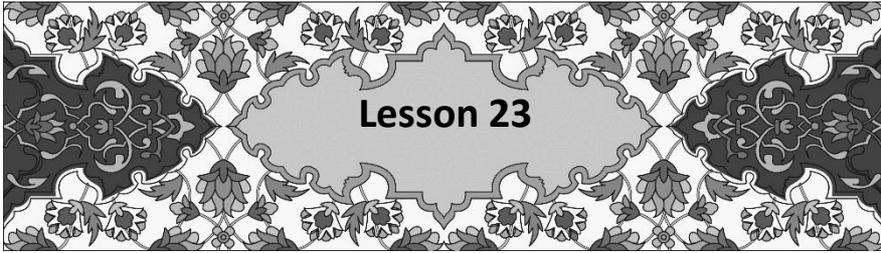
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- 3- What is the source of the Prophets' knowledge? Do they also possess the knowledge of the Prophets that had lived before them?
- 4- Explain the limit and degree of the knowledge that different Prophets possessed.

Research:

- 1- The Prophet of Islam has been described in the Quran using the adjective *al-ammī*.¹ This word is usually translated as illiterate or unlettered by translators. Can one really make the claim that the Prophet was illiterate and couldn't read or write?
- 2- How did the Prophet of Islam possess the knowledge of all Prophets and Messengers before himself even though he lived many centuries after them?

¹ See verses 7:157 and 7:158.



The Characteristics of Prophets and Messengers – Immaculacy



In the previous lesson, we spoke about the first characteristic that Prophets must possess: knowledge.

We showed that without great amounts of knowledge, Prophets are incapable of performing the duties they have been assigned with. This knowledge can only be bestowed by God and gives Prophets a great advantage over ordinary people. Another important characteristic that Prophets must possess is immaculacy. In the current lesson we will speak about this concept in detail.



Scholars and theologians have spoken in great detail and length about the immaculacy of Prophets and its different aspects. In the current lesson we will explain a few essential topics in this regard.

1- The Definition of Immaculacy (*al-`isma*)

Al-`isma is defined in Arabic lexicons as protecting, preventing or holding. When the word immaculate is used to describe Prophets it means that they must be protected and withheld from committing sins and errors. This is how Imam al-Sadiq describes an immaculate person:

“An immaculate person is someone who is protected by the help of God from committing anything that God has made forbidden. Verily God, Blessed and Exalted be He, states: ‘He who holds firmly to Allah has truly been guided to a straight path.’^{1,2}

2- The Scope and Limits Immaculacy

Common-sense dictates that Prophets and Messengers must be immaculate in every task that is related to their duties as guides for mankind. This includes their personal lives, receiving, protecting, and propagating revelations, responding to questions related to revelations, and practicing what has been revealed to them. In none of these categories must they perform or commit any act, insignificant or

¹ Quran, 3:101.

² Al-Şadūq, *Ma`āni l-akhbār*, p. 132.

significant, that can be considered a sin or error. Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} explains this very important issue:

“Prophets do not commit sins for they are immaculate and purified. They do not sin, they do not deviate from the truth, and they do not commit minor or major sins.”¹

3- The Necessity of Believing in the Immaculacy of Prophets

For a Prophet to be taken seriously, he must first gain the trust of those that he is preaching. Normal people must not see him as someone whose statements are flawed or cannot be relied upon. If Prophets are not immaculate, then those that are looking for excuses, will reject them based on their potential errors. On the other hand, those that truly want to believe in them cannot rely on their statements because there is always the chance that they will be led astray by the Prophets instead of being guided by them. This argument, which can be referred to as the ‘Argument of Trust,’ is one of the most important logical reasons for the immaculacy of Prophets.

How can God order us to obey someone without question and at the same time allow that person to commit sins and make mistakes? If we obey such a person, we are following his lead in erring and sinning and if we do not obey him, then of what use is a prophet who is not followed and is disobeyed? Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} enumerates this among the reasons for the immaculacy of Prophets:

¹ Al-Şadūq, *Ma`āni l-akhbār*, p. 399.

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“You must not obey someone who has been created, if it means you have to disobey the Creator. He who disobeys God must not be obeyed. Only God, His Messenger, and the Guardians of [this] Order (meaning the Imams) must be obeyed. God has commanded that the Messenger must be obeyed because he is immaculate and purified and will not command that God be disobeyed.”¹

The fact that God calls the Prophet a fine exemplar in the Quran is further evidence for his immaculacy:

“The Messenger of God is truly a fine exemplar for you.”²

God will not introduce someone as an exemplar who is not immaculate or has a history of sinning, erring, and corruption.

4- The Cause and Source of Immaculacy

Since God has guaranteed the immaculacy of the Prophets, some people believe that Prophets are incapable of sinning and making mistakes. This statement is not accurate. God’s immaculate Messengers have such a great degree of self-control that they will not sin even during the most tempting of situations. This self-control is the result of their absolute knowledge about the vile nature of all sins and their absolute control over their passions and desires. Prophets and Messengers are well-capable of sinning and erring, but they do not do so by using their own free will. Prophets are not forced to be infallible by God. God provides Prophets with the means that assists them in being immaculate.

¹ Al-Şadūq, *al-Khişāl*, vol. 1, p. 139.

² Quran, 33:21.

God assists Prophets in being immaculate through different means:

4-1- Knowledge, Wisdom, and Divine Aid or Divine Intervention

God has bestowed his Prophets with knowledge and wisdom so that they have the ability to respond to all questions without erring. He also aids them in fulfilling this duty. According to Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him}:

“Whenever God chooses a servant for the purpose [of guiding] His creations, He increases that persons capacity of handling that task and fills his heart with springs of wisdom, and greatly inspires him with knowledge. After this, he will never be helpless or confused in responding and giving a correct answer. For he will be protected, aided, made successful, and assisted and safe from mistakes, deviations, and failure.”¹

4-2- Angels

God also has unseen means by which he protects His Messengers from committing sins and mistakes. God assigns his angels to protect Prophets from committing sins and to guide them where they need guidance. Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} states:

“God assigns to his Prophets angels that protect their actions and bring to them what they must preach. After Muhammad was no longer a suckling infant, he was assigned with a great

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamal al-din wa tamām al-ni`ma*, vol. 2, p. 680.

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angel that would guide him to good actions and praised morals and would prohibit him from wicked acts and bad behavior.”¹

Thus, if a Prophet is in a situation where he might unintentionally make a mistake or commit a sin, he will be made aware by the angel that accompanies him and he will not perform that action using his own free will. In normal cases, the Prophet refrains from sins and mistakes without the need for such assistance.

4-3- Righteous Parents

Spiritual and material purity, chastity, modesty, and righteousness of parents usually has a positive and direct effect on their children. All of God’s Messengers and Prophets were born to righteous parents. Imam al-Ṣādiq states:

“Earth will never be empty of a Proof (*ḥujja*) and that Proof will always be a descendant of a Prophet. God has not dispatched a Prophet that was not a descendant of a Prophet. God created for Adam a luminous path and brought out from his loin a pure and immaculate generation that the Prophets and Messengers are from ... no one can be the custodian of God’s Knowledge, the trustee of His concealed things, the treasure-chest of his secrets, His Proof upon His creation, and His translator and tongue, without having these characteristics ... God, Mighty and Majestic be He, chose from the children of Adam a people who had clean births and pure bodies. He protected them in the loins of men and wombs of women and

¹ Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 15, p. 362. The same meaning has been narrated from Imam Ali peace be upon him: “And God made His greatest angel accompany him after he was no longer breastfed. Day and night it would guide him to noble deeds and the best morals.” (Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 192, p. 300)

extracted from them Prophets and Messengers and they are the purest of Adam's branches.”¹

Questions:

- 1- How has *al-`isma* (immaculacy) been defined in Arabic lexicons and by the Imams, peace be upon them?
- 2- What does a Prophet's immaculacy encompass? Why are Prophets also immaculate with regard to their private lives?
- 3- Why must Prophets be immaculate?
- 4- What role do Prophets play in their own immaculacy? Can their immaculacy be considered a virtue?
- 5- How does God assist Prophets in becoming immaculate? Can we attribute the immaculacy of Prophets to God?
- 6- What role do knowledge and ma`rifa play in the immaculacy of Prophets?
- 7- What role do the actions of God play in the immaculacy of Prophets? Do these actions mean that Prophets have no choice about their immaculacy?

