



Fifty Lectures On The Principles Of Faith For Youth

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Preface

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

The precious legacy left behind by the Holy Prophet's Household [ahl al-bayt] (may peace be upon them all) and their followers' preservation of this legacy from the menace of extinction is a perfect example of the all-encompassing school [madrasah] that embraces all the different branches of Islamic knowledge.

This school has been able to train many talented personalities by quenching them with this gushing fountain. This school has given scholars to the Muslim ummah who, by following the Holy Prophet's Household (a.s), have done their best in order to clear away the doubts and skepticisms put forth by any various creeds and intellectual currents both inside and outside Muslim society. Throughout past centuries, they have presented the firmest answers and solutions to these doubts.

Anchored to the responsibilities upon its shoulders, the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) World Assembly has embarked on defending the sanctity of risalah [message] and its authentic beliefs - truths which have always been opposed by the chiefs and leaders of anti-Islamic sects, religions and trends.

In this sacred path, the Assembly regards itself as a follower of the upright pupils of the School of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) - those who have always been ready to refute those accusations and calumnies and have tried to be always in the frontline of this struggle on the basis of the expedencies of time and space.

The experiences in this field, which contained the books of scholars belonging to the School of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s), are unique in their own right. It is because these experiences have been based upon knowledge [ilm] and the preeminence of intellect and reasoning,

and at the same time, they are devoid of blind prejudices or whims and caprices. These experiences address experts, scholars and thinkers in a manner that appeals to healthy minds and pure human natural disposition [fitrah].

In a bid to assist those who are in quest of truth, the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) World Assembly has endeavored to enter a new phase of these worthy experiences by conducting research and translating the works of contemporary Shi'ah writers or those who, through divine guidance, have embraced this noble school.

The Assembly is also engaged in the study and publication of the valuable works of pious predecessors and outstanding Shi'ah personalities so that those who search for the truth may quench their thirst from this palatable fountain which the School of the Prophet's Household (a.s) offers to the entire world.

It is hoped that the dear readers will not deprive the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) World Assembly of their valuable opinions, suggestions, and constructive criticisms in this arena.

We also invite scholars, translators and other institutions to assist us in propagating pure Muhammadan (s) Islam.

We ask God, the Exalted, to accept this humble effort and enhance it further under the auspices of His vicegerent on earth and give us success with al-Mahdi (may Allah, the Exalted, expedite his glorious advent).

It is appropriate here to express our utmost gratitude to ayatullah Makarim Shirazi for writing the book and to Dr. Mahmoud Farrokhpey for translating this work. We should also like to thank colleagues who took part in accomplishing this task especially the staff of the Translation Office for fulfilling their responsibility.

Cultural Affairs Department

The Ahl al-Bayt (a.s) World Assembly

Prelude

The most salient feature of our Islamic revolution is its Islamic nature and the most prominent characteristic of Islam is its personality building aspect based on Divine standards.

Our aim is to prepare an interesting, logic-based and rigorous collection of papers for the general public on the one hand, and for the youth in particular so that they could, under existing Islamic conditions, build a sturdy faith which could in the long run influence their behavior and also be used as an impetus for further studies.

This collection which has been prepared with special precision and initiatives could pave the way for those who need to acquire the Islamic principles on faith for both their personal interests or for instruction.

This collection has been written and prepared by Ayatollah Nasir Makarim Shirazi, a profound pioneer and initiator of religious discussions in the Qom Seminary for the last forty years.

The instructors who wish to teach these lectures to their students should make note of the following points:

1. These lessons should be accompanied with historic evidence and interesting observations based on current affairs.

2. The students' preferences and previous knowledge should be considered in teaching these lessons. A question and answer approach should be used during instruction.

3. The relevant Qur'anic verses on which the lecture is based should be elegantly written on the board and the students should be presented with a literal translation of the verse under consideration. This will lay the foundation for their familiarity with the Holy Qur'an. It is recommended that the relevant verse be recited by one and repeated by the students in unison.

4. If it is not necessary to cover one lecture in one sitting: it could be covered within two sessions.

5. There are subtle and detailed points hidden in each lecture. The lecturer is well advised to study the lecture beforehand in order to bring up those points during the presentation.

6. These lectures are prepared for the students of junior-high school and high school, for both boys and girls, and for the general public who wish to improve their knowledge of the principles of the Islamic faith.

7. Giving prizes to those who successfully pass the exams based on these lectures is highly recommended.

8. Students who are exposed to these lectures might have some theological questions in mind. The following sources could be used as references in order to arrive at appropriate answers: "The Creator of the Universe," "In search of Allah," and "Religious Questions and Answers."

The Hadaf Publication House welcomes any suggestions for the improvement of these lectures.

**The Head of Hadaf Publication House,
Qum, 1991**

[Ten Lectures on God and His Attributes]

First Lecture: Searching for God

Why Do We Think And Study In Order To Know The Creator Of The Universe?

1. The love to be informed about and know the world is deep inside every one of us

We are interested in knowing whether this lofty Heaven with its shining stars and this wide earth with its wonderful sceneries and colorful creatures, its beautiful and varied birds, its seas, mountains, flowers and blossoms, and its tall trees have come into being spontaneously or have been created by a skillful, mighty and dexterous Creator.

In addition to these questions, all of us are confronted with the following questions:

Where have we come from? Where are we now? And where are we going?

How lucky would we be if only we knew the answers to these three basic questions?

Our inquisitive souls advise us not to sit idle; rather, we should endeavor to find proper solutions to the above questions.

In a car accident, an injured and unconscious victim would be taken to the hospital to get proper treatment. However, as soon as he regained consciousness, he would ask his caregivers why he was taken there, what place it was, and when he would leave. This vividly indicates that man could never be indifferent towards the above questions.

Thus, the first thing which will lead us towards the recognition of the God of The Universe and our existence is our inquisitive soul which always wants to know.

2. A Sense of Gratitude

Suppose you were taken to an elegant party by your elder brother and suppose you had never met your host. No doubt, your first desire upon your arrival at such a place would be to identify the host and to show him your appreciation and thank him for his kindness for having invited you.

When we look at the expansive table of sustenance spread for us we are anxious to recognize the distributor of these items of subsistence and to thank Him even if He was not in need of our gratitude. We are restless until this appreciation is extended on our part. And this restlessness on our part is an indication of our desire to recognize Allah.

3. The connection of our benefit and loss to this question

Suppose on your trip you arrived at a junction where there was turmoil. Everybody would advise you not to get out of your car at that place due to the dangers looming there. However, one group might advise you to drive east and another group to drive west. Still another might advise you to take an intermediate course which is said to be the safest way towards your prosperity, welfare, and convenience.

But could we allow ourselves to take up a course without much deliberation? Or could we stay at that hazardous location without selecting a right course of action. Definitely not.

Rather, without hesitation, our wisdom would guide us to study the situation and to consider the statements and advice offered by each group and adopt the best course of action.

During our lives in this world, we are confronted with the same dilemma. Each religion and school tries to attract us. However, since our destiny, prosperity misery and our progress or lack of it, depend on the way we choose for our action, we will find it significant to deliberate seriously and to identify the most appropriate solution to our problems and to keep ourselves safe from danger.

This is another reason why we try to identify the Creator of this world. The Holy Qur'an says:

فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ

Therefore, give good news to My servants, those who listen to the word, then follow the best of it. [Qur'an 39: 17-18]

THINK AND ANSWER

Have you ever seriously tried to know more than what you have heard about knowing God from your parents?

Can you tell the difference between knowing God and searching for Him?

Have you ever felt a spiritual delight deep inside you when you have discovered a need for God or uncovered some mystery concerning Him?

Second Lecture: The Consequences of Knowing God in our Lives

1. Theism and the Advancement of Knowledge

Suppose your friend brought you a book as a present and told you that it was written by an all-knowing and ingenious author...

You would never study such a book indifferently or perfunctorily. Rather, you would contemplate on every single sentence and on every word. If you could not understand the meaning of any sentence at first glance, you would study it once again to have a better comprehension of it. This is because you were told the writer was not a usual one; on the contrary, you were told that he had special talents.

But suppose you had been told that the book was not written by an expert, but rather by a mediocre writer whose judgments were not to be trusted.

Under such conditions you would not take the book seriously and you would attribute any incomprehensibility in the text to the ignorance of the writer.

The world of existence resembles a huge book in which every word stands for a creature. From the viewpoint of every believer, every particle of this universe is worth our serious attention. A believer in God tries, under the light of theism, to delve into the mysteries of existence with utmost curiosity (and this curiosity has led man to improve his knowledge) since he is aware that The Creator of the Universe is The Almighty God who is The Great Knower.

Such a pious man would easily realize that even the minutest part of The Creator's work has been designed on the basis of a special wisdom. For this reason, such a person would study the universe more deeply in the hope of comprehending more of the mysteries of this world.

A materialist on the contrary, would not feel the need for profound study of the mysteries of the world since he would attribute the whole of existence to unintelligent nature. However, there are some materialistic scientists who are convinced that a god exists but name this creator nature. This is because in their view nature is extremely well-organized.

In sum, theism is a means for the enhancement of the sciences and human knowledge.

2. Theism, Endeavors and Hopes

When man is confronted with worldly complexities and he feels desperate and alone, belief in God comes to his rescue and enables him to face his problems.

Those who believe in God do not envisage themselves as alone; neither do they feel helpless. This is because God's Power and Might is beyond all obstacles and no hurdle exists for Him.

True believers with their trust in Allah's Benevolence, struggle against difficulties with all their strength and do so while they are hopeful of God's Magnificence that He will remove all obstacles.

It is a fact that belief in God is a fortified place for man; good faith is a means for man's endurance and stamina; faith in God steadily kindles the light of hope in the hearts of genuine believers.

For this very reason, righteous believers never try to commit suicide. This is because the feeling to commit suicide is a characteristic of quitters, losers and desperate people. The true believer neither becomes hopeless or disappointed, nor does he feel failure or boredom.

3. Theism and the Sense of Responsibility

We know some physicians who provide poor, wretched sick persons with money to fill prescriptions without even asking them for the medical fees. They would even stay at a poor person's dilapidated house if they feel that the person was in danger. Such physicians are truly pious.

On the other hand, there are some physicians who would not do anything for the poor and sick without first receiving the necessary fees. Such physicians suffer from a lack of faith.

A truly religious individual should always feel a sense of responsibility; he is generous and beneficent. He senses an internal policeman within himself at all times who watches his deeds continuously.

Faithless people however are self-centered, despotic and dangerous. They do not assume any responsibility. It is easy for them to hurt others and abstain from doing good deeds.

4. Theism and Peace of Mind

Psychologists and psychoanalysts inform us that mental diseases are more prevalent in our time than at any other time in the past. They add that one of the factors behind such mental problems is anxiety and worry over future events. Worries over death, wars, poverty and failure are also disturbing in our time.

These scientists add that one of the factors that alleviate worries is faith. This is because one's conviction and faith deter one from anxiety.

The Benevolent, Generous God, Who is familiar with every action performed by His servants, will help them if they ask Him for assistance. Then the servants will feel peace of mind for they know that God looks after them.

That is why genuine religious people feel tranquil at all times. They are not worried and anxious because they serve God in their deeds. If they lose something in the process, they know they could ask God for compensation. They are delighted even on the war front. The Holy Qur'an says in this regard:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ

Those who believe and do not mix up their faith with iniquity, those are they who shall have security. [Qur'an 6:82]

THINK AND ANSWER

Do you know of any historical event which could vividly indicate some features of true faith mentioned above?

Do you know of some people who claim to believe in God but exhibit unethical behavior and display the four characteristics above?

Third Lecture: Theism from two Secure Paths

Since antiquity, books about theism have been published and debates have been conducted constantly among experts.

Each scholar has adopted his own special technique and approach to the problem. However, there are two approaches which could safely guide us towards the Great Creator:

1. The way from within (which is the shortest way);
2. The way from without (which is the most enlightened way).

Through the first approach, we will come in contact with our consciences and listen to the call of monotheism from our inner selves.

Through the second approach, we will search in the wide world of creation and observe every sign of God on the forehead of every creature and any particle. Each one of these two approaches calls for a lengthy discussion. However, we will try to briefly discuss each approach.

The Approach from Within

Let us ponder over the following points:

Scientists inform us that anyone who thinks, from whatever race or class, if he himself examines without any special instruments, even to the extent of not hearing about the debate between the believers and the materialists, he would realize that there is a great power supervising the universe which is beyond the material world.

In the bottom of his heart, such a person will feel a delicate call inviting him towards an awesome source of knowledge and power that we call God. This is the call of our pure and flawless conscience.

A person might get distracted by the flashy, material aspects of life and might not hear this call. His involvement in worldly things might hinder him from listening to his own conscience. However, if this person were confronted with natural calamities such as earthquakes and floods, or a wrecked airplane in a hazardous climate, his inner feelings would overwhelm him and would drive him towards the Almighty God whose power lies beyond all other powers.

There are only a very few people in this world who would not resort to such a power at the time of disaster and misery. Of course, this innate feeling is always within us but it is amplified during calamities.

History has repeatedly shown us that those powerful statesmen who would normally abstain from calling God's name have resorted to God when they felt the very pillars of their power and strength shaky and vulnerable.

Islamic history gives the account of Pharaoh, that when he found himself in the middle of the billowing waves crashing down upon him and realized that the very water which was the basis of the prosperity of his land and of his people was ordered to destroy him, he shouted out in his time of misery, confessing, "Now I admit that there is no God except for the God of Moses." This cry emanated from his very conscience. Pharaoh and other people hear this call of conscience in the time of misery.

If you look within yourself and search your heart, you will acknowledge the presence of a light deep inside your heart which constantly leads you towards God. You might have repeatedly been faced with delicate problems

the solution to which might have been beyond your power. Under such hard conditions you might definitely have resorted to the Supreme Power.

Under such circumstances, a hope mingled with love for that power encompasses your turbulent soul and puts aside the gloomy rays of despair.

However, there remains this touchy question: Is it not possible that we resort to God only because we have been conditioned by environmental factors and parental influence, and that the inner conscience is not the crucial factor?

One is justified to make such an assumption. However, we will present you with a solution in the following lecture. For the time being, let us hear what the Holy Qur'an says regarding this issue:

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلِّ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

So when they ride in the ships they call upon Allah, being sincerely obedient to Him, but when He brings them safe to the land, lo! They associate others with Him. [Qur'an, 29:65]

THINK AND ANSWER

Try to memorize the number of the above verse and its meaning so that you might get acquainted with the language of the Holy Qur'an.

Have you ever found yourself in a hopeless situation in which you last resort had been God's Grace?

Why have we called this approach the shortest way?

Fourth Lecture: The Answer to an Important Question

The Question

In the previous lecture, we discovered that we always hear the call of monotheism and theism from the bottom of our hearts, and that this is more strident at the time of danger. Under such conditions, we inevitably remember God and resort to His infinite Benevolence.

At this juncture, we might assume that this call which we have named the call of conscience is nothing more than the result of the indoctrinations to which we have been constantly exposed through our close interactions with the environment, school, and parents or through habit.

The Answer

A few things need to be said prior to answering this question. Habits and customs vary constantly among nations and are always at the mercy of change. We could never come across a habit or custom which has been unchanging and constant throughout the history of a nation. That is why customs and mores are idiosyncratic features of a specific nation during a particular era.

Thus, if we find a common feature in the customs among different nations and peoples we could safely deduce that this is an innate disposition built in the very soul of man.

For instance, a mother's affection towards her child could not be the result of indoctrination or habit formation. This is because it has never been the case among any culture for a mother to deprive her child of her love and care.

Of course, due to mental illness, a mother could destroy herself or a father could have buried his daughter alive during the period of Arab Ignorance. But such examples are rare in the history of mankind.

This introduction now sets the stage for a look at the issue of God-worship among people both in the past and in the present. Since this discussion is a little hard to follow, more attention is required on the part of the reader.

According to great sociologists, religion and faith have always existed. Throughout history, man has always had some form of religion. This is a clear indication for the innate nature of God-worship in the depths of the human mind and soul. This has not occurred through indoctrination or instruction. If it were a result of imitation or habit formation, God-worship would not have been so enduring and ever-lasting in the conscience of man.

There are even clues to the fact that man has had a form of religion even during pre-historic times. [By the pre-historic era, we refer to the time when writing was not invented and man could not transfer much of his culture to future generations.

Since primitive man could not visualize God as a super-natural Being, he would search for God in natural objects and would make idols from them to satisfy his innate need for God. With the rapid development of his mental capacities, man could gradually identify the truth and could dispense with his idols which were material beings and become familiar with the great power of The Almighty God.

2. Some famous psychologists contend that the human spirit has four dimensions or four main senses:

a) The sense of knowing which causes man to acquire types of knowledge to satisfy his curiosity. This knowledge may or may not be materially useful.

b) The sense of doing good, which is the main source for ethical and human issues.

c) The aesthetic sense, which is the source for the creation of poetry, literature and art in their true sense.

d) The religious sense, which invites man to recognize God and to carry out His commands. Thus, you can see that the religious sense is one of the most profound senses of the human soul. This sense never leaves man alone.

3. In our future discussions, we will find that most materially-oriented scholars and atheists have somehow implicitly confessed to the existence of God despite the fact that they have avoided calling Him so by name. They have preferred to use the concept of nature for His real name. However, all the features they have designated for nature coincide with those of God.

For instance, these scholars maintain that the reason why nature has provided man with two kidneys is that in the event of the failure of one kidney man could continue his existence with the other one. But is this giving in harmony with life-less nature? Or does it imply a God whose Knowledge and Power is beyond imagination no matter under what name He is referred to?

From our discussion in this chapter, we have arrived at the following conclusions:

The love for God has always and will always be in ourselves.

Belief in God is an eternal flame which will keep our hearts and minds warm forever.

In order to recognize God we do not have to go a long way. If we delve into the depths of our very being, we will find there the love for God.

The Holy Qur'an says:

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

And We are nearer to him than his life-vein. [Qur'an, 50:16]

Fifth Lecture: A True Story

We have already mentioned the fact that those who deny the existence of God do so only superficially: there is faith in God deep in their very souls and consciences.

No doubt, worldly success could create false pride in shallow, superficial individuals and this pride then leads to negligence to the extent that at times man ignores his true innate nature. However, when he is faced with terrible events he puts aside his false pride and his natural monotheism and God-knowing nature comes over him.

Human history reveals to us many such examples of people one of whom is presented below:

There once lived a powerful and despotic minister who had everything under his scrutiny and control. Once he attended a great gathering of religious scholars. Addressing them, he asked them rudely, "How much longer will you claim that there is a God? I can prove the opposite of your claim in a thousand ways."

He put forth his proposal with a special pride. Since those scholars knew well that he was not a man of logic and that he was under the complete influence of his own power, they remained silent and ignored him in a humiliating way.

Not long after this event, the minister was accused of some wrongdoing and was arrested and sent to jail.