Research:

- 1- Find verses in the Quran that have words derived from the root «عصم» and see if you can define immaculacy by using these verses.
- 2- What is the difference between being immaculate and infallible?

¹ Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 2, pp. 337 & 340. This narration was added by the translator.



Divine Prophets



In the previous lessons, we explained the general topics related to all Prophets and Messengers. In the current lesson we will speak about some of the more well-known Prophets, their books, and their religions.



1- Legitimate Sources for Gaining Correct Knowledge about Prophets

The only sources for gaining correct knowledge about past Prophets are the Quran and Hadith. Based on historical evidence, the books of the Prophets before Islam have been distorted throughout the ages. This can be further affirmed by the contents of these books that sometimes defy logic and common-sense and go against all accepted morals. There are also no surviving independent reports about the events of those times. Thus, the only reliable source one can refer to for this purpose is the Quran and correct Shia scripture.

2- The Total Number of Prophets and Messengers

According to Shia hadith, God has appointed one hundred and twenty four thousand Prophets throughout the ages. From among these, three hundred and thirteen were also Messengers.¹ From all of these, only twenty six have been mentioned in the Quran by name: Adam, Enoch (Idrīs), Noah, Hūd, Šālih, Abraham, Lot, Alyasa`, Ezekiel (Dhu I-Kifl), Elijah (Ilyās), Jonah, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Shu`ayb, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Job (Ayyūb), Zechariah, Yaḥyā, Jesus, Ismā'il al-Šādiq al-Wa`d, and Muhammad.

Furthermore, many Prophets have been mentioned but we do not know their names nor have we any statements about their lives:

¹ Al-Šadūq, *Ma`āni l-akhbār*, p. 333.

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“And Messengers whose stories we narrated to you and Messengers whose stories we did not narrate to you.”¹

The Quran also narrates the stories of some Prophets without mentioning their names.²

3- The Books of the Prophets

God mentions a number of Prophets and Messengers in the Quran then states:

“Those are the ones that we bestowed with Books, the ability to judge, and Prophethood.”³

This verse and many others similar to it show that some of God’s Prophets and Messengers were dispatched with Books:

“This is [what has been written] in the former scrolls. The scrolls of Abraham and Moses.”⁴

“We gave Moses the Book, perhaps they may be guided.”⁵

“And we gave David the Psalms.”⁶

¹ Quran, 3:164.

² See Quran, 2:246-251, 2:259, and 36:13-30.

³ Quran, 6:89.

⁴ Quran, 87:18-19.

⁵ Quran, 23:49.

⁶ Quran, 17:55.

“And we gave him the Bible. Within it is guidance and illumination.”¹

“A Book that we sent down to you so that you take people out of darkness into light by the permission of their Lord.”²

In a discussion that Abu-Dhar had with the Prophet ^{peace be upon him and his family}, he asked about the number of Books that God had sent to his Messengers. The Prophet replied:

“One hundred and four books. God sent down to Seth fifty scrolls, to Enoch thirty scrolls, to Abraham twenty scrolls, and he sent down the Torah, the Bible, the Psalms, and the Furqan (Quran).”³

4- Prophets that Introduced New Religions and Prophets that Propagated these Religions

From all the Prophets of God, only five introduced novel religions and all other Prophets and Messengers were followers of these religions and propagated them. The five Prophets that brought new religions were: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all. Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} states:

“Every Prophet that came after Noah was a follower of his religion, his path, and his Book until the time of Abraham. Every Prophet that lived during the time of Abraham or after

¹ Quran, 5:46.

² Quran, 14:1.

³ Al-Ṣadūq, *Ma`āni l-akhbār*, p. 333.

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him was a follower of his religion, his path, and his Book until the time of Moses. Every Prophet that lived during the time of Moses or after him was a follower of his religion, his path, and his Book until the time of Jesus. Every Prophet that lived during the time of Jesus or after him was a follower of his religion, his path, and his Book until the time of our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family.”¹

For example Hūd and Šāliḥ were propagators of the religion of Noah among their tribes. Lot and Shu`ayb were propagators of the religion of Abraham among their people. Jonah was a propagator of the religion of Moses. The Prophets that brought new religions are sometimes referred to as *‘ulu l-azm*² Prophets (lit. those that possess determination).

Questions:

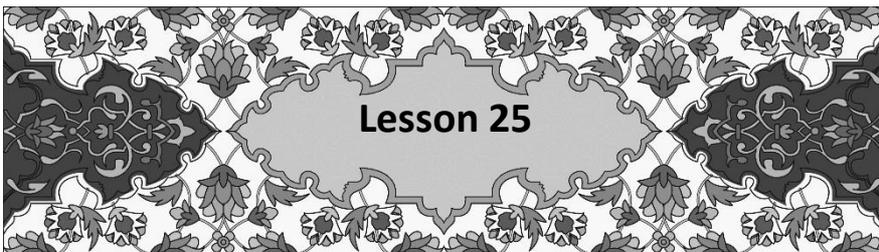
- 1- What are the only legitimate sources for gaining insight about God’s Prophets and Messengers?
- 2- What information can we gain from the Quran and hadith about past Prophets and their Books?
- 3- Who are the ‘Ulu l-`azm Prophets and what distinct feature do they possess?

¹ Al-Šadūq, *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, p. 80.

² See al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 17 and vol. 1 p. 175.

Research:

1- How many Prophets have been mentioned by name in the Quran? Which geographical regions were they dispatched to? Show these on a map.



The Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (1)



In the previous lessons we explained some of the general characteristics of true Prophets. In the current lesson we will speak about the Prophethood of Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family.



The Prophet's Personality and Character

Muhammad was born more than 14 centuries ago on the 17th of the month of Rabi` al-awwal (25 April 570 AD) in Mecca. His father Abdullah died in Medina while returning from a trip to the Levant before his birth. His mother was Āmina daughter of Wahab b. `Abd Manāf. As was customary in those times, Āmina put Muhammad in the care of a nursemaid called Ḥalima to raise him in the plains outside the city. After about five years, Ḥalima returned him to the city where he lived with his mother for another 2 years until she passed away. Muhammad was then taken under the care of his paternal grandfather `Abd al-Muṭṭalib who passed away two years later and at the age of eight Muhammad was put under the care of his uncle Abū-Ṭālib.

Muhammad's youth was passed with chastity, purity, honesty, and good morals. He became to be known among the Meccans as Muhammad al-Amin (Muhammad the Trustworthy). He would always help the needy, the orphans, and the widows. At the age of twenty, he joined the Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl treaty that was created to preserve the rights of the poor and the needy. Joining this treaty was part of his plan to fight for the rights of the needy and oppressed.

Once Muhammad's trustworthiness and honesty became apparent among the people of Mecca, a wealthy chaste and pious woman by the name of Khadija asked him to go on a commercial trip to the Levant. After this trip, when Khadija saw Muhammad's sincerity and trustworthiness she asked that they be married and Muhammad married Khadija at the age of 25. Although Khadija was extremely wealthy, Muhammad never used her wealth for his personal needs and instead used it to help those in need. He would usually spend his free time

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mediating on God's creations and worshipping Him in the mountains outside Mecca and in the cave of Ḥarā'.

Years passed in this manner until the 27th of Rajab 610 AD. While Muhammad was praying in the cave of Hara, he was approached by the Archangel Gabriel who brought him the first verses of the Quran. Thus at the age of forty, Muhammad was selected by God to become His Messenger and the herald of a new religion.¹

Arguments for the Prophethood of Muhammad

In the previous lessons we mentioned the means by which true Prophets can be distinguished from imposters. In the current section, we will use the same means and methods to prove the Prophethood of Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family.

The Miracle of the Quran

According to many traditions and hadiths, Muhammad performed many miracles that we will speak about in future lessons. In the current lesson we will examine his greatest miracle: the Quran. We will first examine the claim that the Quran is a miracle and then we will delve into the different miraculous aspects of this book.

The Quran is the eternal proof for the veracity of Muhammad's claim to Prophethood. This book is superior to the miracles of all Prophets.

¹ For sources and narrations on this section see al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, volumes 15 and 16.

Ever since it was revealed, the Quran has claimed that it is inimitable and has challenged its opponents to produce a book like it and to date no one has managed to produce such a work:

“Say if all Humans and Jinn were to gather together to bring forth like this Quran they would not be capable of doing so even if some helped the others.”¹

Signs of the Miraculous Nature of the Quran

Ever since Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, announced his mission he was met with fierce resistance from his enemies who made every attempt to oppose the religion of God. After it became obvious that Muhammad would not succumb to their threats and enticements, they decided to kill him but God thwarted their plans and Muhammad secretly migrated to Medina. After his migration, he was frequently occupied with wars that were mostly imposed upon him by the infidels or their Jewish allies.

Ever since those times, the enemies of Islam have always been trying to destroy Islam. One method that they have been using to achieve this goal is to create a book similar to the Quran to challenge the Qurans claim to inimitability. The earliest of such attempts was probably that of Musaylima the Liar (*al-Kadhdhāb*) who claimed he was a Prophet and made up a number of verses following the pattern of surah 101 of the Quran. This is what the verses read:

¹ Quran, 17:88.

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“The Elephant. What is the Elephant? What would you know about the elephant? It has a long trunk.”¹

A modern day attempt is a book called *The True Furqan* propagated by Christian missionaries since 1999. It failed to defeat the Quranic challenge mainly because it is composed of verses or statements of the Quran that have simply been rearranged or mixed with Christian beliefs to make the prose sound like the Quran. Lacking novelty, it has failed to gain much support or acceptance although it has been distributed by the authors among many libraries and Islamic centers.

By studying this book and comparing its text with the Quran and the miraculous aspects of the Quran, it becomes obvious that such man-made works are incomparable with the Quran and these attempts cannot challenge the inimitability of the Quran.²

Those that seek the truth, realize that the Quran is inimitable and no one, no matter how hard he tries, can produce a similar book. The Quran possess all the characteristics of true miracles that we described in the lesson on miracles:

- a- No one can reproduce or imitate a miracle by using normal worldly means.
- b- No one can challenge the person that produces a miracle and overcome him.
- c- A miracle is usually produced after a direct confrontation with the Prophet about his claims of Prophethood and is used by the Prophet to prove his claims.

¹ See Ibn kathīr, *Al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 426.

² See *Naqdi kitābi al-furqan al-ḥaq bā ta’kīd bar wujūh i`jāz quran*.

These features are proof enough that this book is not the work of mankind and is the eternal evidence for the veracity of Muhammad's Prophethood. Understanding this meaning needs no prior knowledge or expertise and is acceptable by all people.¹

Different Aspects of the Miraculous Nature of the Quran

1- Eloquence and Elegance

The eloquence and elegance of the Quran are not only accepted by Muslims but also attested to by a number of non-Muslim academics, scholars, and authors:

“The verses of the Qur'an represent its uniqueness and beauty not to mention its novelty and originality. That is why it has succeeded in convincing so many people of its truth. It imitates nothing and no one nor can it be imitated. Its style does not pall even after long periods of study and the text does not lose its freshness over time.”²

“In making the present attempt to improve on the performance of my predecessors, and to produce something which might be accepted as echoing however faintly the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran, I have been at pains to study the intricate and richly varied rhythms which—apart from the message itself— constitute the Koran's undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind . . . This very characteristic feature —‘that inimitable symphony’, as the believing Pickthall described his Holy Book,

¹ See *Amūzish `aqā'id*, p. 262.

² Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, p. 404.

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‘the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy’— has been almost totally ignored by previous translators; it is therefore not surprising that what they have wrought sounds dull and flat indeed in comparison with the splendidly decorated original. For the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both. The verses into which it is divided ... are threaded together by loose rhymes into shorter or longer sequences within the Sura; the rhythms of those sequences vary sensibly according to the subject-matter, swinging from the steady march of straightforward narrative or enunciation (tales of the ancient prophets, formulations of ritual and law) to the impetuous haste of ecstatic ejaculation (the majesty of God, the imminence of the Last Day, the torments of Hell, and the delights of Paradise). I have striven to devise rhythmic patterns and sequence-groupings in correspondence with what the Arabic presents, paragraphing the grouped sequences as they seem to form original units of revelation.”¹

“Even those Qurayshis who refused to accept Islam were disturbed by the Koran and found that it lay outside all their familiar categories: it was nothing like the inspiration of the kahin or the poet; nor was it like the incantations of a magician. Some stories show powerful Qurayshis who remained steadfastly with the opposition being visibly shaken when they listened to a sura. It is as though Muhammad had created an entirely new literary form that some people were not ready for but which thrilled others.”²

¹ Arthur John Arberry, *The Koran: Interpreted*, Introduction.

² Karen Armstrong, *A History of God, From Abraham to the Present: The 4,000-year Quest for God*, p. 67.

The Arabs of Muhammad's time, who were masterful in poetry, realized that the Quran wasn't the work of men. Some of them became believers by simply listening to the Quran.

It has been narrated that Walīd b. Mughayra, a wealthy old man and prolific in poetry and Arabic literature, was asked about the nature of the Quran. He had requested that some of it be read to him. When the Prophet of Islam had reached the verse:

“Say: I warn you about a thunder, like the under that (struck) the tribes of `Ād and Thamūd”¹

His skin shivered and he returned to his house and did not emerge. When he was asked about his opinion he replied:

“I heard a strong statement that makes the skins shiver ... it is neither poetry ... nor a sermon.”²

2- Prophecies

The Quran has prophesied about thirty different events that have all occurred as the Quran had predicted. These events were predicted by the Quran in a time where there wasn't the smallest hint that could point to the occurrence of these events in the future. An example of these events is the victory of the Romans over the Persians that was foretold

¹ Quran, 41:13.

² Al-Ṭabrisī, *l'ālm al-warā*, p. 41.

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by the Quran a few years before it occurred.¹ The victory of the Muslims over the idolaters in the Battle of Badr is another such example.²

3- Laws

The social, political, and economical laws of the Quran are in accordance with man's nature and what benefits him. These laws include the prohibition of interest on loans, consumption of alcohol, gambling and the laws on marriage and adultery. If implemented, the laws of the Quran result in the well-being of society. These laws are applicable to all places, times, and civilizations and in harmony with each other and man's needs.

The miraculous nature of these laws becomes evident once one realizes that they have been revealed by an unlettered man from a backward civilization where the norms of society were injustice, oppression, corruption, and empty of morals.

4- Natural Sciences

The Quran isn't a book of physics, medicine, or psychology. It is a book of guidance revealed with the intention of guiding mankind. However, to reach this goal, the Quran sometimes refers to nature, the secrets of creation, and the wonders of the created world. This is especially evident in its discussions on the Oneness of God where it speaks about natural phenomena that at the time of its revelation were unknown to humanity.

¹ Quran, 30:2-5.

² Quran, 8:7.

These are usually referred to as the *scientific miracles of the Quran*. For example the Quran states that the mountains are moving:

“You see the mountains and think they are immobile, however they are moving like the clouds.”¹

We know today that the earth rotates around itself and the mountains are in fact moving and not immobile. This fact, was not known nearly fourteen-hundred years ago when the Quran was revealed.

It should be noted that even if some verses of the Quran mention scientific facts, this does not mean that the intent of that verse was that scientific fact that we know about today. For science is constantly changing and facts considered correct today might turn out to be outright wrong tomorrow. And for this reason one cannot use scientific theories to explain the verses of the Quran. It is necessary for Muslim scholars to independently study the verses of the Quran and discover the sciences hidden therein.