One of the religious scholars who was present at the session on that day thought it was the right time to pay a visit to the imprisoned minister. He thought that since he was no longer in power, and he was no longer arrogant, and he could offer him some advice. The scholar saw the former minister involved in great contemplation, reciting the following two lines of poetry:

All of us are like the pictures of lions which are drawn on flags. When the wind blows the lion on the flags moves here and there with the wind and seems to be attacking its enemies but in fact, it is not the lion which moves; rather, it is the wind which makes the movement. He was confessing that he himself was nothing in contrast with the power of the Almighty God who could take away any power He has bestowed upon us at any moment He deems appropriate.

The scholar observed that the former minister had turned into a religious, God-Fearing individual. Greeting him, the scholar asked him: Do you remember you said you had one thousand reasons not to believe in God. I have come to nullify those thousand reasons through one reason: God is the one who took away your power from you. The former minister became ashamed and did not say a word since he had realized his errors.

Concerning Pharaoh, The Holy Qur'an says:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَذْرَكَهُ الْعَرَقُ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذِي آمَنْتُ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ

Until when drowning overtook him, he (pharaoh) said: I believe there is no God but He in Whom the children of Israel believed. [Qur'an 10: 90]

THINK AND ANSWER

Give the ethical lesson you learnt from this story.

Why were the children of Israel called by that name?

Who was pharaoh, where did he live and what was his claim?

Sixth Lecture: The Second Way to Know God

A Way from Without

A cursory look at the world will lead us to acknowledge this fact that chaos does not reign over it; rather, every phenomenon is in motion on a specific trajectory and the system of the universe, based on special order is moving towards a definite destination, like a great army.

The following points will clarify our intention:

For the creation and existence of any organism there should be some special conditions. For instance for a tree to come into existence, the proper soil, temperature and heat are crucial. If anything goes wrong, there will be no tree. The creation of these conditions calls for wisdom and knowledge.

Each creature has its specific features. Water and fire have their unique traits which are part and parcel of their very being. These features and traits follow specific laws.

All the organs of an organism work harmoniously with one another. Take the human body as an example. All the members, limbs and organs coordinate with each other in a human body. If anything threatens our bodies, all the organs unite in defending our bodies. This coordination is another sign of the order in the universe.

A glance at the world of creation will vividly show us that all creatures work in harmony with one another. For instance, for the growth of living things, the sun shines, the clouds release rain, the wind blows, and the soil cooperates. All these show the existence of a definite organization in the existing world.

The Relation of Order and Wisdom

Every conscientious person would realize that order in any organization implies wisdom, thought, and planning.

This is because man looks for a source of knowledge and power wherever he notices that order and law prevails. Man does not need any reasoning to arrive at this conclusion.

Man knows that a blind or illiterate man cannot use a typewriter to write a good composition or prepare a critical essay. Neither can a two-year old child create a masterpiece just by randomly moving his pen on the paper. Rather, we would deduce the intelligence of the Creator when we come face to face with a critical essay or a good composition. At a museum, we would appreciate the talent of the creator of a masterpiece even if we did not have the chance to see the artist in person.

Thus, wherever there is an organized system, there exists intelligence and wisdom behind it.

In order to infer the existence of the intelligence as the source for any organized system, man at times uses the laws of probability and reasons in the following fashion: It will take millions of years for an illiterate man to press the right buttons on the type-writer so that he may randomly type out an essay or a piece of poetry (For more details, refer to the book entitled “The Creator of the World” or to the book entitled “In Search of God”)

The Holy Qur’an states:

سُرِّيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنََّّهُ الْحَقُّ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

We will soon show them Our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth. It is not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things? [Qur'an 41: 53]

THINK AND ANSWER

Provide some examples of industrial machinery which lead you to assume the existence of a learned and intelligent creator.

What is the difference between the macrocosm and the microcosm [the horizons and one's own soul]? Give some instances of God's signs in the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Seventh Lecture: Some Examples of the Order of Creation

Order, purpose and planning are vividly observable in all of creation. Here are some striking examples

Luckily, the doors of knowing God are open to us today due to the great advances in the physical sciences, the uncovering of the mysteries of the world, the vast knowledge of man's anatomy and the structure of the bodies of animals and plants and our vast knowledge about the stars and galaxies.

Now we could claim that all the books and resources dealing with the physical sciences are books on monotheism and on knowing God. These sources teach us the magnanimity of God. This is due to the fact that these books reveal the very nature of creatures in this world. They show us the Grandeur and Power of the Great Creator.

The Headquarters of the Territory of Man's Body

The inside of the skull is filled with a gray matter called the "brain" which is the most important organ in the body. This is because it commands all the activities of the organs of the body.

To appreciate the function of this vital organ, let us give you a piece of medical news:

Recently it was reported in the newspapers that an Iranian University student from Shiraz received a blow to his brain in a driving accident. All his organs seemed to be in good condition except for the fact that he had forgotten his entire past. He could not recognize his parents. He was taken to his house in Shiraz, but he was unable to remember any of the items he had worked with in his room. He declared that he could not recognize any of those items.

It was revealed by physicians that a blow to one specific location in his brain had deprived him of his recollections and memories.

Perhaps the damaged section in his brain was the size of the head of a pin but the impact was tremendous.

Our brain and nervous system consists of two distinct sections:

The sympathetic nerves have control over all the voluntary movements of our bodies, such as walking, looking, speaking, and the like.

2. The parasympathetic nervous system, controls the involuntary functions of the heart, stomach, and the like.

The Cerebrum, the Most Amazing Part of the Brain

The cerebrum is the center of intelligence, will, and memory. It is the most amazing section of the brain. It controls most mental reactions, such as anger, fear and the like. If an animal's cerebrum is removed but the nerves remain intact, it will continue to live, however it will lose its intelligence. The cerebrum of a pigeon was once removed, and then the pigeon was given seeds. It could not distinguish them despite the fact that it was hungry. When it was given the opportunity to fly, it continued to fly up to the point where it confronted an obstruction in its path.

Another Astonishing Section of the Brain is the Memory

Have you realized the significance of memory in our lives? Have you realized how miserable we would be if we were deprived of our memory even for one hour?

The memory center, which forms a small section of our brain, files all the memories of our lives. It records all the features and traits of the people we have come in contact with during our lifetime. As soon as we come across a person we have already met, we will recognize him instantly. Then our mind tells us how to react towards him. If he happens to be a friend, we are told to respect him and if he is an enemy, we are told to keep our distance. However, all these reactions are spontaneous.

If we are asked to describe through pictures what we will have in our memory, we need to use hundreds of pages. Our memory, however, has done this filing with the easiest mechanisms available to it.

How Could Unconscious and Unintelligent Nature Create Intelligence?

Hundreds of books have already been written about the miracle of the human brain. Could we believe this highly delicate, precise, complicated and mysterious organ to be created by an unconscious nature? Nothing would be more amazing than to assume unintelligent nature to be the creator of human wisdom. Concerning this The Holy Qur'an says:

وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ؟

And in your own souls too; will you not then see?" [Qur'an, 51:21]

THINK AND ANSWER

Do you know anything else concerning the wonders of the human brain?

What apparatus has God created for the protection of man's brain against accidents?

Eighth Lecture: A World of Wonder in a Small Flying Animal

Now we wish to leave the territory of our bodies and search for other signs of miracles in the wonderful creatures in our world.

If we gaze into the dark sky at night, we might be able to see a flying creature courageously searching the sky for its prey.

This creature is the bat which exhibits very strange behaviors, especially its flight during the dark and gloomy night.

The bat's swift movement in the dark without striking any obstacle is wonderful indeed. The more we study this creature, the more the mysteries of this animal become apparent.

This animal flies in the dark sky with the same speed and courage as a pigeon in the daylight. If the bat knew it would collide with any obstacle, it would be more cautious, however, it has an apparatus which informs it of any imminent danger.

If a bat is left in a dark, winding tunnel, the walls of which are covered with soot, it would pass through the tunnel walls without having its wings blackened. A bat has a built-in apparatus like radar which helps it to find its way during the night.

Now let us think a little about this radar system to see how the bat makes use of it.

One of the subjects of physics is ultra-sound waves. These waves have frequencies that are inaudible to the human ear. For this reason they are called ultra-sound waves, for they are beyond the range of sound audible to the human ear.

When these waves are emitted from a strong transmitter, they travel in a straight line, but when they strike an obstacle such as an enemy airplane or other obstacle, they reflect back like a ball which bounces back if it strikes a wall. The time it takes for a beam of sound to strike an obstacle and then bounce back could be measured accurately.

Most military and commercial planes and ships use radar systems to identify the position of other planes and ships in the vicinity.

Scientists tell us there is an apparatus like a radar system built in the body of a bat. The presence of such a system could be shown by the following experiment. Let a bat fly in a room, then let a microphone change the ultra-sound waves into audible ones. Under these circumstances, the bat would emit ultra-sound waves with the frequencies between 30 and 60 hertz.

Now we would like to know which of the bat's organs are responsible for the creation of such waves.

Scientists inform us that these waves are produced by the strong muscles of the bat's larynx and are sent out through its nostrils. Its rather large ears are the receivers for the in-coming waves.

Thus, a bat owes its nocturnal excursions to its large ears. A Russian scientist called Julian, has shown in some experiments that if the bat's ears are removed, it could never fly without hitting obstacles. But if its eyes are removed, it could still skillfully move around. Thus, a bat "sees" with its ears, not with its eyes. This is strange indeed.

Now reflect on this question for a moment: who has installed this delicate apparatus inside this tiny animal? Who has taught the animal how to use this apparatus?

Could unconscious nature accomplish such a feat?

Imam `Ali (s), talking about the creation of bats in Nahj al-Balaghah says:

لَا تَمْتَنِعْ مِنَ الْمُضِيِّ فِيهِ لِعَسَقِ دَجْنَتِهِ... فَسُبْحَانَ الْبَارِي لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلَى غَيْرِ مِثَالٍ

Never does the bat stop flying due to extreme darkness...Noble and immaculate is the God Who has created everything without previous models. [Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 155]

THINK AND ANSWER

What else do you know concerning the creation of the bat?

Do you know that the bat's wings, its method of reproduction, and sleeping are different from other animals and that it is a completely unique creature?

Ninth Lecture: The Friendship between Insects and Flowers

One spring day, when the weather becomes warm, pay a visit to a garden or a green field. You will observe swarms of small insects, bees, flies, butterflies and tiny mosquitoes flying here and there, from one flower to the next, and from one branch to the other.

They are so involved in their activities it seems as if a stern supervisor commanded them to move about. Their wings and feet smeared with yellow-colored pollen, these insects resemble factory workers who diligently work in their own workshop. But their mission is so worthy that professor Leon Burton writes on their job and function:

“Few people realize that without insects our baskets would remain empty.”

We would like to add to his statement the following observation: “And during the next generations our gardens, orchards, and fields would lose their freshness and vigor.”

Thus, we could say that insects are the true growers of fruits and patrons of flower seeds.

You might ask for the reason. Insects are deemed crucial for one of their most vital functions related to plants, i.e., fertilization. You probably know that flowers, like most animals, have either male or female organs. Without the contact between these two organs, seeds and fruits would not be produced.

But have you ever thought how these two organs together contact each other when plants themselves cannot move? How does the male pollens which acts like sperm integrate with the little seeds that act like ovules and bring about their fertilization?

This is done, in most cases, by insects and at times by the wind.

But the issue is not to be taken lightly. This auspicious marriage, which is initiated by insects, has had a long and interesting history and background.

According to the findings of two scholars of the natural sciences, plants and flowers were created during the second half of the second geological age, i.e. during the Mesozoic period. Strange to say, insects were also created during this era. These two creatures have lovingly lived side by side as two intimate friends during the whole history of creation and have always completed each other.

To attract their friends, flowers have produced a delicious juice inside their rosebushes. And when insects try to move the male pollen to the flowers' female organs in order to let fertilization take place, they get some of this juice free of charge. This precious juice is so palatable for insects that they are involuntarily attracted toward it.

Some botanists contend that the beautiful color and scents of flowers play a significant role in attracting insects. Experiments on bees have shown that they can distinguish between the different colors and scents of flowers.

In fact, it is the flowers that decorate themselves for the insects. In this way, they attract the magnificent butterflies and bees. In this transaction, both sides benefit.

The sweet nectar produced is the most perfect food for insects. When concentrated, this juice is called honey. This is because when insects come to visit the flowers they drink some of this juice. When they leave, they take most of this reserved juice and store it in their nests. This friendship, which is based on mutual benefit, has always been and will continue to exist between flowers and insects.

A Lesson from Monotheism:

When we see these wonderful aspects of the life of insects and flowers, we might be tempted to ask ourselves the following question: Who has arranged this contract of friendship between flowers and insects?

Who has provided flowers with this special nectar? Who has given them these breath-taking colors and scents?

Who has provided these insects, butterflies, and bees with such delicate legs to carry the pollen from the flowers?

Why is it that bees have become fond of a special flower? How is it that the life histories of flowers and insects coincide with each other?

Could anybody, however obstinate he might be, believe that all these events have occurred haphazardly without any planning? Could we believe that these wonderful natural sights have been created by an unconscious nature? Never could this have happened!

The Holy Qur'an states:

وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنْ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا يَعْرِشُونَ. ثُمَّ كُلِي مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ فَاسْلُكِي سُبُلَ رَبِّكِ ذُلُلًا

And your Lord revealed to the bee saying; Make hives in the mountains, in the trees, and in what they build: Then eat of all the fruits and walk in the ways of your Lord submissively. [Qur'an 16: 68-69]

THINK AND ANSWER

What are the uses of the sweetness, the scents and the colors of flowers?

What do you know about the amazing life of bees?

Tenth Lecture: In the World of Microcosms

Since we are living among the wonders of the world of creation, we have become accustomed to them and we might not appreciate them as they deserve. There are some examples of our negligence:

1. There are very tiny animals and insects living next to us whose skeletons are not more than one or two millimeters. But despite this tiny structure, they possess hands, feet, eyes, ears, even brains, intelligence and central nervous systems.

If we put the brain of an ant under a microscope and look at it carefully, we will notice what a complicated structure it has. Different sections are put next to each other and each section controls the functions of certain regions of the ant's body. A disturbance in any section will result in some damage to the ant's life.

Strange as it might seem, this small brain of the ant, which is even smaller than a pinhead, contains the means to evaluate environmental changes.

Could a material thing install and gather so many signs of intelligence inside the brain of such a small creature?

2. In the mysterious world of the microcosm, the smallest unit known is the atom, the size of which is not visible even to the strongest microscopes.

If you want to know how small an atom is, you should be aware of the fact that one drop of water contains as many atoms as the population of the entire world. And if you wish to count all the protons contained in one centimeter of a thin wire, you would have to hire one thousand persons who would have to spend between 30 to 300 years to count them continuously day and night.

Now that we have realized how many atoms are contained in one centimeter of a thin wire, think about how many atoms there are in the heavens and the earth, in the air, in the galaxies and in the solar system. Is it not exhausting for man to even visualize such immense quantities? There is no one except God, the Creator, who knows the precise answers to these questions.

From atoms we learn Lessons on Monotheism

The study of atoms is one of the most promising branches of human science today. From such studies, we will learn lessons on monotheism. There are four aspects about atoms which should hold our attention:

The Wonderful Order: Up to now, more than one hundred elements have been discovered in which the number of electrons varies from one to one hundred, and this wonderful system could not have been created by intelligence-lacking organisms.

The Equilibrium in Forces: We know that two opposite electrical poles neutralize each other. Thus, the electrons which possess a negative charge neutralize the nucleus which possesses a positive charge.

On the other hand, we know that the movement of the electrons around the nucleus creates a centrifugal force. This force intends to let the electrons fly away from the environment of the atom which could lead to its disintegration, and gravity tends to absorb the electrons and destroy the atom altogether.

In this way, we could observe how balanced the centrifugal and centripetal forces are in the atom. Could this equilibrium have been brought about by blind nature?

Each One on its Specific Orbit: We saw that there are a particular number of some electrons for each atom. These electrons do not move in one orbit; rather, each one occupies a specific orbital path without any collisions between them.

Is it an easy task to put all these electrons in their specific orbits?

Atomic Energy: In order to appreciate the amount of energy contained in one atom, observe the following incident:

In 1945, an atomic experiment took place in the desert of New Mexico. A very small atomic bomb was left on a steel tower. After it exploded, the tower first melted and then evaporated accompanied by lightning and horrendous sounds. When the scientists returned to observe the result, nothing was left on the scene.

In that very year, two bombs were dropped on two cities of Japan: One on the city of Nagasaki and the other one on the city of Hiroshima. The number of dead in the former city amounted to seventy thousand with the same amount of casualties. And in the latter city, the number of dead was from 30,000 to 40,000 with the same number of casualties. As a result, Japan had to surrender to the United States and accept the truce.

Is it not sufficient to study the mysteries of one atom to get to know the Great Creator? There are as many reasons for the existence of God as the number of atoms in the universe. The Holy Qur'an states:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَامٌ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ

And were every tree that is in the earth made into pens and the sea to supply it with ink with seven more seas to increase it, the words of Allah would not come to an end. [Qur'an 31:27]

THINK AND ANSWER

Do you know anything more concerning the mysterious life of ants?

Can you draw the structure of the atom on the blackboard?

Further Discussion on the Tenth Lecture

How Splendid are the Attributes of Allah

His Attributes

One should know that it is one thing to recognize God through studying His creatures, but it is quite another thing to recognize the Attributes of God. The former is quite easy while the latter needs much more scrutiny and caution.

One might ask why. The reason is clear. None of God's attributes resembles what we see and hear. Thus, the first condition for identifying the attributes of God is the negation of any of the characteristics of the created world from that of the Sacred Essence. This makes the whole picture difficult and provide us with a dilemma. We have grown up in the middle of this natural world and have been in close contact with it. Thus, we have the inclination to measure everything in comparison with nature.

We have only seen matter and its properties. All the creatures we have encountered live in time and space and have specific dimensions. Thus, it would become extremely difficult to visualize a God who lacks substance, who does not live in time or space but at the same time has control over every aspect of existence, and is timeless. We have to be extremely cautious.

However, it should be pointed out that we could never realize the true nature of the Almighty God. We should not expect we could ever know Him since this expectation resembles pouring an immense ocean into a tiny glass or to expect an unborn child to know all the secrets of the outside world, and this is impossible.

That is why a small error on our part might take us miles away from the road of identifying God and leave us in the desert of idol-worship or atheism. Therefore, we should take heed to never compare the characteristics of creation with those of Allah.

Divine Beauty and Divine Majesty

God's Attributes are usually divided into the positive attributes and the negative attributes. The positive attributes are those which are attributed to God and the negative attributes are those which God does not have.

The answer is as follows: From one point of view, God's attributes are infinite and from another point of view, all God's attributes could be summed up in the following phrase:

God's Being is infinite in all aspects and at the same time possesses supreme perfection.

God's negative attributes could be paraphrased through the following statement: God's essence suffers from no defects from whatever perspective.

However, since perfection and defects have degrees, we could easily state that God has limitless positive attributes and an infinite number of negative attributes. This is because He possesses all the positive attributes that come to man's mind and lacks all those flaws which the human mind can imagine. Therefore, God's positive and negative Attributes are simply limitless.

God's most Well-Known Attributes

God's most positive attributes appear in the following poem:

God is All-knowing and All-powerful;

He is Living and willful;

He is the Perceiver.