Questions:

- 1- Find one of the verses of the Quran where the Quran challenges to reveal a verse or Surah similar to it?
- 2- Why do we claim that no one can present verses like those of the Quran?
- 3- Explain how the laws of the Quran are miraculous in nature?
- 4- Mention one of the Prophecies of the Quran.

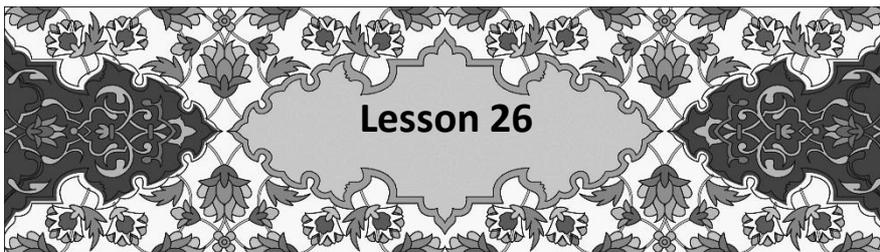
¹ Quran, 27:88.

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- 5- How are the natural sciences mentioned in the Quran considered miracles?

Research:

- 1- Find all the verses of the Quran that challenge its opponents to reveal statements similar to the Quran. How are the meanings of these verses different from each other?
- 2- Refer to books or articles that speak about the natural sciences mentioned in the Quran. Make a list of those that can be considered miracles.



The Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (2)



In the previous lesson we explained that a miracle of Muhammad's revelation ^{peace be upon him and his family} is the Quran and we mentioned some of the miraculous aspects of this book. In the current lesson we will further mention a few more miraculous aspects of the Quran.



1- Different Aspects of the Miraculous Nature of the Quran (continued)

5- Theology and Divine Guidance

What we mean by theological discussions of the Quran are those that speak about the Divine, Prophethood, the world of nature, the world of mankind, and the hereafter. These include a number of insightful and precise statements that respond to very important questions in this regard.

At the time of the appearance of the Prophet, Arabia was one of the most backward places on earth to the extent that they were sometimes referred to as savages. Many of its inhabitants were either idolaters or believed in mortal Gods. They would bury their infant girls alive and among all its population only a very few who lived in Mecca knew how to read and write.

From among such a people, an unlettered man rose that had neither been to school nor had been supervised by any teacher. He brought a Book whose radiant concepts and teachings are so profound and exalted that after fourteen centuries scholars are still finding new meanings in its statements.

An example of its exalted teachings is the core theological teaching of the Oneness of God. This is the first message of Islam that would be preached by the Prophet it in this manner:

“Say there is no God but Allah so that you may [attain] salvation.”¹

The same meaning is also echoed in the Quran:

“Say Allah is One.”²

Compare this to the belief in Trinity which claims that God is One and at the same time three and these do not contradict each-other. The Quran rejects the Trinity and the claim that God can have children:

“He has not taken a wife nor a child.”³

“He does not give birth nor was He born and no one is equal to Him.”⁴

6- Morals and Ethics

Ethical teachings must be in a manner that guide mankind to salvation in this world and the hereafter. They must enliven virtuous morals and humane qualities and convert us into the Perfect Human. A Perfect Human is one whose worldly and spiritual virtues have both been perfected and this is the goal of Islam.

According to Islamic teachings, God has not created man so that he becomes completely attached to the material needs and neither completely spiritual where he completely puts aside his material aspects. Rather he must make a balance between both his material and spiritual

¹ Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *al-Manāqib*, vo. 1, p. 56 & al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 18, p. 202.

² Quran, 112:1.

³ Quran, 72:3.

⁴ Quran, 112:3-4.

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needs and use them for his benefit. The Quran opposes *complete* asceticism and instead insists that humans strive and work in this world and on the other hand advises that humans perform virtuous acts, not for worldly gains but for the sake of God. This is the slogan of Muslims in this regard:

“O our Lord! Give us goodness in this world and goodness in the hereafter.”¹

7- Internal harmony

Man and his thoughts evolve over time. Every new thought or conclusion usually shows the deficiencies or errors of his previous thoughts.

The Prophet of Islam preached the Quran for 23 years in very diverse conditions. However, what he said on the first day were the same as the last. If someone writes a book in a short period of time while in a constant state of thought, the result would probably be free from contradictions. However, if the same book is written in a long period of time while engaged in a range of other duties, frequent wars and social and political dilemmas, then one would not expect the book to be free from contradictions.

This matter becomes more evident when we consider the fact that the Quran speaks about more than five-hundred different subjects while none of these contradict the other. This shows that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet of Islam by God and has been preserved by Him

¹ Quran, 2:201.

from all errors and contradictions. The Quran points to this miraculous feat in the following verse:

“Do they not Ponder on the Quran! For if it was from anybody but Allah, they would have found many contradictions in it.”¹

8- Stories of Past Prophets

The Quran is not a history book but it narrates the stories of bygone generations so that they may be an example for us. When the Quran narrates the stories of Prophets like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, David, and Solomon, it narrates them in a manner that is in accordance with their stations as Prophets. This is while in all books before the Quran such as the distorted Old and New Testaments, the Prophets are portrayed as people that deceive, lie, steal, and commit all kinds of sins.²

This shows that the Quran has not been copied from any previous work and is truly divinely inspired.

2- Other Miracles Performed by the Prophet of Islam

Apart from the Quran, the Prophet of Islam had many other miracles.³ In this section we will only mention one such example that has also been referred to in the Quran. This miracle is that of the splitting of the moon. God says in the Quran:

“The hour neared and the moon split. And if they see a sign they turn away and state: ‘it is a continuous magic.’ They

¹ Quran, 4:82.

² See Genesis, 19:32-37; 1 Kings, chapter 1; Mathew, chapter 17; and John chapter 2.

³ For example see Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vols. 17 & 18.

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denied and followed their desires and all matters will be settled.”¹

According to these verses, the moon was split as a sign from God and yet still some people failed to believe in this miracle and called it an act of sorcery.

According to both Shia and Sunni traditions and hadiths (which some have claimed to be *mutawātir*), when the people of Mecca observed any miracle from the Prophet ^{peace be upon him and his family}, some would believe and others – following the path of many other nations – would claim that these miracles were acts of magic and sorcery. However the tribe of Quraysh believed that it was impossible to create sorcery in the sky so they decided to ask Muhammad to perform a miracle in the sky.

On a full-moon night, fourteen members of the tribe of Quraysh went to Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, and asked him to split the moon in half as proof of his Prophethood. The Prophet asked them if they would become believers if he did this and they all confirmed. So Muhammad asked God to split the moon and when they saw this they still refused to believe it was a miracle and stated they should wait for the people who were outside the city to come and verify this event. When the people who were outside the city returned and verified this event, some of those who had requested the miracle still refused to believe.²

¹ Quran, 54:1-3.

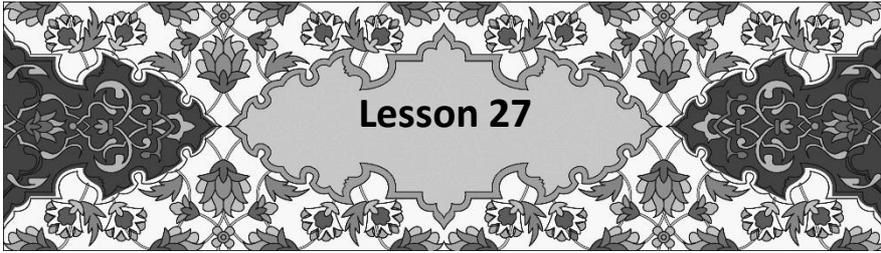
² Al-Qumī, *Al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 340; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fi Tafsīr al-qur’ān*, vol. 5, pp. 214-217; and Ibn Shahrāshūb, *al-Manāqib*, vol.1, p.122;

Questions:

- 1- How do the theological statements of the Quran show its miraculous nature?
- 2- Why is the Quran a miracle from an ethical viewpoint?
- 3- There are no contradictions in the Quran. How is this a miracle?
- 4- Name a few miracles of the Prophet.

Research:

- 1- According to some verses of the Quran, the Prophet would sometimes refuse to produce miracles. Find these verses and explain why the Prophet acted in this manner.
- 2- Name a few people who believed in Muhammad and his message after hearing the theological statements of the Quran.



The Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (3)



In the previous lessons we mentioned some of Prophet Muhammad's miracles. In the current lesson we will explore other evidence related to his Prophethood.



We explained in the previous lesson that by using evidence other than miracles one can verify the claims of a true Prophet. In this lesson we will examine the evidence surrounding the Prophet of Islam.

1- Morals and Character

About his moral and character, it suffices to say that he was known among the inhabitants of Mecca as Muhammad al-Amin (the trustworthy). He was the one that placed the Ḥajar al-aswad in its place and as we previously mentioned, he also joined the Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl agreement at the age of twenty that was created to preserve the rights of the poor and the needy. These clearly show his high social and moral character.

2- Time and Place of Revelation

Before the dawn of Islam, the inhabitants of Arabia lived in socially, morally, and culturally backwards conditions. The conditions were so severe that that era has been historically referred to as the Era of Ignorance. With the dawn of Islam, the same backwards people cast aside their old ways and created a civilization that quickly spread through the world.

The Quran mentions the transformation of the Arabians from utter ignorance into guidance in this manner:

“And mention God’s grace unto you: you were enemies but God united your hearts and you became brothers by His grace.

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And you were on the edge of a pit of hell-fire and He saved you from it.”¹

In this verse, ‘God’s grace’ is Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, who united the hearts and saved the people from hell-fire. Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} states:

“They were saved by the Messenger of God, peace be upon him and his family.”²

This is how Imam Ali describes the Arabians before the Prophethood of Muhammad to show how they were influenced by Islam:

“God, Mighty and Majestic be He, dispatched Muhammad ... while you O group of Arabs were the followers of the worst religion and the inhabitants of the worst abode. You lived among harsh rocks and the most [poisonous] snakes. You would drink dirty water and eat unpleasant food. You would shed each other’s blood and break ties with your relatives. You would erect idols and insisted on sinning.”³

When one studies the dark pages of history before the dawn of Islam, the effect of Muhammad’s teachings on the backwards people of those times and their transformation from the depths of ignorance to the peaks of guidance becomes evident.

How is it possible for someone who has lived all his life among such ignorant and violent idolaters, to suddenly bring about a religion of Oneness and oppose all forms of idolatry and polytheism? How is it

¹ Quran, 3:103.

² Al-`Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 194.

³ Al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, sermon 26, p. 68.

possible for great scientific achievements to be manifested by those ignorant people? How does a religion that calls for justice and unity of all humankind, abolishment of racism, and social equality, rise from a culture based on racism and bigotry? Aren't these all signs and evidence that Muhammad is a true Prophet?

3- Muhammad Was Unlettered

According to the Quran, the Messenger of God was unlettered:

“Say: O People! I am the Messenger of God that He has sent to you all ... so believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered¹ Prophet.”²

The same meaning can be found in another verse of the Quran:

“And you did not read books before [the Quran] and you do not write it by your hand, and if it was so then those that want to disprove [you] would have doubted (or made accusations) against you.”³

Since the Messenger of God had never learned nor attempted to read and write before he became a Messenger, no one could accuse him of reading the books of other religions and presenting them as his own. If

¹ The Arabic word translated to unlettered is *al-ummī*. This word is also used to refer to someone who is from Mecca. A short linguistic discussion on this word has been omitted from the translation – Translator.

² Quran, 7:158.

³ Quran, 29:48.

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he had been lettered before becoming a Prophet, the naysayers would have certainly made these accusations against him.

In a debate session with a Jewish scholar, Imam al-Riḍā ^{peace be upon him} uses this fact as proof of his Prophethood:

“Among the signs [of his Prophethood] is that he was a poor orphan and a hired shepherd. He had never learned a book and had not seen any teachers. Yet he brought the Quran that narrates the news and stories of past Prophets word by word. [He narrated the] stories of those that have passed and those that will come until the Day of Rising. He informed the people of his time about their secrets and what they were privately committing in their own homes and he brought many signs that cannot be enumerated.”¹

However, it should be noted that after Muhammad received revelation, God miraculously gave him the ability to communicate and read in all languages as a tool to further promote His cause.

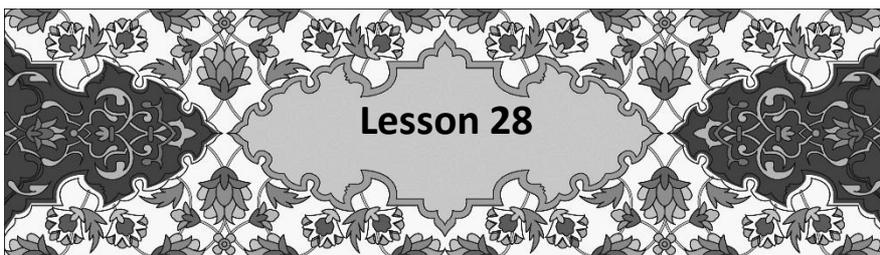
Questions:

- 1- How can one use Muhammad’s moral characteristics and social history to prove his Prophethood?
- 2- How can the time and place that Muhammad lived in be used as an argument for his Prophethood?
- 3- Why is it of importance that Muhammad was unlettered? How can this be used to prove his Prophet-hood?

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, p. 167.

Research:

- 1- Using the Quran, find the accusations that were made against Muhammad by his enemies. Why did some of these people accuse Muhammad of having lost his sanity?
- 2- Research the customs and culture of Arabia before the advent of Islam.



The Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (3)



In the previous lesson, we mentioned arguments for Muhammad's Prophethood, peace be upon him and his family. These included his miracles such as the eternal miracle of the Quran or the splitting of the moon. We also mentioned other evidence from the Prophet's life and his morals and the fact that he was unlettered before he became a Messenger. In the current lesson we will speak about the Prophecies of past Prophets about the appearance of the Prophet of Islam.



Prophecies of Past Prophets about the Appearance of Muhammad

As we previously mentioned, the only religion acceptable by God is Islam. Testifying that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the last Prophet are fundamental beliefs in Islam. Believing in Islam was also part of the teachings of past Prophets. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family states:

“God, Splendid is His Greatness, revealed to Jesus: ‘... Tell them to believe in me and My Messenger the Unlettered Prophet.’”¹

If such orders were given to the followers of previous religions, then the belief in Muhammad and his appearance must be found in the books of previous Prophets. The Quran states that Muhammad has been described in the Torah and the Gospels:

“Those that follow the Unlettered Messenger [whose description] they find written within the Torah and the Gospel.”²

According to Imam al-Bāqir ^{peace be upon him} this is how the Prophet has been described in the books of the Prophets:

“‘The name of the Prophet (Muhammad) was al-Māḥī (the Effacer) in the book of Abraham, al-Ḥād (the Opposer) in the Torah, Ahmad (the Most Praised) in the Gospel, and Muhammad in the Furqan.’ It was asked, what is meant by the Effacer? He replied: ‘He effaces the idols, false gods, omens,

¹ Al-Rāwandī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, p. 271.

² Quran, 7:157.

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and whatever is worshipped instead of the Merciful (God).’ It was asked what is meant by the Opposer? He replied: ‘He opposes those that oppose God and His religion, whether they be close to him or far.’ It was asked what is meant by the Most Praised? He replied: ‘It refers to how God, Mighty and Majestic be He, has praised his actions fairly in His Books.’ It was asked what is meant by Muhammad? He replied: ‘God, his Angels, all His Prophets and Messengers and their people praise him and send their blessings upon him.’”¹

According to another verse of the Quran, the Christian and Jewish sages clearly recognized him and knew who he was:

“Those that have been given the Book recognize him in the same manner that they recognize their own children. Yet some from among them knowingly hide the truth.”²

Throughout the ages, God’s Messengers would speak about the Prophets that would come after them. These Glad Tidings were also given about the appearance of the Prophet of Islam. According to the Quran, this is how Jesus spoke about the coming of Muhammad:

“O Israelites! I am God’s Messenger to you. I testify to what is in the Torah before me and I give glad tidings about a Messenger that will come after me whose name is Ahmad.”³

Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, speaks about prophecies about himself:

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍurhu l-faqīh*, vol. 4, pp. 177-188.