He is Eternal without end,

The Sincere Speaker with His Prophets.

He is All Knowing since He knows everything;

He is All Powerful; this means He encompasses everything;

He is Living; i.e. He is Alive. He is Living since a living being is both Knowing and Powerful. Since God is both Knowing and Almighty, He is Living;

He is willful which means; He decides and carries out His wishes accordingly. He is free to do whatever He wants and whatever He does is based on wisdom.

God is a Perceiver since He perceives everything; He sees everything and hears every sound; and He is cognizant of all things.

God is Eternal and exists at all times. His Being does not have any beginning. This is because His Existence stems from His Nature. For this reason, He is Eternal. Non-existence is meaningless for God Whose Existence relies on Himself.

God is the speaker with His prophets. He creates the sound waves which create words. This does not mean that He has a tongue, lips or a larynx.

God is Sincere; this means that whatever He utters is the absolute truth. This is because lying is the result of ignorance or weakness. God never tells lies since He is both Knowing and Powerful.

God's most famous Negative Attributes could be found in the following poem:

He is not composed;
Neither is He a substance nor a body.
He is not visible,
Neither does He occupy space.
He lacks associates,
He does not bear attributes, either
God is Rich; never is He Needy.

1. God is not composed because He lacks components. If He were composed, He would be in need of His components, while He needs nothing.

2. God is not a substance because every material thing is perishable and limited.

3. God cannot be seen; He is invisible. This is because if He were Visible, He should be a thing, with limits and dimensions.

4. God does not occupy space because He is not a substance to be in need of space.

5. There is no associate with God. This is because if He had an associate, He would be finite, and two finite beings could not tolerate each other. Besides, the uniqueness of the rules in this world leads us to accept His Uniqueness.

6. God lacks attributes because His attributes and His Being are the same.

7. God is not poor; neither is he needy. He is Rich. This is because an Infinite Being does not lack Knowledge or Power.

The Holy Qur'an says:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

Nothing is like Him. [Qur'an 42:11]

THINK AND ANSWER

Do you have any more evidence for God's uniqueness and His lacking associates?

Some religions believe in three gods, some in two gods. Which religions are they?

Ten Lecures on God's Justice

First Lecture: What is Justice?

Why is justice, above God's other attributes, considered as one of the principles of religion?

What is the difference between justice and equality?

Why was Justice Selected above all other attributes?

Before anything else, it should become clear why justice was chosen as one of God's most significant attributes and why it was selected as one of the five principles of religion.

God is All-knowing; He is Powerful; He is Just; He is the Sage; He is both All-merciful and All-compassionate; He is Eternal; He is the Creator and the Provider of Sustenance; why was justice selected out of all these other attributes and why was it assigned as one of the five principles of religion?

To answer this question, we should take the following into consideration

Among God's attributes, justice enjoys a significant position since most of God's attributes go back to it. This is due to the fact that justice in its widest meaning is to put every item in its proper position. Therefore, the Sage, Provider of Sustenance, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate and the like all have their roots in justice.

The issue of the Resurrection [return to God] depends on God's justice. The prophethood of God's Messengers and the responsibilities of the Imams are related to God's justice.

During the early days of Islam, a dispute arose over the issue of God's justice

A group of Sunnis, called Ash'arites, denied God's justice entirely. They claimed that the issue of God's justice or injustice was irrelevant and that all existence is in His possession and belongs to Him. Whatever He does is absolute justice. This group of Sunnis did not even believe in the concept of rational goodness and unseemliness. They used to say: Our wisdom cannot distinguish between good or bad on its own.

Another group of Sunnis, called Mu'tazilites and the Shi'ah, believed in God's justice and used to say that God never engages in injustice and tyranny:

In order to distinguish between these two groups, the second group was termed the "Adliyah," that is, those who used God's Justice as one of their five principles of religion; the first group was called "non-Adliyah," the Shi'ah were among the Adliyah.

In order to make their religion distinct from the "non-Adliyah," The Shi'ah used Imamate as one other principle of religion.

Therefore, wherever the issues of Justice and Imamate are brought up, the school of Imamiyyah Shias is involved.

Since religion's secondary principles are always a reflection of the fundamental principles of religion and since the idea of God's justice has a tremendous effect on human society,

the adoption of the principle of justice as one of the fundamental principles of religion is a means of reviving justice in human societies and encouraging the struggle against any kind of injustice and aggression.

The leadership of the prophets and Imams sets the stage for true leadership in human societies. Thus, the principle of God's justice, which governs all human societies, is an indication of the need for justice in human encounters.

The great world of creation is based on justice and so is human society.

What is Justice?

Justice has two distinct meanings

In its wide sense justice is taken to mean "everything in its proper position," in other words "to be in equilibrium."

This interpretation of justice can be discerned in the whole sphere of creation: in galaxies, inside atoms, in the structure of the human body, in plants and in living organisms.

This is the same meaning which is implied in the famous Hadith of the Messenger of God which declares:

"Through justice the skies and the earth exist."

For example, if the attractive and repulsive forces of the earth are negated or if one of the two of them overpowers the other, the earth would either be absorbed by the sun, which would then be destroyed or it would wander free in the infinite expanse of space and be annihilated.

This sense of justice is depicted in this poem:

What is injustice? Injustice is when things are not in their proper places; what is justice? It is when trees get water; what is injustice?

Injustice is when thorns receive water.

If water is used for plants and orchards, one finds justice; however, if it is used to water thorns and weeds, injustice rules.

Another meaning for justice is "considering other people's rights." thus, it is unjust to deprive others of their rights or to engage in discrimination or favoritism.

It is interesting to know that justice in its two meanings applies to Allah. However, in our discussions the second meaning is more often intended.

God's justice implies that He neither deprives anybody of his or her rights, nor does He engage in favoritism. He does not discriminate among people. He is just in the true sense of the word. In the coming lectures we will present proofs of God's Justice.

Injustice whether it means the deprivation of rights or engaging in favoritism or discrimination, is not in harmony with God's attributes.

God never punishes a righteous person; neither does He encourage a wrongdoer in his vicious acts; He does not punish anyone for the wrong actions committed by others. His actions are completely based on pure justice.

God uses justice with all members of society under all circumstances. Thus, the statement of the Ash'arites is false when they declare that God is just even if He sends all the prophets to Hell or even if He dispatches all the

wrongdoers and criminals to paradise. A man with common sense would not utter such nonsense.

The Differences between Justice and Equality

Another significant point which should be considered here is that justice and equality are sometimes erroneously used interchangeably. This is far from the truth.

Equality is not a pre-condition for justice to occur. Priorities and preferences, too, should be considered; for instance, it is not justice to give all students in a class the same grade; neither should two workers receive the same wage. Justice is used when each student receives his grade according to his or her merits or a worker receives his wage based on his expertise.

The same is true in nature. It would not be just for a whale to have a heart the weight of one gram or for a sparrow to have a heart as heavy as one ton. It would not be just for a sturdy tree to have the root of a small tree.

It is just for any organism to receive subsistence in accordance with its merits and capabilities.

THINK AND ANSWER

Why is justice, which is one of God's attributes, recognized as one of the principles of religion?

Who are the Ash'arites? What do you know of their beliefs?

What are the social consequences of the belief in God's justice?

What are the two meanings of justice? Outline them.

Is justice the same as equality?

Second Lecture: The Reasons for God's Justice

Rational Goodness and Unseemliness

It should be pointed out that our wisdom realizes the goodness and unseemliness of things to a certain degree.

For instance, we know that justice and kindness are good and admired characteristics and injustice and jealousy are bad and repulsive. We know all this without religious instruction. However, there are things we could not understand through the sciences alone; to recognize them, we need the instruction of religious leaders such as the prophets.

Thus, the Ash'arites are wrong when they deny rational goodness and unseemliness.

If our wisdom was not able to distinguish between good and bad, how would we be able to acknowledge whether or not God had given miracles to an honest individual or to a liar? But when we say lying is unseemly and is uncharacteristic of God and that His statements are always right and flawless, we know that His promises are true and that He would never support a liar, so He would not provide a liar with miracles.

That is why we can trust religion and we can conclude that the belief in rational goodness and unseemliness is the very foundation of our religion.

Now, let us return to the reasons for God's justice. To know these facts, we should be aware of the following:

What is the Source of Injustice?

Injustice is due to one of the following:

Ignorance

Sometimes a cruel person or a tyrant does not really know what he is doing; neither does he realize that he is destroying the rights of others. Need

At times, we wish to possess things which belong to others. Under these conditions, we might be tempted to become involved in injustice.

Incompetence and Inability;

At times, we may not be willing to deprive others of their rights but we cannot help it and unwillingly we become involved in injustice.

Selfishness and Revenge

Sometimes none of the above factors are responsible for our decision; rather our selfishness leads us to trespass over the rights of others. Our desire for revenge might be another factor for getting involved in injustice. Our egocentrism might be responsible for the wrong inflicted by us on others.

God has none of these defects due to the fact that He is All-knowing, He is in need of nothing, He has power over everything and He is kind towards everyone. It is therefore irrational to think that He could ever get involved in tyranny or injustice.

God is infinite; His perfection has no limit. One can expect nothing but benevolence, justice, kindness and affection from such a source of Divine Mercy.

When we observe that evildoers are punished, it is not God Who punishes them; rather their punishment is, in fact, the consequence of their wrong. This resembles the punishment of death which an addict receives

because of his addiction and due to his use of narcotics and alcoholic beverages. The Holy Qur'an says:

هَلْ تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ؟

Shall you be rewarded for aught except what you did? [Qur'an 27:90]

The Qur'an and God's Justice

It is worth mentioning that this fact is highly stressed in the sacred verses of the Holy Qur'an. For instance, on one occasion God says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَكِنَّ النَّاسَ أَنْفُسُهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

Surely, Allah does not do any injustice to men, but men are unjust to themselves. [Qur'an 10:44]

Still in another situation, the Holy Qur'an says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ

Surely, Allah does not do injustice the weight of an atom. [Qur'an 4:40]

Concerning the chastisement of the Resurrection Day, the Holy Qur'an states:

وَنَضْعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا

And We will set up a just balance on the Day of Resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least. [Qur'an 21:47]

Invitation to Justice

We have already said that man's attributes should be a reflection of God's Attributes and that God's Attributes should be felt among the members of any society. Based on this principle, the Holy Qur'an emphasizes both God's Justice, and justice among the members of human society. The Holy Qur'an has repeatedly considered injustice as the very essence of corruption in human society and predicts a painful fate for cruel people.

By describing the fate of people in olden times who were destroyed due to their unjust deeds, the Holy Qur'an warns people against practicing injustice and cruel acts.

Using it as a principle, the Holy Qur'an explicitly states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ

Surely, Allah enjoins the doing of justice and doing of good to others and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency, evil, and rebellion. [Qur'an 16:90]

It is worthwhile to mention that accepting cruelty and injustice from others is just as abominable as doing injustice to others. This is explicitly stated in verse 279 of Surah Baqara:

لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ

Neither shall you make the debtor suffer loss, nor shall you be made to suffer loss. [Qur'an 2:279]

Submission to the unjust acts of cruel people is to encourage tyrants to engage in their devilish deeds even more.

THINK AND ANSWER

Is our intelligence or wisdom capable of distinguishing between good and bad independently and without the assistance of the Shariah?

What are the sources of injustice? What logical reasons are there for God's justice?

What does the Holy Qur'an have to say about God's justice and the negation of injustice by Him?

What is man's duty vis-à-vis justice and injustice?

Is it considered a sin to submit to injustice?

Third Lecture: The Philosophy behind Disasters and Evils

Since ancient times, some ignorant people have criticized God for His alleged injustice. They have put forward some issues which, in their conceptualization, are in conflict with God's genuine justice. They have even gone so far as to use these issues to support both the negation of God's justice and His existence altogether.

Among the things, they see as evils are those mishaps which at times afflict man, plants and other living organisms.

Among them are natural disasters such as tornadoes, earthquakes and other general calamities.

This issue is often brought up in relation to either theism as opposed to atheism, or God's justice or lack thereof. In order to comprehend this topic, let us consider the following carefully:

Man's Relative Judgment and his Limited Knowledge

In judging some things, we usually rely upon our own selves. For instance, we will say that something is near to us or far from us, or, we refer to another person as either strong or weak. This comparison is done by comparing that person's strength or weakness with our own, both physically and mentally. In relation to good and evil, people employ the same approach.

For instance, if it rains somewhere, we would ignore the impact of that rain on the general economy of our country, instead, we would only be concerned with our immediate environment, our homes, our fields, or at most our city. If the impact of that rain is positive, we will refer to it as a blessing from God, and if it had deleterious effects, we would refer to it as a disaster sent from heaven.

Let us give you another example: when a dilapidated building is torn down to be replaced by a better building, we refer to the dirt produced as an evil thing, forgetting for the moment that the newly built building might be a hospital from which numerous people would benefit in the future. In the case of that rain, we might temporarily forget that it might have positive advantages for the community.

In our superficial and unfounded judgments, we would consider a snake's poison as an evil thing, forgetting for the moment that this poison is one of the defense mechanisms of the snake and that this poison could be used for pharmaceutical purposes to save a man's life.

Therefore, to avoid falling into this pitfall, we should not use our limited knowledge to judge world affairs. In our judgments, we should avoid judging things and affairs exclusively based on ourselves; rather, we should take as many factors as possible into consideration.

Basically, the geographical and climatic events in the world are inter-related: the storm blowing in our city today and the torrential flood pouring down tomorrow are links in the universal chain of events which are taking place. These events have their roots both in the past and in the present.

We will conclude from what we have said above that jumping to conclusions based on scanty pieces of the picture and ignoring the whole body of evidence is irrational indeed.

What should be strongly denied is the creation of “absolute evil.” It would be more acceptable to see things as good from one perspective but from another aspect, and the good aspect to be more is predominant in it.

A surgical operation is extremely painful from one aspect but is of a great benefit to the person involved.

An earthquake naturally creates a lot of destruction in some areas of the earth. But when we put it into the perspective of other related affairs, our judgments drastically change.

Scientists present us with two types of causes for earthquakes. According to one theory, it is caused by the moon’s attraction to the dry outer layers of the earth. In accordance with a second theory, earthquakes are caused by heat and gases within the earth.

No matter which theory is taken to be true, we should take its other consequences into consideration. In other words, we should be aware of the effects of the earth’s internal heat over the formation of fossil resources, such as oil and coal inside the earth. Therefore, earthquakes could be regarded as relatively benevolent and good.

Another example is the tides, which are created by the attraction of the moon to the oceans and which results in the irrigation of the dry coasts of the oceans and seas. This, too, is of relative benevolence.

Thus, we understand that our relative judgments and limited knowledge are the real causes for our misunderstanding of universal events. The more we study the inter-relationship between events, the more we will recognize the limited scope of our judgments. Regarding this, the Holy Qur’an tells us:

وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

And you are not given aught of knowledge but a little. [Qur’an 17:85]

With this limited knowledge, we should avoid rushing to jump to conclusions.

Unpleasant Events and Warnings

All of us have observed some people, who when they gain possessions and affluence, become immersed in vanity and false pride, forgetting for the moment, most of their responsibilities and important human affairs.

We have also seen that people are steeped in luxury, they become carried away by negligence which, if it continues, leads to disaster.

You have, no doubt, heard experienced drivers complain of straight, curve-free roads, which might make them drowsy and could be devastating to them. In some countries, artificial bumps are placed on these kinds of roads to reduce danger.

Human life resembles these straight, curveless roads in many ways. If there were no bumps, such as unpleasant events, in our way, negligence would overcome us and we would forget our duties towards God and other fellow human beings.

We are not advising people to create nasty, unpleasant events for themselves. Rather, we are saying that the philosophy behind some of these events is that they could prevent us from sinking into vanity and negligence. Regarding this topic, The Holy Qur’an states:

فَأَخَذْنَا هُمْ بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَضَرَّعُونَ

...then We seized them with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves. [Qur'an 6:42]

THINK AND ANSWER

Who has brought up the question of disasters and vices in the discussion on religion?

Name some examples of disasters and calamities. Have you ever experienced any of them?

What is meant by relative judgment as opposed to all-inclusive judgment? And what is meant by “absolute evil” and “relative good”

Are tornadoes and earthquakes completely negative in their effect?

What positive effects might unpleasant events have on our lives?

Fourth Lecture: The Philosophy behind Unpleasant Events in our Lives

We have seen that some faultfinders have used the unpleasant events that occur in man's life and the disasters which we constantly face to deny God's Justice or to deny the very existence of God altogether.

In our previous discussion, we analyzed some of these events and provided two different philosophies. Let us now continue with this discussion.

Man Matures when he Faces Difficulties

Let us repeat what we have said previously: we should never try to create problems for ourselves. It frequently happens that certain difficult obstacles strengthen our determination and enhance our faculties. This resembles the act of a blacksmith who puts steel into hot ovens to make it stronger and more durable. We, too, become more determined in the oven of hardships.

Wars are abominable events, but sometimes an intense could enhance the capabilities of a nation and make it flourish; it could change disunity into unity and could redress backwardness.

A well-known western historian writes:

"Any brilliant civilization that has emerged in whichever part of this world has been caused by a strong foreign invader which has caused the hidden capabilities of the invaded nation to flourish."

Of course, the reaction of all individuals and societies in the face of the bitter events of life has not been identical. Some individuals despair easily; so, they are drawn into pessimism; and end up being the losers. There are others, however, because of their potential are motivated by events and move forward energetically trying to amend their weak points and drawbacks. However, since most people judge superficially, they only observe the bitter and hard aspects of the hardships of life and do not notice the positive aspects of these difficulties.

We do not, claim that all bitter events always have such an impact on us, but they do in many cases.

If one studies the life patterns of those endowed with genius, you would find out that nearly all of them carried out their activities under hard and difficult circumstances. Few of those who have been pampered and spoiled have shown any genius or have reached lofty positions in life. Great, distinguished military leaders and generals have such high social positions because they have encountered difficult challenges in the military theater. By the same token, the experts in economics are those who have wrestled against daunting economic conditions and have emerged victorious.

In the same way, great politicians are those who have struggled against hard and unpleasant events.

In sum, it could be stated that hardships and pain nourish the human mind.

We read the following truth in the Holy Qur'an:

فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

Then if you hate them, it may be that you dislike a thing while Allah has placed abundant good in it. [Qur'an 4:19]

Hardships Prepare Man to Return to God

In the previous discussions, we found out that there is a specific aim for every one of our limbs and organs. There is even a philosophy behind the creation of our fingerprints, so, how could it be possible for our whole body to lack any pre-specified objectives?

We have seen so far, as well, that the main objective of man's creation has been for him to develop and to flourish in all aspects of life.

In order to attain such perfection, man needs profound educational programs that could lead the entirety of his being, therefore such a program should be all-inclusive. For this very reason, God has provided man not only with a monotheistic nature but has sent heavenly books through great prophets to lead man to the straight path.