² Quran, 2:146.

³ Quran, 61:6.

“O people! By God the Prophets and Messengers of past have given glad tidings about me.”¹

Apart from the mentioned verses, there are other verses in the Quran that explain how Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, has been described in the books of past Prophets.²

Although nearly all references to Muhammad and Islam have been erased from or distorted in the Old and New Testaments by the hands of those that feared the spread of Islam, there are still some verses in these books that foresee the coming of Muhammad. We will mention a few instances here:

“This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death. He said: ‘The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran.’”³

Mount Sinai is where the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, Seir is the region where Jesus dwelled and Mount Faran is a mountain in the proximity of Mecca the city where Muhammad announced his mission.

The word Paraclete used in John 14:16 refers to the Prophet of Islam. Fakhr al-Islam (former Catholic priest Mosheh bin Jonah, d. 1910) states in his book *Anīs al-a`lām fī nuṣrat al-Islām* that he had been presented

¹ Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, p. 60.

² For example see verse 3:81, 6:20, and 26:196.

³ Deuteronomy, 33:1-2.

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with two ancient manuscripts by his teacher at the Vatican that clearly showed this meaning.¹

According to the Gospel of Barnabas, it is written above the gate of heaven that Muhammad is the Messenger of God:

“God hid himself, and the angel Michael drove them forth from paradise. Whereupon Adam, turning him round, saw written above the gate, "There is only one God, and Mohammed is messenger of God.”²

According to a tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him}, the story of Muhammad and the place of his appearance were written in Jewish books and a group of Jews had migrated to Arabia to await his appearance. About a millennium before the birth of Muhammad, Tubba` I the king of Yemen attacked Arabia and heard about Muhammad from the Jews that had resided there. He ordered the two tribes of Aus and Khazraj who were his close followers to stay with the Jews of Medina to assist Muhammad when he appeared. He also wrote a letter to Muhammad and proclaimed that he believed in him and his religion and asked that he intercede on his behalf on Judgment Day.³

The signs and prophecies about Muhammad were so clear that some scholars and followers of past religions recognized Muhammad and stated their belief in him when he was only a child and during his youth. His meeting with the Christian Monk Baḥīrā while he was only eight⁴ and

¹ See Fakhr al-Islam, *Anīs al-a`lām fī nuṣrat al-Islām*, vol. 1, pp. 8-20.

² Barnabas, trans. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas* (London: 1907), 41:33-34.

³ Al-`Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 49.

⁴ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 182 – 188.

with another Christian Monk at the age of twenty-five during his trip to the Levant,¹ are examples of such incidence and show that Jesus had given glad-tidings to his followers about the appearance of Muhammad.

Prophecies about Muhammad in early Christian and Jewish books were probably clear and not obscure because these prophecies were uttered for the purpose of guidance not bewilderment of the believers. When the Quran speaks of such prophecies, they are usually stated in an atmosphere of enmity from the opposition. If these prophecies were not real, the Jews and Christians would have quickly refuted Islam on the basis of false prophecies. According to the Quran, these individuals did not oppose Muhammad because they believed he had not fulfilled the prophecies, rather they denied him after they were provided with conclusive proof about his prophethood:

“So when what they knew came to them they rejected it.”²

“And when a Messenger came to them from Allah that verified what they possessed, some from those that have been given the Book threw God’s Book behind their backs as if they didn’t know.”³

“Those that have been given the book recognize him in the same manner that they recognize their own children. Yet some from among them knowingly hide the truth.”⁴

“And when God made a covenant with those that were given the Book that ‘you will make it clear to the people and you will

¹ Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, vol. 1, pp. 190 – 191.

² Quran, 2:89.

³ Quran, 2:101.

⁴ Quran, 2:146.

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not hide it,' but they threw it behind them and sold it for a cheap price.”¹

“O Israelites! I am God’s Messenger to you. I testify to what is in the Torah before me and I give glad tidings about a Messenger that will come after me whose name is Ahmad. And when he came with clear arguments they stated this is obvious sorcery.”²

Questions:

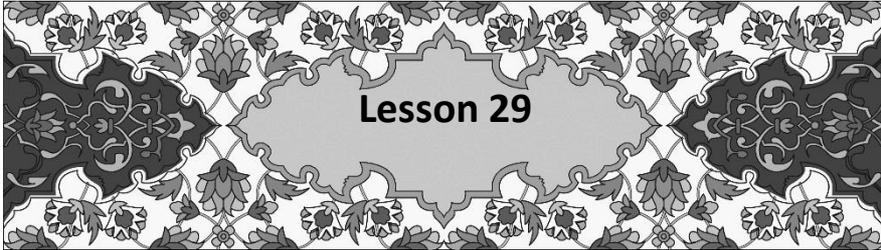
- 1- Mention two prophecies about the Prophet of Islam from the Bible.
- 2- According to Imam al-Bāqir, what was Muhammad referred to in the Holy Books of the past?
- 3- What occurred between Muhammad and Baḥīrā the monk?
- 4- Find Quranic and historical evidence that shows Jews knew that Muhammad would appear in the land of Hijaz?

Research:

- 1- What other prophecies can be mentioned about the appearance of Muhammad from the books of religions before Islam.
- 2- What is the Gospel of Barnabas and what is its current state?

¹ Quran, 3:187.

² Quran, 61:6.



The Teachings of Prophet Muhammad



In the previous lessons, we put forward arguments for the Prophethood of Muhammad. In the current lesson we will mention some of his most important teachings that have been explained and applied by him. These teachings can also be used as arguments for his Prophethood.



1- The Oneness of God and Resurrection

The Quran displays a detailed and precise picture of the world and creation. It explains that the mysteries in the creation of the earth, the heavens, day and night, creatures, plants, and human beings are all signs of the One and Only God.

The Quran takes us deep within our consciousness and reminds us about our innate knowledge of God:

“And when they travel on a ship [and are inflicted with a storm] they call out to God with pure faith; however, when he saves them and they reach land they associate others with Him.”¹

Sometimes it uses `aql and reason to argue for the Oneness of God. It mentions the signs of God in nature and within ourselves and their delicacies and intricacies:

“And in the earth are signs for those that have certitude and in your own selves; do you not see?”²

Sometimes it describes God using very simple statements:

“There is nothing like him.”³

And at other times it mentions His features in the clearest manner:

¹ Quran, 29:65.

² Quran, 51:20-21.

³ Quran, 42:11.

“He is Allah. There is no God but Him. [He is] the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Protector, the Guardian, the Invincible, the Compeller, the Mighty. He is devoid of what they associate [with Him]. He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Shaper. He has the best Names. Everything that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him and He is the Invincible and All Wise.”¹

It describes God’s unlimited Knowledge in the following manner:

“If all the trees on earth were pens and the seas along with seven other seas [were ink], the Words of your Lord would not end.”²

The Quran explains that God’s Knowledge is All-Encompassing and He is Ever-Present using unique statements:

“To God belong the East and the West and wherever you face there is the Face of God.”³

“He is with you wherever that you may be and He is well aware of your actions.”⁴

When confronted with the disbelievers it responds to their denial and awe about the resurrection in this manner:

“He said: ‘Who brings back to life the bones after they have crumbled?’ Say: ‘The One who first created them will give them life again and He is completely aware of every creation. He who has made fire for you from green tree[s] and you use it

¹ Quran, 59:22-23.

² Quran, 31:27.

³ Quran, 2:115.

⁴ Quran, 57:4.