For man to accomplish such a profound feat God has revealed to him the consequences of his sins and wrongdoings and has made man suffer in those cases where he has disobeyed God's orders and commands; in this way, God has taught man to take lessons from his previous errors and pave the way to approach Him. For this reason, some of the disasters and unpleasant events man encounters, are in fact God's grace and signs of His Benevolence.

This fact is vividly stated in The Holy Qur'an:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَرْجِعُونَ

Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return. [Qur'an 30:41]

Regarding the afore-mentioned topics, it is entirely baseless and illogical to consider disastrous events as evil, to interpret them as pernicious and to consider them as signs of God's injustice. This is because the more meticulously we delve into this issue, the more we appreciate the philosophy behind it.

THINK AND ANSWER

What are the objectives behind man's creation? How could we attain such objectives?

How does man mature and become stronger through hardships?

Have you encountered anyone who became greater and emerged victorious through hardships? Write their biographies.

What does the Holy Qur'an say regarding the consequences of our sins?

Which individuals benefit from bitter events and which ones interpret them negatively?

Fifth Lecture: More Discussion on the Philosophy behind Disasters and Evils

Since the issue of disasters and evils is a problem for most students of theology and monotheism, we shall devote more space here to this topic.

Hardships and Life's Ups and Downs Enliven Us

It might seem difficult for some to comprehend, but gifts and blessings lose their value if they continue for a long time and do not change.

It is a proven fact that if a smooth item is placed inside a sphere with strong rays of light directed upon it, the item becomes difficult for the observer to see. This is because it is the shadows around an item that make it visible.

Blessings, in the same way, are not observable without the shadows of hardship. We would not enjoy our lives if we did not encounter any diseases at all. It is only after a night of fever and headache that we appreciate the value of health.

As a whole, a monotonous life, even the most affluent one, is both boring and morbid. It is commonly observed that some of those who have led an affluent life, free from disturbances, consider life to be absurd and have tried either to commit suicide or complain about their lives.

You never see a talented architect construct the walls of a hall like the walls of a prison, drab and monotonous; rather, with his innovations he tries to give it spirit and joy.

Why is nature so wonderfully beautiful? Why are forests, mountains, rivers, streams and the swaying branches of the trees so interesting and so charming? One obvious reason might be the lack of monotony.

The dichotomies of light and dark on the one hand and day and night on the other, which are repeatedly emphasized in the Holy Qur'an, are meant to eliminate monotony from human existence. This is because if the sun continuously shone from only one location in the sky, there would be no change of day and night and within a short time, everyone would suffer boredom.

Based on these pieces of information, we should accept the fact that disasters in life are partly influential in making the rest of our lives more attractive and helping us appreciate the real value of our blessings.

Self-made Hardships

Another point which should be mentioned in this final section of our discussion is the fact that most people are ignorant of the causes of unpleasant events and disasters and attribute those injustices which are actually done by other human beings to the system of creation. They thus attribute the irregularities in man's deeds to irregularities in creation.

For instance, they complain in the following fashion: "Why should all disasters and misfortunes happen to me? Why do earthquakes cause few casualties in towns, but many more in the villages? Why should so many lives be lost in villages due to earthquakes? What sort of justice is this? If we are supposed to be exposed to all sorts of calamities, why should we not receive them equally? Why should the poor be exposed to so many disasters? Why are the poor victimized in general hospitals?"

These critics do not realize that none of these issues is related to the general scheme of creation; nor are they related to God's justice. Rather, these are the direct and inevitable consequences of man's injustice and exploitation of other human beings.

If villagers were not living under dire poverty due to the inequalities between them and city dwellers, they could build stronger houses to withstand earthquakes and many lives could be saved this way. But when their houses are built with clay bricks without using cement, any strong wind or weak earthquake can easily destroy them. How can these events be related to God or His justice?

We should not, find fault with God's philosophy of creation by complaining and uttering such statements: "He has given some people all sorts of assets, but has deprived others of their basic needs. He has given some people elegant, breath-taking mansions and others caves to dwell in!"

These criticisms should be directed towards the disorganized institutions of society. These social injustices should be eradicated through our efforts. Poverty should be removed from our society through our efforts. The deprived and the miserable should be taken care of. Only through such deeds could we rid ourselves of these blatant cases of injustice.

If all people from all walks of life had proper nutrition and hygiene, they would be resistant to diseases.

However, in a society in which a just order does not exist but in which aggression and the exploitation of others prevail, there would be some who would be so affluent that they would even have veterinarians and medicines for their pets and there would be those who would lack even the right medicine for their babies. Such cases are prevalent in many societies.

Under such circumstances, it would be rational to find fault with our own deeds and not with God.

We should advise the oppressors to stop their acts of cruelty and tell the oppressed not to yield to oppression.

We should, as well, try hard to provide all members of society with the minimum means of hygiene, treatment, food, shelter, and education. Therefore, we must conclude that we should not blame the creator for our own faults and shortcomings, saying: How could God ever impose such miseries upon us? How could God ever have recommended such an unjust social order?

In contrast, God has created us free since freedom is the very key to prosperity.

However, it is we who misuse our freedom and expose others to cruelty. These cruelties ultimately manifest themselves as social disorder, irregularities and complete chaos.

Unfortunately, these blunders affect everyone and the works of some poets attest to this situation.

The Holy Qur'an explains this issue elegantly:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَكِنَّ النَّاسَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

Certainly, Allah does not do any injustice to men, but men are unjust to themselves. [Qur'an 10:44]

THINK AND ANSWER

Why did we discuss the issue of disasters and evils in three lectures?

What is the drastic side effect of a monotonous life? Have you ever met a person who complains of his affluent life?

What do you know of the philosophy of light and darkness in the world of creation?

Are all the calamities that are prevalent in our society attributable to creation or do we also, have some role in their occurrence?

Are there appropriate ways available to us to redress social disasters? What are our responsibilities vis-à-vis the oppressed?

Sixth Lecture: Determinism and Free Will

One issue related to God's justice is the topic of determinism and free will.

The proponents of the philosophy of determinism contended that man is not free in his deeds, behavior and speech and that even the movement of his limbs and organs is performed as obligatorily as the movement of parts of a car.

This raises the question: How is this opinion compatible with the issue of God's justice? For this very reason, the Muslim group called the Ash'arites to whom we referred previously, and who deny the concept of logical good and evil, have accepted determinism and have denied justice. By accepting determinism, one no longer has to accept the issue of justice.

To clarify this issue, we should first discuss some other topics.

The Origin of the Belief in Determinism

Every body feels deep inside himself that he has freedom of choice. For instance, he can decide to help his friends financially or not; he can drink water when he is thirsty or decide not to do so. He is free to forgive or take revenge on anybody who has wronged him.

Every one can distinguish between the shaking of the hands of a sick or old person and someone shaking their hands of their own free will. So how is it that some people accept the philosophy of determinism when everyone intuitively feels that man is free in his nature?

There are several reasons for this orientation, one of which is presented here: When one sees that the environment influences everybody, that training affects everyone, that culture and indoctrination influence man's soul and mind, that economic factors sometimes elicit reactions in people and that the influence of heredity is inevitable, one naturally jumps to the conclusion that man cannot act freely,

and that all internal and external factors influence his decisions and that these behaviors would not have been manifested had these factors not existed before hand. These states of affairs are referred to as environmental determinism, hereditary determinism and the philosophy of determinism in general.

The Basic Error of the Proponents of Determinism

These people, however, have neglected one fundamental point: it is not the issue of "stimuli" and "minor causes;" rather, it is the issue of the ultimate cause. In other words, nobody could deny the role of the environment, culture or economic factors on human thinking and activity. The point is, despite the influence of all these stimuli, it is we who arrive at decisions in the final analysis.

This is because in an oppressive social environment, such as a tyranny, in which everybody could engage in corruption, one does not have to become corrupt. In that type of social situation, one could decide to avoid receiving bribes or not to frequent centers of corruption and decide to remain intact, healthy and whole.

Thus, environmental circumstances should be distinguished from the ultimate cause.

We have instance of individuals raised in a corrupt family environment or culture, or who have inherited something inappropriate, but who have followed the right path and have even risen up against the corrupt environment. If everybody had to be the immediate product of his own time and environment then no fundamental revolution could have been created or produced. Under such conditions, everybody would have had to adapt himself to the status quo and no one could have hoped for any improvement in the social order.

All this indicates the fact that none of the afore-mentioned factors are vital to our destiny. Rather, each one only sets the background for our activity. The main decision is arrived at by one's own determination.

This resembles the situation when we decide to fast on a hot summer's day. Every part of our body craves for a drop of water. However, we ignore such a desire in order to obey God's commands. Under similar conditions, another person could yield to his wants and consequently break his fast.

We shall conclude, therefore, that beyond all stimuli, there lies a vital factor called man's power to make decisions.

The Politico-Social Factors Involved in the Philosophy of Determinism

The issues of free will and determinism have always been misused during man's history. There have been a few peripheral factors that have given rise to supporting the issue of determinism and denying free will: Among them are the following:

Political Factors

To carry on with their illegitimate governments and in order to suppress the fires of revolution arising among the oppressed classes of society, most tyrants and despotic statesmen have spread the illusory thought that we are not free to decide on our own and that the hand of destiny and the determinism of history write our fate. They erroneously conclude then, that it is one's destiny that makes a prince or a beggar.

It is obvious that such a philosophy could easily stupefy the masses and set the stage for the continuation of colonial policies. In accordance with wisdom and the Shariah however, our destiny lies in our own hands and fate, in its deterministic sense does not exist. Divines decrees depend to a large degree on our will, faith, and endeavor.

Psychological Factors

There are some losers who are unwilling to accept the fact that the real cause for their failure has been their laziness and lethargy. In order to justify their laziness, they resort to the philosophy of determinism which they blame for their laziness. In this way, they arrive at a pseudo-peaceful state of mind. They claim that they have been wretched from the very start and that nothing could alter their destiny. They pretend that they are extremely intelligent and talented but fate has not been kind to them, however.

Social Factors

Some people prefer to be free to engage in libertinism and pleasure-seeking activities. They somehow convince themselves that they are

innocent and they usually deceive the society into believing that they really are innocent.

For this purpose, they resort to the philosophy of determinism in order to justify their own sensual and whimsical behavior.

However, we are well aware of the fact that all of these are lies. Even those who present these baseless excuses know that they are not telling the truth. But they are hindered from expressing the truth by their whimsical and transient desires.

Thus, in order to purify our society, we should combat the very notion of determinism, which has been a tool in the hands of colonialists in order to carry out their plans and in the hands of losers in order to justify their failures.

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the difference between the schools of determinism and free will?

What sorts of proofs do the proponents of determinism rely on?

How would you explain the effects of environment, culture, and heredity?

What political, mental, and social factors lie behind the school of determinism?

What should our position be vis-à-vis such factors?

Seventh Lecture: The Clearest Proof for free will Man's Conscience Categorically Rejects Determinism

Despite the fact that philosophers and religious scholars have advanced arguments and proofs of various kinds concerning man's free will, we shall resort to the shortest and easiest argument in this regard, which is man's conscience.

It is worth mentioning that everybody, theist and atheist alike the easterner and the westerner, the ancient and the modern, the affluent and the poor, the developed and the underdeveloped, all believe that law should govern and dominate human societies and that individuals should be responsible to carry out their duties and tasks at hand and that whoever violates law and order should be punished in some way.

In summary, the jurisdiction of law, the individual's responsibility towards it, and the chastisement of law-breakers and wrong-dowers are those issues that all the wise men of the world would agree upon. It is only the savage who does not agree with these issues.

This issue, which is referred to as the general conscience, is the clearest reason to prove the existence of man's free will.

How could man lack freedom of action and will and then be assumed responsible for the consequences of his deeds? Or how could man be considered obliged to obey the law, and be tried in lawful courts? Or how could he ever be proven guilty and then sent to jail or even be executed?

Man in this case would resemble the stones in an avalanche which cause the death of travelers on the road below.

It is evident that there are differences between a stone and a man. But if we deprived man of his free will, these differences vanish. Then both effects, being killed by a man or by falling stones, would be the same. The criminal's urge to kill, would be considered outside his control, just like gravity lies outside the control of the falling stone. According to the proponents of determinism, there is no difference between these two sets of events, for both events have occurred outside the doer's free will or control.

Now, we are faced with a choice: We either have to reject the common conscience of all members of the society and consider the act of punishing the wrongdoers and criminals as absurd and worthless or reject the proponents of determinism altogether. In this case, we will definitely select the second choice.

It is worthwhile to observe the fact that those who believe in deterministic ideology adhere to the theory of free will in practice when they naturally come face to face with the realities of life.

These kinds of people, when deprived of their rights or when bothered by wrongdoers, seek justice and ask for the punishment of wrongdoers.

Now, if man is not free in his actions, then why should he bother to complain, or seek justice?

Thus, this general conscience of the intelligent people of the world is a clear reason for the existence of free will in man and for the fact that man voluntarily accepts free will and has always been loyal to it. He cannot carry on with his daily life without it even for one day.

The great Islamic philosopher, Kwajah Nasir al-Din tusi, in his discussion on free will versus determinism states succinctly:

“The perception of the essentials and our conscience lead us to believe that all of our deeds are dependent on us.”^[1]

The Religious Opposition to Determinism

What we have stated so far has been based on opposition to the school of determinism from the angle of the conscience of the world’s intelligent people, both theist and atheist. But from the religious point of view, we have another convincing reason against determinism.

There is a clear conflict between religion and determinism. If religious programs were based on determinism, every thing would be distorted.

This is because of the following reason:

We could never reconcile God’s justice, on which we have already had a lengthy discussion, with determinism. How could God force a person to carry out something and then punish him for it? This is in conflict with logic itself.

Thus, with a belief in determinism, the issues of spiritual reward, chastisement, Paradise and Hell are no longer valid.

Also the belief in the record of one’s own acts, the concept of the Day of Judgment, divine inquiry into one’s deeds, the idea of chastisement for wrong-doers and the topic of showing favor to well-wishers so vividly brought up in the sacred verses of the Holy Qur’an would all be unnecessary. This is because in accordance with such a view, neither a wrongdoer nor a well-wisher would have been free to do what he did.

Furthermore, in our first contact with religion we referred to the topic of “duty and responsibility.” But how is “duty and responsibility” related to a man who is not free in his actions?

Could you ever tell a man to stop his trembling hand when his hand naturally shakes due to his illness? Or could we ask a man to stop suddenly when he is running on a steep plain?

For this very reason, Imam `Ali (s), in a famous narration, says. The school of determinism belongs to the idol worshippers and the proponents of Shaitan:

“This is the statement of the idol worshippers, of God’s enemies and of Shaitan’s party.”^[2]

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the clearest reason against determinism?

Describe the general conscience of people concerning the concept of free will.

Do the proponents of determinism have the same idea when confronted with the facts of life?

Is determinism compatible with God’s justice? If not, why?

How is freedom of will the basis for any kind of responsibility and duty?

Eighth Lecture: What is the Intermediate School?

Delegation vis-à-vis Determinism

In the spectrum of determinism / free-will, there is a place for those who believe in delegation.

The proponents of this latter school contended that God has entrusted us with everything since our creation and He is absolutely not responsible for our actions; therefore, we are completely free to do anything we desire. Nobody can interfere with our work.

No doubt, this way of thinking is incompatible with the principle of Monotheism, which has taught us that everything belongs to God and nothing lies beyond His domain. Even our deeds, while we enjoy free will, are not outside His sovereignty, or else it would be blasphemy.

In other words: we must not believe in two Gods: one the Almighty God, the major God Who has created the universe, the other one the minor God, i.e., man, who is absolutely independent in his actions and autonomous in his deeds, so independent and autonomous that even Almighty God could not interfere in them.

This is blasphemy; it is worshipping two Gods. The crucial point for us is to recognize man to be a free entity that enjoys freedom of will and to acknowledge God as the real dominant entity who dominates all our actions.

The Intermediate School

The important issue here is these two positions do not in contradict each other. The crucial point is for us to believe in both God's justice and in man's freedom and responsibility on the one hand and in monotheism and God's sovereignty and dominance over the whole universe, on the other. This is what we mean by the intermediate school (A school which lies between two extreme ideologies).

Now, due to the complicated nature of the issue, let us illustrate it with a clear example:

Suppose you are a train operator and a strong cable of electricity lies along the rails from which the locomotive receives its energy to move. Any time there is a lack of electricity this would force the train to stop.

No doubt, you are free to move around during the entire time of your journey. You are even free to stop the train, to add to, or to decrease the speed of the train. However, despite all this freedom of action, the man who is responsible for the electricity could stop you at any moment since the key to power lies in his hands.

When we observe the situation in the above example, we will see that while this man has freedom of action, he is under the domination of another power and these two situations are not contradictory.

Another Example

Suppose the nerves of someone's hand have become paralyzed due to a certain disease or a disaster and he cannot move his hand. Also imagine that such a person could move his hand if he received electricity from some source.

If such a person, under such conditions, commits a crime, slaps somebody's face or stabs an innocent person, he would be considered guilty

by law since he was physically capable of the atrocity and was free to do so; capable and free man, according to law is responsible for his own acts.

However, the man who provides him with power to move dominates him despite the fact that he is free.

Now, let us return to our main topic: The Almighty God has provided us with strength, power, wisdom and intelligence. We receive these endowments every minute, and if we are disconnected from God, even for the slightest instance, we will be destroyed.

We owe our strength to Him, even our freedom of will stems from Him; this means that He has desired for us to be free and to stay on the road of perfection and progress.

Thus, we are constantly under God's domination despite the fact that we are free to act and this domination is continual. We are nothing without His domination and this is the true meaning of an intermediate path: through the adoption of this option, we have neither posited any associate for God nor do we consider God's servants as being forced to carry out their routine tasks, the result of which would be injustice.

We have learned this lesson from the Infallible Ones(s): Whenever they were asked if there was any road between determinism and delegation, they used to answer, yes, but this road is wider than the distance between the earth and the sky.

Determinism and Free Will in the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an explains this issue explicitly. It proves that man enjoys the principle of free will. There are hundreds of sacred verses in the Holy Qur'an which vividly prove this topic.

All the verses which deal with commands and prohibitions assume man's free will. This is because if man were not free, the above three issues would be irrelevant.

All those verses which blame the evil doers and praise the well-wishers are related to man's freedom to act or else blame and praise would be irrelevant.

All those verses which deal with the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection on the one hand, and reward and chastisement on the other, are related to man's freedom of action. This is because if such freedom did not exist, the issues of chastisement and reward would be irrelevant, and the trial of the evildoers would be pure injustice.

All those verses which stress the fact that men are responsible for what they do, such as the following:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِيْنَةٌ

Every soul is held in pledge for what it earns. [Qur'an 74:38]

كُلُّ اَمْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِيْنٌ

Every man is responsible for what he shall have wrought. [Qur'an 52:21]

And the like, vividly prove man's free will

Verses of the Holy Qur'an such as the following are also clear reasons for man's free will:

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

Surely, we have shown him the way: He may be thankful or unthankful. [Qur'an 76:3]

There are, however, some explanations on some verses of the Holy Qur'an which support the question of "the intermediate affair," which have been interpreted by ignorant individuals as an argument for the belief in determinism. One such verse is the following:

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ

And you do not please except that Allah pleases; surely Allah is All-knowing, Wise. [Qur'an 76:30]

It is evident that this verse and others like it do not want to deprive man of his free will; rather, they show that while man is free in his will, he is under God's domination at the same time.