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to kindle [fire]. Is it not possible for He who has created the heavens and the earth to create similar to them? Yes indeed, for He is the most Creative and the All-Wise. His order is such that when He wills [to create] anything He says to it: 'Be' and it becomes.”¹

The Quran informs us that there are witnesses to our actions that will testify about our deeds:

“On that day [the earth] will speak what it knows. For your Lord has inspired it to do so.”²

“On that day we shall seal their mouths and their hands will speak to us and their legs will testify about what they have committed.”³

The importance and value of the teachings of the Quran can be further understood by comparing its verses with similar topics in the Bible. A comparison between the manner these two books speak about the creation of humans, the characteristics and stories of the Prophets, and the attributes of God clearly show the differences between these two books.

¹ Quran, 36:78-82.

² Quran, 99:4-5. Verses 82:10-12 also speak about the actions of mankind being recorded – translator.

³ Quran, 36:65.

2- The Call for Justice and Speaking Against Injustice

All decent humans long for justice and oppose injustice and oppressors. This is also evident in the teachings of all Prophets. The laws of the Quran are free from injustice. God states this in the following manner:

“You will not be unjust and you will not be dealt with unjustly.”¹

The Prophet of Islam states:

“Whoever goes to an oppressor to assist him while he knows that that person is an oppressor, then he has left the religion of Islam.”²

“On the Day of Judgment a caller will call out: ‘where are the oppressors and their assisters and those like them?’ Then [all of them] even those that have sharpened the pencils of the oppressors or have prepared ink for them will be gathered in a coffin of iron and will be cast in hell.”³

Justice and fairness will not become manifest in any community unless the community is first cleansed from the unjust and oppressors. These people will always stand in the way of justice for their own personal gain. For this reason, the Prophet of Islam stood up against the oppressors and tyrants of his time and by defeating them succeeded in implementing a just and fair society. No group can strive for justice in a community but by first removing the source and root of injustice.

¹ Quran, 2:279.

² Al-`Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, vol. 17, p. 182.

³ Al-Daylamī, *Irshād al-qulūb*, vol. 1, p. 186.

3- Morals and Ethics

Humans have both a material and spiritual dimension. Both of these dimensions must be cared for and neglecting either will impede our journey to the hereafter. Any school of thought that only pays attention to one of these dimensions while ignoring the other, will have gained nothing but forcing one to bear the weight of the other.

The moral system as described in Shia Islam, is a coherent system of laws introduced to us by exemplars that will forever influence humankind. These exalted teachings that work in harmony with each other are easily grasped and understood by people with different thoughts and beliefs and are applicable in our everyday lives.

4- Cultural and Scientific Development

Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, proclaimed his mission in a land empty of acceptable cultural norms and the means for education. There were no notable learned men or scholars in the community and no teaching institutes of any kind. However, the Quran's first message to Muhammad was a message that spoke about the ability to read and write:

“[O Muhammad] read in the name of your Lord that has created. He has created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is the Most Generous. The One who taught using the pen.”¹

¹ Quran, 96:1-4.

Knowledge is considered with such high regard in Islam that even the blood of a martyr cannot be compared with the ink used to pen down knowledge. According to Imam al-Şādiq ^{peace be upon him}:

“On Judgment Day God will gather all the people on a flat land and the scales of justice will be set up. Then the blood of the martyrs will be weighed against the scholars’ ink and the scales will tip in favor of the scholars’ ink.”¹

Due to Muhammad’s teachings, the ignorant society that existed before Islam in Arabia, within the span of a few decades, transformed into a civilization that became an exemplar among the civilizations of those times and students dispatched from all corners of the world to partake from its scientific offerings.

It should be noted that scientific activity in Islam is not based on learning and blind imitation rather it is expected from the student to practice freedom of thought, ponder, and fairly criticize where the situation arises.

5- Establishing a Civilization and Building a Community

Islam not only strives to teach its tenets but also aims to apply its divine laws. This is evident in the life and actions of the Prophet who applied his teachings in the community. The statements of the Prophet of Islam concerning theological and religious topics are so exalted that no one would think they have been uttered by someone who had spent most of his life among an ignorant and backwards people and a good

¹ Al-Şadūq, *Man la yahdurhu l-faqīh*, vol. 4, P. 399.

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part of his time was occupied with defending his followers from the wars created by these people.

The Prophet Islam, using the aforementioned method, gradually built a group of followers within Mecca. He then migrated with them to Medina which allowed him to spread his message among a larger audience. From there, Islam spread throughout the lands and slowly turned into a new nation that challenged the empires of its time.¹ Muhammad's methods are a perfect example of fulfilling the spiritual and material needs of a community in the most balanced manner.

Questions:

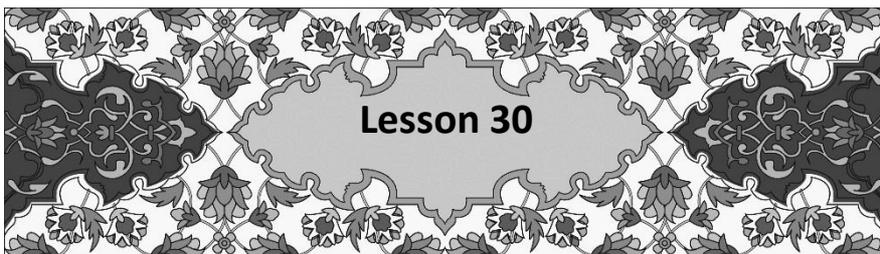
- 1- How do Muhammad's teachings advocate striving for justice and opposing oppression and tyranny?
- 2- What are some of the most important moral teachings of the Prophet of Islam?
- 3- What witnesses do we have that show the role of Islam in developing culture and science?
- 4- How and by the use of which methods does Islam help to improve communities?

Research:

- 1- What role did the Prophet of Islam play in developing the scientific and spiritual growth of humanity?

¹ After the death of the Prophet, the nation that he created, was misused by those that unlawfully claimed were his successors and was turned into an empire – translator.

- 2- Refer to books written on Islam by non-Muslims and see what they consider as important and influential teachings of the Prophet of Islam.



The Finality of Prophethood (*khātamiyya*)



In the previous lessons we explained the most important topics related to Prophethood. We defined Prophethood and Messengership and spoke about the traits and characteristics of a true Prophet. We also put forward arguments and provided proof for the Prophethood of Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family. In the current lesson we will speak about the principle of *khātamiyya* that states Muhammad is the final Prophet and no Prophets or Messengers will come after him.



1- *Khātamiyya* is an Indispensable Principle of Islam

According to many verses and traditions that can be found in all sects of Islam, *khātamiyya* or the finality of the Prophet of Islam is an ‘Indispensable Principle’¹ in Islam and denying this principle would mean a Muslim no longer believes in Islam. According to this principle, all Muslims believe that after the Prophet of Islam no more Messengers or Prophets will be sent by God and the Quran is the last of the Holy books.

2- Finality in the Quran

The most explicit² verse of the Quran that speaks about the finality of Muhammad is verse 33 of the fortieth Surah:

“Muhammad is not the father of any man among you; rather he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*).”³

The Arabic word used in the verse to refer to finality is *Khātam* which is derived from the root KH-T-M. The literal definition of Khatm is to end something. The word *Khātam* is used to refer to anything that is a means

¹ ‘Indispensable Principles’ are principles and beliefs in Islam that are so obvious that a Muslim must have faith in and cannot deny them. These are usually referred to in Arabic as *ḍurūriyyat al-dīn* or *ḍurūriyyat al-madhhab*.

² Eight more verses can also be used to show this meaning: 41:42, 6:20, 6:115, 34:28, 7:158, 68:52, and 21:107.

³ Quran, 33:40.

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of putting an end to something.¹ Thus the *khātam al-nabiyyīn* is someone who ends Prophethood and the chain of Prophets is sealed by him.

Sects and cults that have appeared after Islam, dispute Muhammad being the seal of the Prophets because their own founders have made claims about being Prophets.

They usually use two arguments to support their claims:

- 1- The verse only states that Muhammad is the seal of the Prophets not the seal of the Messengers. Thus Messengers with new religions can appear after Muhammad.

This argument is not correct because as we stated in the previous lessons all Messengers are also Prophets and when the station of Prophethood comes to an end so those the station of Messengership.