THINK AND ANSWER

What is meant by "delegated"? What kind of shortcomings does it imply?

Describe through examples learned from the Infallible Ones(s) the view of the intermediate school.

What do the sacred verses of the Holy Qur'an have to say concerning the issue determinism and free will?

If we accepted the issue of determinism, what would happen to the topics of resurrection, Paradise, Hell and the questions asked on the Day of Judgment?

Are verses such as:

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ

Taken to be proof for the validity of the issue of determinism?

Ninth Lecture: Guidance and Misguidance are in the Hands of God

1. Kinds of Guidance and Misguidance

Suppose a tourist stopped you to ask you for directions. There are two options available to you to show him the way:

The first option for you is to accompany him to his destination, and then to turn back saying good-bye to him.

The second option for you is to show him the way with gestures and body language.

You have definitely shown him the right way, but there are differences between the two methods. The second method is only “showing the direction” but the first method can be entitled “accompanying one to his destination.” Guidance is described in both ways in the Holy Qur’an and in the Islamic traditions.

The word “guidance” has been used in the Holy Qur’an with two distinct meanings: sometimes it is “legislative,” i.e., “by way of laws and regulations,” and at other times it is “creative,” (genesis), i.e. through the system of creation, such as the guidance of the sperm towards becoming a whole human being.

In many verses, we read that both guidance and misguidance (going astray) are in God’s hands. No doubt, God shows us the right path because it is He Who has sent both the prophets and the heavenly books, to guide mankind.

However, forcibly accompanying someone to his destination against his will is in fact incompatible with the notion of free will. But since it is God Who provides us with all means for the attainment of our objectives, this sense of guidance, too, comes from God.

A crucial and important question

Now we are faced with a problem. In some of the verses of the Holy Qur’an we read:

فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Then Allah makes whom He pleases err and He guides whom He pleases, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. [Qur’an 14:4]

Reading verses like this one in isolation and ignoring other verses which interpret such a verse makes some individuals jump to the conclusion that God leads those whom He wants and ignores others, and that there is no option left for mankind.

The important point to consider is that we should read the Qur’anic verses in conjunction with each other so that we can arrive at a better grasp of their meaning. Here we will present you with some more verses dealing with the topics of guidance and misguidance (going astray) so that you may read them together and arrive at a better understanding of these verses. At one place we read:

وَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ الظَّالِمِينَ

And Allah causes the unjust to go astray. [Qur’an 14:27]

Elsewhere we read:

كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ مُرْتَابٌ

Thus does Allah cause him to err who is extravagant, a doubter.
[Qur'an 40: 34]

And still at some other place, we read:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

And as for those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways. [Qur'an 29:69]

As you see, God's Determination and Benevolence are well-founded. He will neither guide nor misguide people without the proper considerations.

God has promised to endow with guidance those who take part in holy struggle for Him, those who struggle against their enemies and those who endeavor against their inner selves.

But those who undermine the foundations of justice, those who are involved in extravagance, those who implant temptation in the hearts of others, they will be denied God's guidance. In this way, their hearts shall become dark and they lose the chance to prosper. This is what we mean by "God letting people go astray" and this is justice.

God's Eternal Knowledge an Excuse for Justifying Crime:

The last point related to the issue of the determinism/free will controversy is the excuse that some proponents of determinism use to justify the sins they commit. The structure of the argument is as follows: Did God know that a certain person would commit a crime or would drink wine? If one answers negatively, they would have denied God's knowledge. If one answers positively, then this would be taken to mean that that person should have done that crime or else God's knowledge would have been negated.

Therefore, in order to maintain God's knowledge, sinners have to commit their sins.

But those who are involved in rationalizations of this sort in order to hide their criminal tendencies are in fact ignoring one important point and that point is the following: We said from the beginning that God is aware of the fact that we are free either to obey or to disobey Him. This means that God's knowledge includes his knowledge of our freedom of action. Therefore, if we were forced by our fate to carry out some pernicious act then this would mean that God's knowledge is changed into Ignorance.

Let us now provide you with some concrete and tangible examples: Suppose a high school teacher knew from the outset that a lazy student would fail the final exams. And suppose that this teacher was certain in his knowledge.

Now if the student failed the exam, could he blame his own failure on the teacher's knowledge that he would fail?

Let us give you another example: Suppose an innocent person became aware of the time of the occurrence of a crime and found it advisable to interfere. Does this innocent person's knowledge exonerate the murderer of his crime?

Suppose, as well, that an annotative apparatus was in use which could anticipate the timing of a crime prior to its occurrence by a certain person. Do these mechanical means force the criminal to commit the crime?

In sum, God's knowledge would never force anybody to carry out a wrong action.

THINK AND ANSWER

How many kinds of guidance are there? Describe them.

Give some of the Qur'anic verses which deal with guidance or misguidance.

How would you define God's guidance or misguidance?

What is meant by God's eternal knowledge?

Does this eternal knowledge exonerate us from doing our tasks? Give an example.

Tenth Lecture: God's Justice and Eternal Chastisement (khuld)

We know that the Holy Qur'an explicitly speaks about a special kind of permanent and eternal chastisement called khuld relating to a specific group of infidels and sinners. In one Surah we read:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْكُفَّارَ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا

Allah has promised the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women and the unbelievers the fire of hell to abide therein. [Qur'an 9:68]

The question is raised here as to why a person should undergo the chastisement of millions of years when he has lived on earth only eighty years or one hundred years at most.

The Answer: In order to settle this important question, we have to take the following points into consideration:

The punishments and chastisements of the afterlife are in no way similar to those that a person receives in this world, for instance, confinement in prison. Rather, the punishments of the afterlife are the direct consequence of one's deeds in this world.

In other words, the pain and suffering sinners go through in the other world are the consequences of their actions and deeds in this world.

Regarding this latter point, the Holy Qur'an states very clearly:

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

So this day no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least; and you shall not be rewarded aught but that which you did. [Qur'an 36:54]

Through a simple example, we may visualize this fact

Suppose a person resorted to narcotics or alcoholic beverages and suppose he was repeatedly warned against the destructive effects of these items on his stomach, heart, and nervous system. However, imagine he ignored these warnings and continued with his destructive deeds. He would enjoy the temporary satisfaction that these items provided him.

However, later on he would be inflicted with ulcers, heart disease and possibly a nervous breakdown. Then, he would have to suffer day and night for the rest of his life. Could we now conclude that this individual should not suffer all his life because he enjoyed the narcotics and wine only for a relatively short period of time?

We would immediately reply that he is facing the consequences of his own deeds. Even if he lived as long as Noah, we would still react with the same remark. We would say he is receiving the consequences of his actions.

The punishments of the day of Resurrection are of this kind. Therefore, it is not related to the issue of justice.

It is an error to imagine that the duration of punishment should be the same as the duration of time spent in self-destructive acts. This is because the relation of a sinful act to the punishment is not based on time; rather, it is based on the consequences of the sin committed.

For instance, it might take a murderer only a minute to kill a person, but, in accordance with the criminal laws of some communities, he might be punished with execution. The duration of the sin was very short but the

consequence is very heavy and nobody would consider this punishment as an act of injustice. It is because under such circumstances it is not the matter of minutes, hours, months or years; rather, it is the quality of the sin and its consequences that count.

Perpetuality or “khulud” in Hell and eternal chastisement belong to those who have closed all the windows of salvation on themselves and have knowingly become involved in corruption, unbelief and hypocrisy. Regarding this, the Holy Qur’an has an elegant statement:

بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَاطِئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

Verily, whoever earns evil and his sins beset him on every side, these are the inmates of the fire; in it they shall abide. [Qur’an 2:81]

Such people have disconnected themselves from God and have closed on themselves all the windows of salvation.

Such individuals resemble a bird which has knowingly broken all its wings and has to stay on the earth and has been deprived of its flight into the skies.

A cursory look at the above three points will vividly show that the application of eternal punishment for the special group of hypocrites and infidels is not against the principles of justice. What they receive as punishment is nothing more than the consequences of their previous deeds, of which they had already been warned by the prophets.

These kinds of people would not have received such harsh punishments if they had been ignorant of the prophets’ instructions and guidance.

It is also worth mentioning that based on the Qur’anic verses and Islamic traditions; God’s Benevolence is so wide that it embraces a great majority of sinners through one of the following means:

Through intercession [Shafa’at];

Through pardoning;

Through the performance of minor good deeds for which God provides them with large rewards;

And finally, a group of sinners who have become purified after their confinement in Hell and are ready to receive God’s mercy.

There is only one group of sinners left in perpetual punishment due to their obstinacy and their insistence on continuing in their enmity with righteousness and because of their indulgence in injustice, corruption and hypocrisy.

THINK AND ANSWER

How is it that some people have considered “khulud” or perpetual chastisement as not harmonious with God’s justice?

Are the chastisements of the other world similar to those of this world? If not, how are they?

Does justice imply that the timing of a sin should be equal to the period of punishment?

What kind of people receive perpetual chastisement?

Who will receive God’s pardon?

Notes

[1] Tajrid al-’Aqa’id, The issue of Determinism and Free Will.

[2] Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 119, The Issue of Determinism.

Ten Lectures on Prophethood

First Lecture: Our Need for Divine Leaders

The Limitations of our knowledge

Some people might raise this question: Are prophets needed to lead men?

Isn't our wisdom sufficient enough to grasp the realities? Hasn't the advancement of human knowledge and science assisted man in discovering the truth?

The structure of this argument continues something like this: Our wisdom either comprehends what the prophets have to offer to us, or is unable to understand it. If the first case were true, we would not need the prophets and if the second case is correct, we would not be able to tolerate anything that goes against our wisdom and intellect.

Besides, the argument goes on, is it right for us to be under the guidance of another and listen to him? Are the prophets not human beings like us?

Answers: In order for us to answer these questions and find out the effects of the prophets on mankind, let us consider the following points:

We should be aware that our knowledge is limited in scope and despite all the advances in human science, there are still immense amounts of secret and unknown facts which remain to be discovered. The ratio of our knowledge to the unknown is like the ratio of one drop of water to the ocean. In the words of some great scientists, all the science with which we are now familiar is just the alphabet of the great book of creation.

In other words: the sphere of our judgment or our rational capacities is extremely minute. We are largely unaware of what goes on around us.

However, it is the prophets who widen this scope for us to see well. Our wisdom is like a tiny projector, but the prophets and their relations act as a bright sun. Could anybody claim that he does not need the sun because he is in the possession of a small projector?

Now, let us explain more vividly: the problems of life can be divided into three groups: rational, irrational, and unknown.

The prophets never utter irrational statements; i.e. they never say anything contrary to wisdom. If they did so, they would not be entitled to occupy the high position of prophethood. Rather, they endeavored to bring obscurities to light and this is crucial for our lives.

In the past, some people, such as Brahmins [of India and elsewhere] claimed that they did not need the prophets because they possessed wisdom. Similarly today, some people claim that prophets are not needed since man has advanced significantly in the area of scientific knowledge. These people have recognized neither the scope of human science nor prophethood and the revelations of the prophets.

This looks like the claim of a first grader of an elementary school who claims that since he knows the alphabet he knows everything and does not need teachers. Is this statement well-founded?

Besides, prophets do not play only the role of the teacher. Their leadership is an issue to which we will refer later in our discussion.

No one would dare declare that others should surrender themselves to him. The point to make here is that the prophets, as we shall prove later, possess divine revelation, i.e. they are connected to God's endless knowledge and we should grasp, through definitive reasoning, the nature of

these relations. It is only through this approach that we can understand and adopt the teaching of these divine envoys.

Would I have done anything wrong if I had submitted to the prescription of an adroit and deft physician and acted on it?

The prophets are great spiritual physicians. Would I have done wrong if I had followed the lectures and advice of a teacher with whom I am in harmony? Prophets are man's great teachers.

Now we have to delve into the issue of the necessity of prophethood and the appointment of prophets by God.

We need a Prophet's guidance for three valid reasons. We shall refer to two of them here and postpone the third until we arrive at the next section.

We Need Prophets for Educational Reasons

Even if we could ride an illusory and imaginary mount made of light waves that could travel three hundred thousand kilometers in a second in boundless space we would see only a small and minute portion of the immense universe.

This universe with its immense expanse has not been created in vain, and as we have already seen in the lectures dealing with knowing God, the creation of this world did not provide any satisfaction for God as such. This is because God is a complete and non-finite Being Who does not suffer from any shortcomings, the compensation of which he should resort to the creation of man.

Thus, we shall come to the conclusion that He created this world to endow others with His Benevolence. Through His creation of this world, He desired for His creatures to progress towards perfection. God is like the sun which illuminates everything without needing others. We benefit from the sun's rays without being able to do anything for it in return.

On the other hand, is our knowledge enough on its own to guide us toward prosperity and perfection in every respect?

How much of the world's mysteries are we familiar with? What is the essence of life and existence? When was this world created? Nobody can tell. Until what time will it last? Nobody can tell either.

Every scientist has a hypothesis of his own concerning man's social and economic life for instance.

Some would recommend capitalism, and others would recommend socialism or communism and still others would admire neither of these ideas and consider both of them pernicious.

Concerning other issues there are some disagreements among scholars and sometimes we just do not know which ideology we should adopt. If we judged judiciously, we would confess that we would need a series of right instructions and guidance in order for us to arrive at the main objective behind creation which is "man's growth and progress in all areas." And this could happen only through God's knowledge, i.e. divine revelation through the prophets. Therefore, God Who has created us to go along this path should provide us with such knowledge.

The Need for Leadership in Social and Ethical Fields

We know that besides intelligence and wisdom there are other powerful stimuli within us, known as instincts and desires. Examples are the instinct of self-preservation, the instinct of anger, the sexual instinct and the instinct of possession.

No doubt, if our instincts were not controlled and if they dominated us, our wisdom would become imprisoned and man would turn into a fierce wolf, more dangerous than the desert wolves themselves.

In order for us to gain an ethical education, we need instructors and models to be real examples for us to follow.

For this purpose, a completely educated person is required to help us on such a bumpy and rough path, to modify the flood of our instincts, to provide us with ethical principles and implant in our souls the traits of courage, moral heroism, altruism, compassion, generosity, loyalty, honesty, and chastity.

Except for an innocent and infallible Prophet, who else could be adopted as a guide and instructor?

That is why the Compassionate, Almighty God has not deprived us of such benevolent prophets.^[1]

THINK AND ANSWER

Do you think that the more we know there are still many more unknown things? (Give some examples).

Could you explain the difference between blind imitation and following the prophets?

If we passed through an unfamiliar road without having someone to guide us, what sort of hazards might threaten us?

Explain the different dimensions of our need for prophets.

Can you guess other aspects of this issue that should be studied in the following sections?

Second Lecture: Prophets are Needed to Provide us with Rules and Regulations

In the preceding lecture, we dealt with two functions of the prophets: The educational dimension and the ethical dimension. Now we will deal with their function in providing us with social laws which are crucial to our lives.

We know that man's most important asset is his dynamic social life which is the basis for all his various advancements.

If men lived apart from each other there is, no doubt that we would now be living in a situation not better than that of the Stone Age.

It is the collective endeavor of mankind that has kept the torch of culture and civilization burning. It is our collective efforts which have been the source of all these scientific discoveries and innovations.

For instance, the journey to the moon would never have taken place if a great number of experts and scholars had not continuously worked diligently in the decades that preceded it.

Another example is the transplant of a dead person's heart into the body of a living person and the subsequent saving of a life, whose death would have been inevitable if this operation had not taken place. Such a feat is the result of continual research done on the human heart during the history of mankind.

However, despite the glories that social life provides us, there are still some hardships and obstacles in our way and these are the conflicts that exist in human social life which at times culminate in wars.

In this respect, we appreciate the need for laws and regulations.

Rules could solve three types of hardships

Laws outline an individual's tasks vis-à-vis society and vice versa. They give us the capabilities to flourish and coordinate our efforts.

Laws pave the way for regulating individuals in carrying out their tasks.

Laws prevent individuals from violating each other's rights; laws prevent chaos in one citizen's interaction with another. And laws define punishment for criminals and law-breakers.

Who is the Best Legislator?

Now we would like to know who could be the best legislator; who is most capable in regulating the necessary laws for mankind that could encompass all the three principles mentioned above which outline the individual's rights and interactions with society and which control affairs and inhibit the aggression of law-breakers?

Human society, for example could be likened to a huge train and the government as its engine.

Laws are like the rails of such a train which show the direction towards a specific destination, a direction and route which passes through all kinds of bends and curves, and all sorts of mountains, hills, and valleys.

A good railway should have the following features:

The ground on which the train travels should be strong enough to tolerate the maximum pressure;

The distance between two rails should be the same as that between the wheels of the train.

The direction should not be too steep so that the brakes of the train could function properly.

Landslides should also be prevented and the probability of the occurrence of flooding and avalanches should be accounted for to ensure the safety of the train.

Having considered this example, let us now return to human society:

The legislator who desires to pass the most appropriate laws for human beings should have the following features:

He should know human nature well and be familiar with man's instincts, emotions, needs and problems.

He should consider all man's capabilities and should prepare the necessary laws for them to flourish.

He should be able to predict all the accidents that might inflict the whole nation.

He should not have special personal privileges and prerogatives so that he could design law without seeking to secure his specific interests or those of his close relatives.

Such a legislator should be aware of all the progress that man might have made and all the failures and pitfalls that threaten his safety.

Such a legislator should be completely immune from committing errors, mistakes, blunders and forgetfulness.

He should be strong enough not to be intimidated by any governmental official or by any power. At the same time, he should be extremely amicable and sympathetic.

Who Possesses These Features?

Can a man be the best legislator? Has there been someone who knows man completely when one of the greatest sociologists of our time has written an informative book called "Man, the Unknown Creature."

Is man's mentality, his tendencies, instincts and emotions entirely known to us?

Does anybody else, besides God, know man's spiritual and physical needs? Can you pick a man out of human society who does not have any special interests in his community? Can you identify a man who is immune to faults and blunders?

For these convincing reasons, there is nobody except God and the person who receives His revelations, who could ever be a good and prudent legislator.

Thus, we arrive at the following irrevocable fact; the Creator Who has created man to improve and become perfect should appoint for him guides who could provide man with all-inclusive divine laws.

People would definitely trust those rules that come from God and this trust and recognition will safeguard those laws.

The Relation between Monotheism and Prophethood

It is worth mentioning here that the system of creation as such, is a living witness for the divine prophets and their righteous missions.

It should be pointed out that even a short and cursory look at this marvelous creation will reveal to us that God has not ignored any of the needs of any creature. For instance, He has given us our eyes and then has

provided these eyes with eyelashes and eyelids to protect them from any sort of damage.

God has provided tear-ducts for each eye because dryness destroys them.

God has also provided small openings in the corner of man's eyes to carry the extra water through them into the nose. If these openings were not narrow enough, teardrops would always cover our faces.

God has made man's pupils so sensitive to light that they automatically widens or narrow in response to strong and weak light. This protects the eyes from any unpredictable damage.

There are muscles around the eyeballs which can turn the eyes in different directions to observe different objects.

Could such a God, Who has provided man with all his needs, deprive man of a guide and an infallible leader who is intimately connected with His revelation?

The well-known philosopher, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), in his work called "Shafa" [Remedy] writes:

"Man's need for the appointment of prophets for his survival and for his attainment of virtues is more crucial than the growth of his eye-lashes, eyebrows, the curves in his feet and the like. Thus, it is impossible for the Eternal Benevolence to arrange for the latter and ignore the former."

THINK AND ANSWER

What is man's most precious asset?

Why can't man live without laws?

Give one revealing example of the role of laws in man's life.

What are the characteristics of the best legislator?

Why should prophets be human beings?

Third Lecture: Why are Prophets Sinless [infallible]?

Immunity against Sins and Wrongdoing

No doubt, each Prophet should attract public confidence as his first priority so that no one could identify any trace of wrongdoing, lying, or error in his utterances.

If this is not the case, his very position of leadership will be undermined. If the prophets were not infallible, those who seek for an excuse, under the pretext that the prophets make errors, and those who find the truth, due to the flaws they observe in the Prophet's invitation, would abstain from answering their invitation or at least not accept them enthusiastically.

This reason which could be called "the infallibility reason" is one of the strongest proofs of the infallibility of the prophets.

In other words, how could God order us to obey a person with no pre-conditions while that person might be a wrongdoer? Under such circumstances, if people obey such a person, they would have followed a sinner and if they did not obey him, then his position of leadership would have been compromised.

For this very reason, when the great interpreters interpret the sacred verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

O you who believe: Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you. [Qur'an 4: 59],

they inform us that the reason for this unconditioned obedience is that both the Prophet and "those in authority," who are the infallible Imams, are sinless and infallible. Otherwise, God would never have issued the command for absolute obedience.

Another approach to verify the sinlessness and infallibility of the prophets is to consider the fact that "the factors that contribute to committing sins are non-existent in the prophets."

Now let us explain a little more: When we study ourselves, we will find out that we are almost sinless with respect to some dirty or inappropriate deeds.

Let us observe the following examples:

Have you ever met a wise man who likes to eat fire, dust or garbage? Can you find an intelligent person who likes to walk in the streets naked?

Definitely not; and when we come across such a person, we will be certain that he has gone insane and suffers from some mental disorder.

For this very reason, we could explain this magnificent fact through the following succinct sentence: Every rational and healthy individual is infallible and sinless with respect to a range of improper deeds.

If we delve into this issue a little more, we will find out that some people are immune from the wrongdoing that others commit while ordinary people do not have such immunity.

For instance, a proficient and skillful physician, who has a deep knowledge of microbes and their hazards, would never drink dirty water that had been used to wash the clothes of infected patients, while an illiterate person might unknowingly do this.

We could also come to the following conclusion: the more knowledge we have about a subject, the more immune we are from acting in error regarding that subject.

It is easy for us to see that a person whose faith is strong and who firmly believes in God's justice and vividly sees this justice around him, would be immune against all sins and any repulsive act would seem to him just like walking naked in the streets. For him illegally gained property would look like the flames of fire. In the same way that we refrain from taking fire into our mouths, he too would avoid taking religiously unlawful property.

From these discussions, we could conclude that the prophets, due to their strong faith and knowledge, could easily control and suppress the stimuli for committing sins and the most enticing means to engage in sins could never influence their wisdom or faith. That is why we have concluded that prophets are infallible and immune from sins.

How Could Infallibility be considered a Point of Honor?

Some people who are ignorant of the fact that infallibility and inerrancy inhibit the commission of sins claim that it is not a point of honor for an infallible person not to commit a sin since God has helped him to be so. They add further that this is an imposed infallibility and the person should not claim any virtue for it.

However, with the explanation we have offered above, the answer to such a claim loses its merit. A Prophet's immunity against sins is in no way imposed; rather, it is the result of this powerful faith and conviction and his extra-ordinary knowledge. And this is the greatest point of honor for him.

Is a skillful physician forced to avoid infectious diseases? Is it not a virtue for such an adroit person to observe hygiene? Is it not a point of honor for a lawyer to avoid crimes due to the fact that he knows their consequences?

Thus, we conclude that infallibility on the part of the prophets is entirely voluntary and is considered a great honor for them.

THINK AND ANSWER

How many branches of infallibility are there?

What would happen if the prophets were not infallible?

What is the essence of infallibility?

Could you offer some more instances of actions against which some people are infallible?

Is the infallibility of prophets compulsory or voluntary? Why?

Fourth Lecture: The Best Way to Recognize the Prophet

It is, no doubt, against wisdom and logic to accept the claim of just any claimer. A person who claims to be a Prophet might be telling the truth, but there is always the chance that an opportunist might also claim that he is a Prophet. For this reason, it is necessary for us to have definitive criteria to evaluate such claims.

There are different ways for us to arrive at such an objective. Among them are the following two approaches:

A study of the content of the Prophet's invitations and message;

Miracles and supernatural deeds

Now, let us talk a little about miracles: there are those who are amazed at the word "miracle," or consider miracles to be the stuff of legends and myths. But when we consider the true meaning of miracles, we find out that such conceptions are false.

A miracle is not an impossible act, neither is it an effect with any cause. In plain words, a miracle is an extra-ordinary act whose performance is beyond the power of the common man; rather, its performance depends on a supernatural power.

Thus, a miracle has the following features:

It is an action that is possible and acceptable.

Ordinary people or even men of great genius who are reliant on human power are not capable of performing such an act.

The performer of a miracle should be so confident of his performance that he could invite others to challenge him.

No one else could perform the same miracle, and as its name implies, no one would be able to perform it and would be frustrated in attempting it.

A miracle should be accompanied with the claim to prophethood or Imamate [thus, any extraordinary work performed by a common man is not a miracle; rather it is an act of divine grace (Karamah)]

Some Vivid Examples

All of us have heard that one of the miracles performed by Jesus Christ(s) was to bring the dead back to life and to cure incurable diseases.

What scientific or rational reasons do we have to believe a man could not return to life after his body was dead? Or what rational reasons are there for us not to believe that a cancer patient who was considered incurable could be cured?

Of course, man, with his normal powers, is not capable of resuscitating the dead or curing many diseases, even if all the world physicians worked together.

But why couldn't a man who is equipped with a divine power and who is cognizant of God's immense ocean of Knowledge resuscitate a dead body or cure an incurable disease?

Science says: I do not know and am not capable, but it could never say that it is impossible or irrational.

Another example: A journey to the moon without a spacecraft would be impossible for any human being. But what is wrong for a person to do it if

he is equipped with a supernatural force and with a mysterious mount that is very different from what we have seen?

Anybody who could perform such feats and then claim prophethood and invite people to challenge him must be definitely sent by God.

This is because it is impossible for God to give a thief and a liar such a power to mislead people.

Miracles should not be mingled with Superstitions

Going to extremes have always caused the distortion of facts and truth. The same is also true regarding miracles.

While some modernist thinkers, either explicitly or implicitly deny all miracles, other groups of people invent miracles and present others with weak Islamic traditions and superstitious myths, which are probably the work of mysterious enemies, thus defacing the Prophet's true and intellectually sound miracles by encapsulating them within the cover of illusion and superstition.

True miracles do not show their merits unless they are pruned of such man-made, invented myths.

For this very reason, our religious thinkers have always been careful to present Islamic narrations without such man-made innovations.

These Islamic thinkers created a science called "the science of the men of religion" so that they could evaluate the narrators and they could distinguish correct narrations from weak ones and stop the mixing of truth with illusory and baseless ideas.

Colonizers and atheistic movements have also not remained idle and have also endeavored to mix pure, clean religious ideas with baseless superstition. In this way, they have frantically tried to give an unscientific aspect to these genuine miracles. However, we should always be aware of the destructive conspiracies of our enemies.

The Differences between Miracles and Other Extraordinary Acts

Sometimes we hear about people performing supernatural deeds. Many have witnessed such feats. This is a fact, not a myth.

Now this question is raised: What is the difference between these extraordinary acts and the miracles of the prophets? What are the criteria to distinguish between them?

There are two clear answers to this question:

Yogis perform only a limited set of acts. In other words, no Yogi would do any act that you might suggest; rather, he would carry out the extraordinary act at which he is adept. This is obvious since the power of human beings is limited and he can become an expert only in one or of practice.

However, there is no limit to the Prophet's extraordinary feats. There is no condition on them.

At any moment, a Prophet is ready to perform any miracle required of him. This is because they receive their power from God. And we know that there is no limit to God's power while man's power is limited.

What a yogi may perform could be done by another yogi, so their practice is not beyond the power of man.

For this very reason, a yogi would never challenge others to carry out the same feat he does. This is because there might be other people like him.

However, the prophets challenged others to do what they did and they would say, “If all people on the earth gathered together, they would never be able to do what we do.”

The same applies to magic. These two differences clearly distinguish miracles from magic, as well.

THINK AND ANSWER

Why is a miracle called by this name?

Are miracles considered as exceptions to the law of cause and effect?

How could you distinguish miracles from the works of yogis?

What are the main principles of miracles?

Have you ever encountered a phenomenon similar to a miracle in your life?

Fifth Lecture: The Greatest Miracle of the Prophet of Islam

The Eternal Miracle

All Islamic scholars believe that the Holy Qur'an is the greatest miracle of the Prophet of Islam. The reasons for this statement are as follows:

The Holy Qur'an is a rational miracle which deals with people's souls.

The Holy Qur'an is an eternal miracle.

The Holy Qur'an is a miracle that says aloud:

"If you say this book is not from God, then bring forth one like it."

This challenge is explicitly stated in the Holy Qur'an:

قُلْ لَّيِّنَ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنَّ عَلَىٰ أَن يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا

Say: If men and jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur'an, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them supported the other. [Qur'an 17:88]

Still on another occasion, The Holy Qur'an has eased the condition for such a challenge:

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُوْرٍ مِّثْلِهِ مُفْتَرِيَاتٍ وَادْعُوا مَن اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

Or do they say: He has forged it. Say: then bring ten forged chapters like it and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful. [Qur'an 11:13]

And later, the Holy Qur'an adds: if they did not accept this invitation, be aware that these verses are from God.

فَالَّذِينَ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكُمْ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أُنْزِلَ بِعِلْمِ اللَّهِ وَأَن لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

But if they do not answer you, then know that it is revealed by Allah's knowledge and that there is no god but He; will you then submit? [Qur'an 11:14].

Once again, the Holy Qur'an has set the least condition for challenges against it:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُوْرَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our Servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your witness besides Allah if you are truthful. [Qur'an 2:23]

In the next verse, the Holy Qur'an explicitly states:

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

But if you do it not and never shall you do it, then guard yourselves against the fire whose fuel will be men and stones and is prepared for the unbelievers. [Qur'an 2:24]

These continual challenges reveal the fact that the Great Prophet had relied heavily on the Holy Qur'an and presented it as his miracle despite the fact that he performed numerous other miracles mention of which can be found in the history books.

Since the Holy Qur'an is a living miracle which is available to all, we shall rely on it extensively.

How did the Infidels Show Their Weakness in Response to These Challenges?

It is worth noting that the Holy Qur'an put a lot of pressure on the infidels to encourage them to mount a response to its challenge because it did not like to give the infidels a chance to make excuses.

Expressions such as "If you tell the truth"... "You would never be capable of"... "Ask the whole world for assistance"... "Bring forth at least one Surah like it"... "If you become an unbeliever, a burning fire is waiting for you"... all explain this truth.

Besides all this, the Prophet's Holy wars against the unbelievers was not an easy job because Islam had endangered not only their religion to which they were inclined but also their economic and political interests. In short, even their very existence was severely jeopardized.

In other words, the advance of Islam had disturbed every aspect of their life. For this very reason, they had to fight back vehemently.

In order to weaken the Prophet of Islam, they decided to bring forth verses similar to those of the Holy Qur'an so that they could not be intimidated by it any more.

They asked all the eloquent writers among the Arabs to combat the Holy Qur'an but each time they took part in the competition they were the losers. The account of these failures is recorded in history books.

The Story of Walid Ibn Mughirah

Among those who were invited to this contest was Walid Ibn Mughirah, of the tribe of Banu-Makhzum who was quite well-known among the Arabs in those days for his penmanship and his literary style.

He was asked to deliberate on the Holy Qur'an and tell others about the impressions he got from it. Walid asked the Prophet to recite some of the verses of the Holy Qur'an for him and the Prophet recited a part of the Surah ha-Mim.^[2]

These verses excited Walid so much that he jumped up instantly and headed towards the tribe of Banu-Makhzum, saying vehemently, "I swear to God I heard some words from Muhammad that are similar neither to the words of human beings nor of the fairies." He then uttered the following:

"His statements have a special flavor and a unique beauty. Above them you would assume branches filled with fruits and their roots encompass deep meanings which dominate everything and are dominated by nothing."

These remarks of Walid caused the rumor among the tribe of Quraish that Walid had been enchanted by Muhammad(s).

Abu-Jahl hurriedly went to his house, and told him what he had heard from the men of Quraish and invited him to a meeting they were holding.

Arriving in their company, Walid asked them: Do you think Muhammad is crazy? Have you observed any symptoms of madness?

The audience replied in unison that they did not, and then he asked them if they thought that he was a liar. Had he not been well-known among them as a trustworthy man?

Some of the Quraishi leaders replied “Then with what term shall we accuse him? Walid thought for a moment and then replied: “Call him a wizard.”

Although they desired to drive away the masses that had been fond of The Holy Qur’an, this very appellation of “magic” was living proof of the supernatural attraction of the Holy Qur’an. They thus interpreted this attraction as “magic” when in reality these two are not connected, at all.

This is why the Quraish men spread the rumor that Muhammad was a skillful wizard and that those verses were his magic. They advised the people to stay away from him and not to listen to his words.

However, they failed in every respect and those thirsty for the truth and those who found it, who were clean-hearted, gathered around the Holy Qur’an in the thousands and were satisfied with the content of its verses. The defeated enemies had to withdraw.

Today, too, like in the past, the Holy Qur’an invites all peoples to challenge it and it proclaims: If you are in doubt concerning the validity of these verses, and if you imagine they are man-made, then bring forth something like them. I invite you scientists, you philosophers, you literary men and you writers from all nations and tribes, to do so.

We know that the enemies of Islam, especially Christian priests, who see Islam as a revolutionary sect that is full of meaning, and who visualize Islam as a threat to their interests, spend millions of dollars every year to carry out their anti-Islamic propaganda. They carry out their obnoxious activities in Islamic countries under the pretext of cultural, scientific, medical and hygienic activities.

Why have they not taken the short-cut by inviting Christian Arabs, and Arab scientists, poets, writers and philosophers to write and produce some Surahs like those of the Holy Qur’an, in this way, they could silence Muslims forever.

They would have done this under any circumstances if they could. Their weakness vis-à-vis this issue is a firm argument against the infidels and a living argument in favor of the miraculousness of the Qur’an.

THINK AND ANSWER

Why is the Holy Qur’an considered as the Holy Prophet’s greatest miracle?

How does the Holy Qur’an invite people to challenge it?

Why did the unbelievers give the title of “magic” to the Holy Qur’an?”

Why is Islam considered as the sturdy rival of Christianity?

What was the story of Walid Ibn Mughirah?

Sixth Lecture: A Brief Look at the Miracles of the Holy Qur'an

Why the Discontinuous letters?

We know that at the start of most Surahs of the Holy Qur'an we will find discontinuous letters, such as Alif, Lam, Mim [ALM], ALMR, and Yasin [YS].

In accordance with some Islamic narrations, God has used these letters to show that one eternal miracle of creation, i.e., the Holy Qur'an, is simply composed of letters and it is constructed in such a way as readily could be produced even by children. The very fact that such a masterpiece is composed of such simple letters, is a miracle in itself.

Now this question may be raised: How is the Holy Qur'an a miracle? Is it because of its eloquence and clearness or because of something else?

When the Holy Qur'an is looked at from different angles, different aspects of its miracle manifest themselves, including the following:

Eloquence and clearness: the words and lexical items in The Holy Qur'an have their specific attraction.

The content of the verses is extremely magnificent. The verses are free from superstitions.

Scientific miracles: this means the disclosure of issues which had not been attained in those dark days;

Vivid and explicit prediction of future events (the concealed news of the Holy Qur'an)

Lack of contradiction and unrelated issues

A complete discussion of these five issues would need a large space. However, a short reference to each one of them seems reasonable.

Eloquence and Clarity

We know that every discourse has two aspects: the words and the semantic content.

A discourse is called eloquent and clear when its words and morphemes are chosen in such a way that they show coherence and a lack of ambiguity. When the conditions are fulfilled, the text is deemed attractive.

The Holy Qur'an possesses these two distinctive features in such a way that up to now no one has ever been able to produce anything as attractive and elegant as its verses and Surahs.

In the previous lectures we read about the story of Walid Ibn Mughirah, the representative of the Arab infidels, who became so excited upon hearing the recitation of the Holy Qur'an that he ordered the Quraish leaders to describe the Holy Qur'an with the pejorative word "magic" and Muhammad as a "magician."

They used this expression repeatedly for the Prophet. Although they did so cast aspersions on the Prophet, in fact, it showed their admiration of him. This is because the word "magic" implied that the Holy Qur'an had a tremendous effect on the audience.

However, instead of accepting the Holy Qur'an as a miracle and believing in it, they went astray and called it sorcery.

There are many instances reported in the history of Islam of aggressive unbelievers who converted to Islam upon hearing the Holy Qur'an recited to them. This clearly shows that the eloquence and clarity of the Holy Qur'an was a sign of its miraculousness. For those familiar with Arab literature. The more they read the Holy Qur'an, the more they became fascinated and enchanted by its verses.

Qur'anic expressions are extremely well-arranged, accompanied with an elegant style, vividness, and lack of obscurities or ambiguity.

It is worth mentioning that Arab literature in those dark ages was sublime and the poetry which has survived from the pre-Islamic era is still highly accomplished even today.

It is said that each year the most famous literary men of the Hijaz used to assemble and present the best examples of their poetry in the 'Ukaz Market, which was a trade and literary center. The best poem was then regarded as "the poem of the year." After this, they would write it down and post it in Mecca. When the Prophet started his mission, there had been seven such masterpieces which were collectively termed "the Seven Suspensions."

However, upon the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, every one of those seven literary masterpieces lost its fame and were finally forgotten forever.

The interpreters of the Holy Qur'an elucidated its subtleties in their commentaries on the sacred verses, and one can see a range of such interpretations in related works.^[3]

Familiarity with the Holy Qur'an reveals the complete sincerity and lack of exaggeration in the following statement uttered by the Prophet of Islam:

ظَاهِرُهُ أَيْقُنْ وَبَاطِنُهُ عَمِيقٌ؛ لَا تَخْصَى عَجَائِبُهُ وَلَا تَبْلَى غَرَائِبُهُ

"The outward aspect of the Holy Qur'an is elegant and its content is deep. No one can enumerate the number of the miracles of the Holy Qur'an and its wonders would never be out-dated."