- 2- The word *khātam* has a second meaning in Arabic which is 'ring'. Thus the verse is simply stating that Muhammad is a ring or ornament among the Prophets not their seal.

It is correct that *khātam* also means ring in Arabic but it does not refer to ornament. The reason that a ring is referred to as *khātam* in Arabic is due to the fact that the stamp used for sealing letters using wax was usually engraved on a ring. So even if the word *khātam* refers to rings it is because the rings were used for stamping wax seals. This further confirms that Muhammad is the seal of the Prophets and not an ornament among them. Words derived from the root KH-T-M have been used in eight places in the Quran and all of these either refer to sealing or ending. For example:

¹ Ahmad b. Fāris, *Mu`jam maghaīs al-lugha*, vol. 2, p. 245.

“Today we will seal (*nakhtim*) their mouths and their hands will speak to us.”¹

“God has sealed their hearts and ears and there is a covering on their eyes.”²

2- Finality in the Hadith and Narrations

In the scripture of Sunni Islam one can find many references to the Finality of the Prophet of Islam.³ According to Ibn Kathīr the number of narrations that speak about the topic of finality are so numerous⁴ that the Principle is considered *mutawātir*.⁵ The same trend can also be seen in Shia scripture. For example when the Prophet was setting out to the Battle of Tabūk he left Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} behind in Medina to take his place. Imam Ali expressed sorrow that he could not participate in the battle. The Prophet comforted him by saying:

“Are you not satisfied that your station compared to mine is like that of Aaron compared to Moses except that there is no Prophet after me?”⁶

This hadith is known as the Hadith of Manzila (Station). It has been narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq ^{peace be upon him} that:

¹ Quran, 36:65.

² Quran, 2:7.

³ See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 6, pp. 381 – 384 and Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 5, p. 20.

⁴ See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 6, p. 381.

⁵ A *mutawātir* hadith or topic is one that has been narrated either in wording or meaning by many different people.

⁶ Al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, vol. 1, p. 15 and al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, vol. 1, p. 322; vol. 2, p. 487.

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“God, Mighty is His Remembrance, sealed the Prophets through your Prophet and there will never be any Prophets after him. He sealed all [Holy] Books by your Book [meaning the Quran] and there will never be any books after it.”¹

4- The Wisdom Behind Finality

The finality of the Prophet of Islam is due to two important principles:

- a- The religion of Islam is universal.
- b- Islam is the eternal religion of God.

4-1- The Religion of Islam is Universal

Islam is not confined to a specific group of people, nation, or geographic location. It is all-inclusive and is practiced by nearly every nation, ethnicity, and tribe from the four corners of the world. The all-inclusiveness of Islam can be understood from the Quran where this meaning is implicitly or explicitly expressed.

Many verses of the Quran refer to their audience using statements like “O people”² or “O children of Adam.”³ It also preaches to the followers of other religions and refers to them as “the people of the Book.” This shows that the followers of other religions are also the audience of the Quran. The Quran also states it is a warner to whoever it reaches.⁴ If the Quran was intended for only a specific group of people or followers of a specific religion, it would not start its verses in this manner.

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 10.

² For example see Quran, 2:21; 4:1; and 31:15.

³ For example see Quran, 7:26, 27, 31, 35 and 36:60.

⁴ Quran, 6:19.

On the other hand, the Quran states that it will prevail over all religions.¹ This can only be achieved if the followers of all other religions are also an intended audience of the Quran.

The Quran also states that its guidance is for the people² and the worlds.³ In other verses it mentions that Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family, is a Messenger to all the people and the worlds:

“Blessed is He who revealed the Furqān unto His servant so that he can be a warner to the worlds.”⁴

According to this verse, the Prophet is a warner to the inhabitants of all the worlds, wherever or at what time they may live. Thus the Quran is the eternal Book of God and Islam is the everlasting religion that have both been revealed to us by God through Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family.

Furthermore, the Prophet of Islam sent many letters to the kings and rulers of his time and invited them to accept the religion of Islam. His letters to the Caesar of Rome, King of Persia, rulers of Egypt, Ethiopia, the Levant, and tribal leaders all show that Islam is an all-encompassing religion intended for all people and races.

4-2- The Religion of Islam is Eternal

Islam claims to be eternal and the source of guidance until the Day of Judgment. This eternal guidance comes from two eternal sources:

¹ Quran, 9:33 & 61:9.

² For example see Quran, 2:185,187; 3:138; 14:1,52; 39:41; 16:44; 18:54; and 59:21.

³ For example see Quran, 6:90; 12:104; 81:27; and 68:52.

⁴ Quran, 25:1. Also see 3:79; 22:49; 34:28; and 21:107;

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a- The Holy Quran: Unlike the Divine Books of the past, the Quran is eternal and will not be superseded by any Book. The Quran states itself:

“Verily it is an invincible book. No falsehood can approach it from in front or behind it. It has been revealed by an All-Wise and Praiseworthy [God].”¹

This verse shows that the Quran cannot be nullified nor overtaken by any other Book. Similar meanings can be found in the hadith. When Zurara asked Imam al-Sadiq ^{peace be upon him} about halal (permissible) and haram (forbidden) he had replied:

“What Muhammad has made permissible are permissible forever until the Day of Rising and what he has forbidden will remain forbidden forever until the Day of Rising. There will be nothing but this and no other thing will come but this.”²

b- The Station of Imamate: Although Prophethood and Messengership have come to an end but Islam is alive and thrives due to the station of Imamate. This station fulfills the goals that all Prophets had endeavored to reach in every age. Reading the Divine verses, awakening the remembrance of God, informing people about Gods orders and laws, completing God’s proof, warning and giving glad tidings, making the truth manifest and resolving differences, transforming the animalistic nature of men into the most humane character, and establishing peace and justice are just a few of these goals.

After the Prophet of Islam passed away, these goals were pursued by the immaculate Imams. Imamate in the Shia belief is the continuation of

¹ Quran, 41:41-42.

² Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 58.

Muhammad's mission with the intention of fulfilling all his goals. The Imams possess all the stations of the Prophet except that they do not receive revelations about a new belief system which is a function reserved solely for the Prophet.

The Hadith of Manzila that we mentioned in the previous section confirms this meaning. According to this hadith the only difference between the Prophet and Imam Ali is the fact that Imam Ali is not a Prophet. This means that religion in its entirety has been revealed to Muhammad and no new laws will be revealed to the Imams in this regard and the laws of Islam will remain unchanged until Judgment Day.¹ Until then the main duty of the Imams will be to explain and establish the laws of Islam as brought by Muhammad, peace be upon him and his family.

Although the revelation of new laws ceased after the Prophet, the Imams do receive other forms of revelations. God states in the Quran about the Night of Qadr:

“The Angels and the Spirit descend by the permission of their Lord for every affair/matter.”²

This event has been occurring every year on the Night of Qadr ever since the time of the Prophet and will continue until Judgment Day. The angels would descend unto the Prophet and after he passed away unto his righteous successors. Imam Ali ^{peace be upon him} states:

“The Night of Qadr occurs every year. On that night the affairs/matters of that year are revealed. For this event there

¹ See al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 2, pp. 20-21

² Quran, 97:4.

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are guardians after the Prophet: I and eleven Imams from my descendants that converse with the angels.”¹

According to this hadith and many others, the Imams converse with the angels and the connection between the Creator and the created continues in this manner after the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family. This connection guarantees that Islam will remain valid forever.

Questions:

- 1- What are indispensable principles in Islam and why is the belief in finality an indispensable principle?
- 2- Prove the finality of Prophethood using the Quran and hadith.
- 3- Using the Quran show that Islam is all-encompassing.
- 4- Explain in the detail the preconditions needed for a religion to be eternal and show that Islam has these preconditions.
- 5- How is humanity guided after the Prophet of Islam if he is the last Messenger from God and there will be no Messengers and Prophets after him?

Research:

- 1- Research the different groups and sects that have argued against the Finality of Islam. What were/are the motivations for these oppositions?
- 2- How does Islam address new issues and novel problems that arise in the modern world?

¹ Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 247.