The great student of the school of the Holy Qur'an, Imam 'Ali(s), regarding this issue writes in the Nahj al-Balaghah:

فِيهِ رَبِيعُ الْقَلْبِ وَيَنَابِيعُ الْعِلْمِ وَمَا لِلْقَلْبِ جَلَاءٌ غَيْرُهُ

"The spring of hearts lies in the Qur'an; rivers of knowledge spring from it. There is no polish effective for man's heart and soul than this book."

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the philosophy behind the use of the discontinuous letters in the Holy Qur'an?

Is the Holy Qur'an considered a miracle or a series of miracles?

Why did the opponents of Islam call the Prophet of Islam by the pejorative name "magician"?

What is the difference between eloquence and clarity?

To what era does "the Seven Suspensions" belong and what does this phrase mean?

Seventh Lecture: The world view of the Holy Qur'an

As a prelude to our discussion, we should discuss the environment in which the Holy Qur'an was nurtured.

In the opinion of all historians, the land of hijaz was one of the most retarded and backward sections of the world of antiquity. For this reason, the pre-Islamic Arabs were considered as savage or semi-savage.

Ideologically, they enthusiastically worshipped idols and these stone and wooden idols had a dark domination over their lives. It is also narrated that they used to make idols out of dates and bowed before them. However, at the time of famine, they would eat them.

Despite their hatred towards girls and in spite of the fact that they buried them alive, they considered the angels as the daughters of God. In this way, they lowered God's position to the status of a man.

They were baffled by the notions of monotheism and when the Prophet of Islam invited them to monotheism, they remarked in astonishment:

أَجْعَلِ الْآلِهَةَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجَابٌ

Has he managed to substitute one God for various gods? Really, this is a strange thing! [Qur'an 38:5]

Anybody who said anything against their superstitions, false myths or illusory thoughts was considered a lunatic.

A tribal system dominated their community and the differences among the tribes were so acute that the fire of war was never extinguished among them. They easily shed each other's blood; and plunder was considered as a point of honor and their daily routine.

The number of literate men who could barely read and write in the city of Mecca was very few and scientists and learned men were scarce among them.

Out of such an environment, an unlettered man arose and brought forth a book whose content was so rich that after fourteen centuries scholars are still busy interpreting it and new truths are still being discovered in it.

The way the Holy Qur'an depicts the world of being is very accurate and precise. It presents the idea of monotheism in the most complete manner and introduces, in an elegant way, the mysteries of the creation of the universe, day and night, the sun and the moon, and of the plants and man, as signs of a unique God.

Sometimes, the Holy Qur'an penetrates into man's soul and speaks of innate monotheism saying:

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلِكِ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ

When they embark on a ship (as soon as they feel some danger is approaching them on the sea) they invoke Allah sincerely, but when they are landed safely, they forget their Savior and again they consider partners for Allah. [Qur'an 29:65]

At other times, the Holy Qur'an, based on wisdom and rational thinking, discusses rational Monotheism, describing the outside world and the inner soul, and explaining the mysteries of the earth and the universe, the animals, the mountains, the seas, the rain, storms, and the subtle realities of man's spirit and body.

When discussing God's attributes, the Holy Qur'an uses the most profound and attractive methods: On one occasion it says:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

There is none like Him. [Qur'an 42:11]

In other places, the Holy Qur'an says:

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ. هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ. هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

He is Allah besides Whom there is no god; the Knower of the unseen and the seen; He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is Allah, besides Whom there is no god; the King, the Holy, the Giver of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness Glory be to Allah from what they set up (with Him).

He is Allah the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most excellent names; whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares His glory; and He is the Mighty, the Wise. [Qur'an 59: 21-24]

In describing God's Knowledge and in explaining His Infinite Nature, the Holy Qur'an makes use of the most elaborate expressions:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْنَامٌ وَالْبَحْرِ يَمُدُّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ

And if all the trees on the earth were pens and the seas were ink with seven more seas, yet the words of Allah would not be exhausted. [Qur'an 31:27]

Concerning God's dominance over everything and His presence everywhere, the Holy Qur'an employs elegant expressions such as the following:

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ

And Allah's is the East and the West, therefore, wheresoever you turn, there is Allah's face. [Qur'an 2:115]

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَمَا كُنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

And He is with you wherever you are; and Allah sees what you do. [Qur'an 57:4]

And when the Holy Qur'an deals with the issue of Resurrection and the Day of Judgment, it astounds the unbelievers and neutralizes their argument by saying:

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ. قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنْشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ. الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ مِنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنْتُمْ مِنْهُ تُوقَدُونَ. أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ بَلَى وَهُوَ الْخَالِقُ الْعَلِيمُ. إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten. Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognizant of all creation. He Who has made for you the fire (to burn) from the green

tree, so that with it you kindle (fire). Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like of them? Yea! And He is the Creator (of all), the Knower. His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is. [Qur'an 36: 78-82]

In those days when photography and sound recording did not yet exist the Holy Qur'an says in relation to man's deeds:

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا

On that day, she shall tell her news because your Lord had inspired her. [Qur'an 99:4-5]

The Holy Qur'an also talks about the witness that our hands, feet and skins would offer on that day:

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

On that day, We will set a seal upon their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness of what they earned. [Qur'an 36:65]

وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا دِهِم لِمَ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

And they shall say to their skins: why have you borne witness against us? They shall say: Allah Who makes everything speak has made us speak. [Qur'an 41:21]

The true value of Qur'anic knowledge and its freedom from any superstition becomes evident only when we compare it with "the distorted Old Testament and the New Testament of today." For instance, when we compare what the Holy Qur'an and the Bible have to say concerning man's creation, what they have to say concerning the prophets, and how they describe God, then we can vividly see the differences.^[4]

THINK AND ANSWER

What are the main features of the social environment from which the Holy Qur'an arose?

How did idolatry influence their thought at this time?

What is the difference between natural and rational monotheism?

What is the logic of the Holy Qur'an in describing God and His Attributes?

How could we better comprehend the contents of the Holy Qur'an?

Eighth Lecture: The Holy Qur'an with Respect to the Scientific Discoveries of our Time

The Holy Qur'an is not a book on natural science, medicine, psychology or mathematics; it deals instead with man's guidance and his development and says what is necessary concerning these issues.

We should not expect to find an encyclopedia in the Holy Qur'an. Rather, we should look for spiritual guidance, piety, virtues, humanity, ethics, order and law and the Holy Qur'an has them all.

To achieve such an aim, the Holy Qur'an sometimes refers to some subjects related to the natural sciences, the mysteries of creation and the wonders of the universe. This is especially true regarding those topics which are related to monotheism. Depending on the course of the argument the Holy Qur'an, always, reveals some of the mysteries of creation and unveils some facts that were not known to the scientists and scholars of those days.

We shall refer to this group of Qur'anic expressions as "the scientific miracles of the Holy Qur'an" and we shall talk about some of these miracles here:

The Holy Qur'an on Gravity

Nobody had discovered the law Gravity before Newton. It is said that one day when Newton was sitting beneath an apple tree an apple fell upon his head and this incident occupied his mind for a number of years afterwards.

He would ask himself "what was the force that attracted the apple?" "Why did it not rise toward the sky?" And only after years of hard work did he find out about gravity. His law ran something like this: "Every material body exerts a mutual attraction each other directly proportional to their masses and inversely proportional with the square of their distance apart."

The discovery of this law led man to discover the source of the solar system. It was found out why these gigantic heavenly bodies rotate around the sun on their orbits and why they could not escape from their orbits. It was discovered why they did not collapse over one another and what kind of power kept all the bodies rotating in this endless space.

Yes, Newton discovered the fact that the rotational movement of a body tends to let it escape from the center and the law of attraction pulls it toward the center and when these two powers are in equilibrium, their centripetal and centrifugal forces let them stay on their orbit and move in the correct direction.

However, the Holy Qur'an, more than one thousand years ago, explained the same notion in the second verse of Surah Ra'd [Thunder]:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي رَفَعَ السَّمَاوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّكُمْ تُوقِنُونَ

Allah is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that you see, and He is firm in power. He made the sun and the moon subservient to you; each one pursues its course to an appointed time; He regulates the affair, making clear the signs that you may be certain of meeting Your Lord. [Qur'an 13:2]

We read in a narration under this verse from Imam `Ali Ibn Moses Al-Reza (s):

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ يَقُولُ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا؟ قُلْتُ: بَلَى. قَالَ: ثُمَّ عَمَدٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَرَوْنَهَا

Doesn't God say that He erected the skies without a pillar? The narrator says: I replied to the Imam (s): yes. He then replied: there is a pillar, but you cannot see it.

Is there a clearer and easier expression than this in the Arab literature to explain gravity? In another narration from Imam `Ali(s) we read:

هَذِهِ النُّجُومُ فِي السَّمَاءِ مَدَائِنٌ مِثْلَ الْمَدَائِنِ الَّتِي فِي الْأَرْضِ، مَرْبُوطَةٌ كُلُّ مَدِينَةٍ إِلَى عَمُودٍ مِنْ نُورٍ

These stars which lie in the sky are like the cities on the earth. Every city of this series is connected to the other city through a beam of light.

Scientists now agree that there can be millions of inhabitable stars with intelligent beings on them; the details are not clear yet, however.

The Discovery of the Rotation of the Earth around Itself and its Orbit around the Sun

It is said that the first scientist who discovered the rotation of the earth itself was the Italian Galileo who lived in Italy four centuries ago. Prior to him, scientists believed in the astronomy of the Egyptian scientist called Ptolemy who said that the earth was the center of the world and the heavenly bodies rotate around it.

Of course, Galileo was ostracized by the church due to this discovery. But when he expressed his repentance, he was rescued from an inevitable punishment of death. Later, however, other scientists followed up his theory and today the orbit of the earth around the sun has become an established fact, which could be perceived even through normal observation. Space flight has proven even more than this.

To Sum up: The assumption that the earth was the center of the universe was rejected and it was found out that this error only occurred because of our perception.

The Ptolemaic theory dominated scientific thought for nearly fifteen centuries and up to the appearance of the Holy Qur'an nobody dared to oppose this theory.

However, when we refer to the verses of the Holy Qur'an, we find out that in verse 88 of Surah Naml [27], the orbit of the earth is explicitly expressed:

وَتَرَى الْجِبَالَ تَحْسَبُهَا جَامِدَةً وَهِيَ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ السَّحَابِ صُنِعَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَتَقَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ إِنَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَفْعَلُونَ

And you see the mountains, you think them to be solid, and they shall pass away as the passing away of the cloud-the handiwork of Allah Who has made everything thoroughly; surely, He is Aware of what you do.

The above verse explicitly talks about the movement of the mountains despite the fact that we see them as stationary. Similarly, the movement of the earth and the clouds implies both speed and the quiet nature of this movement.

The above sacred verse employs the expression to mean the movement of the mountains for the movement of the earth for emphasis. This is because mountains cannot move unless the earth on which they lie moves as well.

Now, is it not a scientific miracle to talk about the movement of the earth at a time when everybody believed in the stationary nature of the earth?

And it is amazing that such a great assertion has been made by an illiterate person who lived in the most backward, parts of the world.

Now, isn't this statement of the Holy Qur'an a sign of its validity?

THINK AND ANSWER

What is meant by the scientific miracles of the Holy Qur'an?

Who discovered the law of gravity for the first time and when did he live?

In which verse did the Holy Qur'an refer to the law of gravity and in what interpretation does it employ this law?

Who believed in the central status of the earth and who discovered its rotation?

In which verse did the Holy Qur'an refer to the rotation of the earth and in what interpretation does it use this term?

Ninth Lecture: Another Proof for the Legitimacy of the Prophet of Islam

In order for us to realize the legitimacy of a Prophet's claim to prophethood and in order to find out if he is truthful or a pretender, apart from observing his miracles, we have the following set of methods available to us:

His ethical traits and his past social activities;

The conditions which govern and dominate the time of the claim;

The temporal conditions;

The content of the claim;

The program of implementation and the means to arrive at the objective;

The level of the claimant's faith and loyalty to his aims;

His firm standing against any compromise;

The speed of his influence over the public;

A Survey of those who have adopted the new faith and a study of their social standing.

Through the application of these nine approaches to any claimant of prophethood, we could easily test the validity of his claim.

Now we will apply the above tests to the Prophet of Islam and present a brief description of his traits despite the fact that a complete description of the characteristic of the Prophet of Islam(s) requires numerous volumes of books.

With respect to the ethical traits and post social activities of the Prophet (s), both his detractors and supporters agree upon the fact that he was completely trustworthy and was well known for this trait. History tells us that when he was leaving for the city of Medina, he appointed `Ali(s) to return people's deposits to them.

His bravery, perseverance, good-temper, generosity, and gentleness could be observed during his holy wars as well as during times of peace. His public pardon which he issued after the conquest of Mecca and the surrender of the aggressive enemies of Islam is a living document for this claim.

We all know that both the ordinary person and the genius consciously or unconsciously are influenced by their environment. Of course, this influence varies from person to person.

Now, imagine an individual who had been brought up for forty years in an environment dominated by idol worship and superstition. How could he show his inclination towards pure monotheism and fight against all manifestations of infidelity?

Is it not odd that out of such a strange environment replete with superstitious ideas, the best form of scientific advancement could emerge?

Could we ever think that such an extraordinary individual could have come forth without divine confirmation?

Observe the time at which such a great Prophet appeared. He appeared when the world was under the domination of a dark age: the time in which despotism, discrimination, unjust racial attitudes and class conflict prevailed. It is better to listen to Imam `Ali(s) who had witnessed both the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras: He says:

“God appointed him for such a mission at a time when people used to live under ignorance, when their wisdom and rational thinking were under devilish whims and wishes; at a time when arrogance and false pride had caused their down fall; at a time when the darkness of the period of Ignorance had led them astray and they were caught between ignorance and perplexity”^[5]

Now think, under such severe conditions, how could a religion have come into being whose watchwords were equality among men, and the elimination of racial and class discrimination?

The content of its invitation were equality and unanimity in all aspects, the negation of cruel and unjust relationships, the unity of mankind, the struggle against cruelty, a design for a world government, defense of the needy, and the adoption of purity and piety.

In implementing his program, he always employed sacred means to arrive at his sacred goals. He used to say explicitly:

وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ اَلَّا تَعْدِلُوْا

Your enmity with a specific group should not hinder you from performing justice. [Qur'an 5:8]

His commands in the arena of war included the observance of ethical principles, not attacking non-military persons, avoiding the destruction of date-plantations and orchards, not contaminating the enemy's drinking water and the amicable treatment of prisoners of war.

The effect of his teachings was so profound that his enemies worried about individuals getting close to this because his influence over people was tremendous. So when he would begin to deliver his sermons, his enemies would make much commotion so that his followers could not hear what he was saying.

In order for the Prophet's enemies to discourage people from being attracted by the Prophet's charisma, they called him a wizard and described his words and discourse as magic. The use of these pejorative titles indicates the profound impact the Prophet had over his listeners.

The amount of sacrifice that he made towards the new religion which he had brought proved that he cared more than others about it.

In some wars when newly converted young men would flee the scene, he showed great fortitude and never turned his back on the enemy. In those situations when the enemy tried to bribe, intimidate or entice him, he stayed firm and maintained position.

The enemies of Islam repeatedly tried to make him go astray, but they failed each time. He used to say: Even if you place the sun in one of my hands and the moon in the next, I would never abandon this religion.

His efforts in communicating the principles of Islam were both amazing and swift. His impact on people was tremendous. Those who read western views on Islamic history would notice how surprised they are concerning the spread of Islamic ideology among different people. For instance, three well-known authors writing on “the history of western civilization and its bases in the East” have openly confessed to this fact for example one of them has said:

“It is still a mystery how Islam spread all over the civilized nations of those days in less than a century.”

Yes, indeed it is still an enigma how Islam spread so widely among the hearts of people and how it could absorb civilizations and establish a civilization of its own.

His enemies were the tyrants and unjust dictators and some of the affluent classes of society. The newly converted on the other hand were among the penniless and the deprived, poverty-stricken individuals or even slaves: they were people who had nothing except for sincerity and purity of heart.

From the above discussion, we could easily come to the conclusion that Muhammad's invitation to Islam was a divine one: it was an invitation whose source lay in the supernatural, and it was the Hand of God who had dispatched him for man's salvation from dire corruption, ignorance, injustice and faithlessness.

THINK AND ANSWER

In order for us to verify the authenticity of a Prophet's mission, do we have any other way available to us except for miracles?

What is meant by collecting evidence? What aspects should be taken into consideration?

Could we get anything out of comparing the conditions of the Arabs both in the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras?

Tell us something concerning the Arabs in particular and the world in general during the pre-Islamic, Period of Ignorance.

Why did the foes of Islam give the pejorative title of “a magician” to the Prophet(s)?

Tenth Lecture: The Prophet of Islam: the Seal of the Prophets

The Real Meaning of the Seal of the Prophets

The Prophet of Islam is the last of God's prophets and with him the cycle of prophethood comes to an end and this is one of the "essential beliefs of Islam."

The true meaning of "essential" here is that anybody who enters the rank and file of the Muslims would soon realize that all followers of the Prophet believe him to be the last. In other words, such a person would soon realize that Muslims agree unanimously on the principle that Muhammad(s) is the last of the prophets in the same way that they emphasize the principle of monotheism and no Muslim is awaiting the arrival of another Prophet.

In fact, with the Prophet's mission, human civilization and perfection are now on their right paths and have reached a mature status to be able to stay on their own course. Now man can solve his problems through his use of Islam's complete codes of instructions and teachings.

This notion could be expressed in another way: Islam is the most complete and ultimate stage in the evolution of human civilization. In its ideology, Islam is the most complete and in practice, Islamic laws deal with all human needs.

The Reasons why the Prophet is the Last Prophet

To verify this claim, we will present three clear reasons here:

The necessity behind Muhammad's being the last Prophet: We have seen so far that anybody who comes into contact with a Muslim would realize that he or she believes that the Prophet of Islam is the last Prophet. Therefore, if anybody accepted Islam through logical reasoning, he has to accept this principle. And since in the previous lectures we dealt with the legitimacy and authenticity of this religion, we have to accept and believe that the Prophet of Islam is the last Prophet.

Some verses of the Holy Qur'an deal with this principle. An example is the following:

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ

***"Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Apostle of Allah and the seal of the prophets."* [Qur'an 33:40]**

This interpretation came into being at a time when the adoption of sons was a common practice among Arabs. They used to accept as their son somebody else's son whom they adopted their own. That child would be adopted and accepted in the family circle and even got some share in the inheritance.

Islam put an end to such a backward custom, and adopted sons no longer benefited from inheritance. Among these was Zayd, the adopted son of the Prophet of Islam. Thus, this verse says: Instead of introducing the Prophet of Islam as the father of a specific individual, define him through two of his real characteristics: i.e. his prophethood and his being the last Prophet.

This interpretation reveals the fact that this principle was an accepted and generally verified fact.

Now we would like to know the real meaning of finality as related to the Prophet's mission. The word "Khatam" comes from the word "Khatm," meaning "final." For instance, a seal at the end of a letter is called khatm or finisher.

In Islamic narrations, we read that when the Prophet(s) decided to write letters to the rulers in those days to invite them to the new religion, he was told to stamp and seal his letters with a seal because it was the habit of Iranian rulers and statesmen not to accept any letter that was not sealed. For this reason, the Prophet(s) ordered his men to make a ring for him on the signet of which was written:

"There is no associate for God and Muhammad is God's messenger." From then on letters were sealed with this ring.

Thus, the true meaning of "khatam" is something that completes.

There are numerous narrations, as well, which irrevocably prove the fact that the Prophet of Islam is the last prophet.

Some of these narrations are as follows:

In an authentic narration from Jabir Ibn `Abdullah Ansari, the Prophet(s) said:

"Among the prophets I am like the last brick in the construction of a building. Everybody who looks at the building admires it. They say: this building is beautiful except for the fact that one brick is missing. I am that missing brick. I am the completer in the line of the Prophets."^[6]

Imam sadiq (s) says:

حَالِلٌ مُحَمَّدٌ حَالِلٌ أَبَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَحَرَامٌ أَبَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

"What Muhammad made halal [i.e. something considered Islamically permissible by the Prophet(s)] would be halal until the Day of Resurrection Day. And what he made haram [i.e. something prohibited by Islam] would be haram until the Day of resurrection."^[7]

In a well-known narration, narrated by both Shi`ah and Sunni traditionists, we read that the Prophet told Imam `Ali(s):

أَنْتَ مِنِّي بِمَنْزِلَةِ هَارُونَ مِنْ مُوسَى إِلَّا أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنِّي بَعْدِي

"You are to me as Aaron was to Moses except for the fact that there will be no Prophet after me."

There are ten other narrations like this one, in the literature.

There are some issues concerning Muhammad as the Last Prophet:

Some say, if the mission of the prophets is a divine benefit, why should the people of these days be deprived of such a benefit? Why should there not be a leader to guide people today?

Those who utter such words are ignorant of the fact that the deprivation of the people today of having a Prophet could not be considered as a weak-point for people; rather, due to the fact that people of the world have matured sufficiently, there is no need for another Prophet. These people could use Islamic guidelines to continue their lives.

To clarify the issue, let us give an example: There have been five prophets who brought divine books (i.e. those in authority); they were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the Prophet of Islam(s). Each one of these had tried to lead the people of the world during an era in human history. Each

Prophet then passed on his mission to the next. This succession of missions continued up to the point when the people of the world had arrived at their destination. This resembles the act of a student who finishes his stages of education up to the time when he graduates from university.

Now, if a doctor does not attend either elementary school or participate in BA programs, it does not mean that he does not deserve to attend school. Rather, it implies that he has enough knowledge now to make him capable of solving his own problems and make progress in life.

Still, another question may be raised, human society is always in a state of flux; everything is changing rapidly. How could Islam, with its unchanging laws, care for human needs today?

Now, let us answer this important question: There are two series of laws in Islam. One series of laws are like man's specific traits, unchangeable, such as struggling: struggle against injustice and the like.

There is another set of rules which change if human needs change. For instance, in Islam we have a principle, called (أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ) [Respect your contracts].

Naturally, with the passage of time, there will appear all sorts of useful social, trade and political contracts which could be considered under the above principle.

There is, yet, another principle, that says, "Any verdict or rule which could be detrimental to the individual's wellbeing should be deleted from the system of laws."

You would notice how such general Islamic laws could be useful in solving human problems. There are many good laws like these in Islam. With the help of such rules, we were able to solve the perplexing obstacles and difficulties related to the Islamic Revolution in recent years.

Still, another question might be raised: No doubt, we will need a guide to solve our religious problems, however, in the absence of a Prophet and his substitute, there might be some obstacles facing Islam. As a result, is this not a blow against Islam?

To answer this question: We should know that Islam has made provision for this issue. It has entrusted us with the wilayat al-faqih which means that a learned and pious jurisprudent can solve the problems of the Muslims. The way to recognize such a social and religious position is explicitly stated in Islamic law. Therefore, there is no need to worry.

Thus, wilayat al-faqih is the continuation of the mission of the prophets and the Infallibles (s). Therefore, Islamic societies should never lack leaders.^[8]

THINK AND ANSWER

What is meant by the statement: The Prophet of Islam is the Last Prophet?

How could we derive this principle from the verses of the Holy Qur'an?

Why should the people of our time be deprived of having another Prophet?

How many types of Islamic laws are there? How could they cope with the needs of our people today?

Can an Islamic society be without a leader? How is the issue of leadership solved in our time?

Notes

- [1] The rest of this lecture is presented in the next section.
- [2] Qur'an, 41.
- [3] Tafsir Namuneh.
- [4] For further information concerning this issue, refer to the book called "The Great Leaders."
- [5] Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon: 91.
- [6] Majma` al-Bayan.
- [7] Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p 58.
- [8] For further information see the book called A Design for the Islamic Government written by this author.

Ten Lectures on Imamate

First Lecture: When was Imamate first discussed?

We know that after the passing of the Prophet of Islam, Muslims were divided into two groups.

One group, called the Sunnis, believed that the Prophet of Islam had not selected a successor and that he had left it up to the people to assemble and choose a leader for them.

A second group believed that the Prophet's successor should be as pious as the Prophet himself and should be competent to have the spiritual and material leadership of the people and defend the very foundation of Islam.

This latter group believed that such a successor could be appointed only through God and the Prophet and that this appointment had already been made by the Prophet who had chosen Imam `Ali(s) as his successor. This latter group is designated by the title Imamiyyah or Shias.

It is our objective to delve into this issue through rational argumentation and through the use of historical and logical reasons and by resorting to the sacred verses of the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition. However, prior to such discussion, let us first refer to some important issues.

Does such a discussion bring forth disagreement and discord?

When the issue of Imamate is brought up, there are some who would say: today is not the right time for such arguments. Today is the time for the unity of Muslims and discussing the Prophet's successor only causes disunity among Muslims. These people also add that today all Muslims have common enemies, such as Zionism, and eastern and western colonialism. Therefore, we should not bring up such disturbing topics.

However, this conservatism is wrong for the following reasons:

First: What causes disunity is prejudice, Logical arguments and revengeful aggression. logical and rational discussions, which do not include prejudice or obstinacy on the part in the participants of the discussion, and which are held in an amicable atmosphere not only do not cause disunity and division, but could bridge differences and strengthen commonalities.

In my frequent journeys to hijaz to perform the Hajj pilgrimage, I have had frequent discussions with Sunni scholars, and we both felt that these discussions would have no negative effects on our relations. Indeed, we felt that these discussions increased our understanding lessened the difficulties in our relations and eradicated any potential hatred from our relations.

The significant point in such discussions was the fact that we had a lot in common and these commonalities could help us against our enemies.

The Sunni school consists of four branches: the hanafis, the hanbalis, the Shafi'is, and the Malikis. The very existence of these four branches has not brought forth disunity among them, however. And when they include Shi'ah jurisprudence as the fifth branch, many discrepancies are removed.

Recently, the great Mufti (leader) of the Sunnis, the chancellor of Al-Azhar University in Egypt, Sheikh Shaltut, took a big stride in formally accepting Shi'ah jurisprudence in this way Through this method he could bring forth, mutual understanding between Muslims and a cordial relationship developed between him and the late Ayatollah Borujerdi.

Second: We believe that true Islam is manifested in Shiism more than in the other Islamic sects. Having a deep respect for all sects of Islam, we firmly believe that the Shi`ah branch could introduce Islamic principles and solve problems better than the other branches.

Why should we not teach this Shi`ah school to our children? We would have wronged them if we did not do this.

We are certain that the Prophet of Islam had appointed a successor. Why should we not pursue the discussion logically? While discussing such delicate issues, however, we should take care not to hurt any one's religious sentiments.

Third: The enemies of Islam have leveled so many lies and accusations against the Shi`ah to the Sunnis and against the Sunnis to the Shias that these two branches have separated and have gone their different ways.

But when we discuss the issue of Imamate in the manner presented above and clarify that which the Shi`ah emphasize through the Holy Qur'an and the traditions it will become clear that the enemies of Islam, which all the branches have in common have used their tricks in spreading false propaganda to cause divisions among Muslims.

As an example, I will never forget my discussion with one of the high standing religious leader of Saudi Arabia who told me he had heard that we use a Qur'an in Iran that was different from their Qur'an.

I became astonished and told him that he could investigate this very easily. I told him, "I invite you to come to Iran and go to any mosque to see if the Qur'an is different from yours.

There are many Qur'ans in every mosque. In fact, you can find a copy of the Holy Qur'an in the home of every Muslim family. Our Qur'an is exactly like yours. Furthermore, most copies of the Qur'an we use are printed in hijaz, Egypt and other Islamic countries.

No doubt, this amicable discussion removed one of the misunderstandings from the mind of a religious leader.

We, therefore, conclude that discussions on the Imamate, if carried out according to the approach mentioned above would solidify Islamic unity and provide the opportunity to clarify facts and would lessen differences.

What Does Imamate Mean?

As the title indicates, "Imam" means the leader of the Muslims and in Shi`ah ideology an infallible Imam is the one who acts in the capacity of the great Prophet of Islam, with the difference that the Prophet is the founder of Islam and the Imam is its keeper and protector. Revelations are revealed to the Prophet but not to the Imam. An Imam receives his instructions from the Prophet and his knowledge is vast.

In the view of the Shi`ah, an infallible Imam is not a political leader of the Muslims. Rather, he is in charge of the spiritual, material, apparent and hidden aspects of the Islamic community. He is the defender of Islamic doctrines and law and a genuine servant of God.

The Sunnis do not interpret Imamate in this way. They look at the Imam as mainly a political leader of the Islamic community.

In our future discussions, we will prove that at every period of time there should be a divine representative, either a Prophet or an infallible Imam

among the people, so that he could protect the truth and lead the truth-seekers. If one day, for certain reasons he becomes hidden and disappears from our eyes, his representatives could teach the principles of Islam and establish an Islamic government.

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the logic behind such expressions as this: “Today is not the time to discuss Imamate?”

How many logical answers could you offer for such a discussion?

How have the enemies of Islam brought about division between the two major groups of Muslims? How could such differences be bridged?

Do you remember any examples of such divisions?

What is the difference between the concept of Imamate in Shi`ah ideology and Sunni ideology?

Second Lecture: The Philosophy behind the Existence of the Imams

The reasons we advanced for the necessity of prophethood will make us familiar to a large extent with the necessity for the existence of the Imams after the demise of the Prophet. This is because these two have a lot in common. Here, however, some other topics will be discussed as well.

Spiritual perfection with Divine Leaders

Let us first consider the objectives behind the creation of man, the cream of the crop of creation.

Man travels along a rough road, full of ups and downs towards God, towards absolute perfection and towards spiritual progress in all dimensions.

No doubt, man could not succeed without an infallible Imam, without a divine instructor. This is because everywhere there is darkness, and one must be aware of the danger of going astray.”

Despite the fact that God has equipped man with wisdom and intelligence, with a strong conscience and with divine books, he could still go astray. The presence of an infallible leader will, to a great extent, reduce the hazards of deviation and corruption. For this reason: “the existence of an Imam completes the goals of creation as such.”

This is the same thing that is referred to in books on belief, such as “The Law of Benevolence,” which means that God has put all the means of perfection at man’s disposal. Among these means is the appointment of prophets and infallible Imams.

Protecting Heavenly Laws

We are aware of the fact that divine religions, when revealed to the prophets, are like sparkling raindrops that sustain life. However, having been in contact with unclean environments and feeble minds they gradually become contaminated and become mixed with superstitions and illusions. In this way, these religions lose their initial elegance and vividness and under such conditions, they lose both their attraction and educational impact. They then lose their quality to satisfy.

That is why there should always be an infallible religious leader to protect the principles of religion and in this way; innovations and superstitions in religion could be avoided. A religion would lose its value and vigor within a short period of time if such a leader did not exist.

For this very reason, the Honorable Imam `Ali (s) in Nahj al-Balaghah says:

اللَّهُمَّ بَلَى! لَا تَخْلُو الْأَرْضُ مِنْ قَائِمٍ لِلَّهِ بِحُجَّةٍ؛ إِمَّا ظَاهِرًا مَشْهُورًا أَوْ خَائِفًا مَغْمُورًا لِنَلَّا
تَبْطُلَ حُجُجُ اللَّهِ وَبَيِّنَاتُهُ

“Yes, the surface of the earth shall never lack a rising that rises by God as His proof, either in an apparent or hidden way.”^[1] In fact, an Imam’s heart is like a safe in which precious documents are safeguarded so that they might be secure against theft by robbers or against hazardous and unfortunate events. This is one of the logical reasons for the presence of an Imam.

The Social and Political Leadership of the Nation (Ummah)

There is no doubt that no community could continue to exist without a capable leader. For this very reason, it has been common for nations in the past to appoint leaders; sometimes leaders have been decent and at other times indecent. Because of the need for a leader, aggressors and tyrant sultans have passed themselves off as the community leaders since antiquity.

On the other hand, in order for a person to attain spiritual perfection, he has to live and cooperate with others. This is because an individual is not powerful enough but a congregation of people can give the individual a lot of power.

However, a community should be governed by a correct system in order for capabilities to flourish and corruption to be suppressed. Such a community should mobilize its potential innate forces.

Since error-prone man cannot bring forth such a mobilization, an innocent and infallible leader, appointed by God, becomes necessary. This need is especially felt today when we observe the degree to which political leaders are corrupt.

This is another logical reason for the presence of an Imam within a community. It is another aspect of God's Benevolence. I would like to iterate this fact that while the Infallible Imam(s) is temporarily hidden from our eyes, our obligation to have a substitute Imam has been anticipated in Islamic law. This will be discussed in subsequent lectures.

The Need to Make the Proof Irrefutable

It is up to an Imam to both lead and guide people and make the proof irrefutable against those who would still like to go astray. This will forestall any excuses to the effect that the religious leader has not put forth enough energy to guide them.

This would prevent the construction of alibis and excuses, and those who are sincere would be guided.

The Imam is a Great Medium for Divine Grace

Most scholars of religion, in accordance with Islamic narrations, have likened the presence of a Prophet or an Imam among humanity to the heart in the body of a human being.

We know that when the heart beats, it sends blood to all the arteries which carry blood to other parts of the human body.

The Infallible Imam is a perfect and progressive member and leader of humanity. Since he is the cause for the descent of divine Grace from which each individual benefits depending on the degree of his communication with the Prophet and the Imam, he could be likened to the heart of the community as well.

We should not be under the delusion that the Prophet or the Imam should provide people with material things. The same way the heart is an intermediary between man and God in conveying God's Grace; the Prophet and the Imam are the intermediaries of God's Grace to humanity.

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the role of the Imam in man's spiritual perfection?

What is his role in safeguarding the Shariah?

What is his role in leading the government and the political system?

What is meant by the Imam as the irrefutable proof? What is the Imam's role in this regard?

Who is the intermediary for God's Grace? What can the Prophet or Imam be likened to?

Third Lecture: The Imam's specific traits

Before we delve into the subject, one point should be explicitly stated: It can be easily understood from the Holy Qur'an that the position of imamate is the most prestigious position for a person to have. It is even higher than that of prophethood. This is because in the story of Abraham, the idol-destroyer Prophet(s), the Qur'an states:

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely, I will make you an Imam of men. Abraham said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the unjust, said He. [Qur'an 2:124]

In this way, having fulfilled the position of prophethood (nubuwwah) and messengership (risalah) and having passed different tests, Abraham attained the rank of having the material and spiritual leadership of the people.

Besides having the positions of nubuwwah and risalah, the Prophet of Islam enjoyed the position of Imamate and the leadership of the people. Other prophets also enjoyed such a position.

On the other hand, the qualifications necessary for any social or religious position vary for different positions. The higher the position, the heavier one's tasks and obligations would be.

For instance, one who fills the positions of a judge, witness or a Friday Imam should be just. When such a heavy set of qualifications are necessary for a judge, we could only imagine how heavy the qualifications of a Prophet must be.

The following are among the characteristics of an Imam:

1. Infallibility or Sinlessness

An Imam, like the Prophet, should be immune from committing sins, or else he could not occupy such a demanding position and enjoy the confidence of the society.

An Imam should capture the people's hearts and his commands should be acceptable to all without question. One who has indulged in sins could never have such a position and could never be trusted by the community.

One who commits errors in his daily affairs could never be relied on in communal affairs. No doubt, a Prophet should be infallible, but such a condition is necessary for an Imam as well.

Such a proposition could still be verified in another way: "The Rule of Benevolence" upon which the existence of both the Prophet and Imam rely, implies such an attribute (i.e. infallibility). This is because the Prophet and the Imam's objectives could not be carried out without their having the attribute of infallibility.

2. Having Great Knowledge

Like a Prophet, the Imam is the source of knowledge for the people. He should have a thorough knowledge of the major and minor principles of Islam, of the Holy Qur'an, of the Prophet's tradition, and of what is related

to Islam in general; this is because he is both the protector of the Shariah and the leader of the nation.

Those who become worried over complex issues, or resort to others for minor things, or whose knowledge is not sufficient, would never be eligible for the leadership of mankind.

In sum, the Imam should be the most knowledgeable and the wisest man about God's rules. He should be able to fill the gap after the death of the Prophet and put Islam into practice with no deviations whatsoever.

3. Bravery

The Imam should be the bravest individual in Islamic society. This is because, without bravery, leadership cannot exist: bravery in the face of severe accidents, against the tyrants and the unjust, and bravery in the face of both the internal and external enemies of the Islamic nation.

4. Piety and Austerity

We know well that those who have fallen in love with the superficial, material things of this world are very easily deceived and the chance of their going astray is very high.

Concerning the good things of this world, the Imam should be a prince and not a captive. He should be free from all sorts of worldly shackles, free from the chains of selfishness, free from wealth, and worldly considerations. He should be the one who cannot be deceived, or influenced.

5. Ethical Attractiveness

Regarding the Prophet(s), the Holy Qur'an says:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ

Thus, it is due to mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently, and had you been rough, hardhearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you. [Qur'an 3:159]

Not only should the Prophet(s) but the Imam or any social leader as well should possess an attractive disposition and temper.

No doubt, it would be disadvantageous for the Prophet or Imam to be ill-tempered. However, they are free from such shortcomings.

These are the main characteristics which the great Shi'ah scholars have postulated for the Imam. However, the Imam should have other distinctive traits to which we shall not refer here.

THINK AND ANSWER

Why is Imamate man's highest position?

Did the Prophet of Islam and other major prophets hold the position of Imam?

If the Imam was not infallible, what sorts of problems would be created?

Why should the Imam command a high degree of knowledge?

For what reasons should the Imam be the bravest, the most pious, the most upright and the most ethically and attractive person?

Fourth Lecture: Who has the Responsibility to Appoint the Imam?

The Sunnis contend that when the Prophet of Islam(s) died he did not appoint a successor and he left the responsibility of appointing a successor upon the shoulders of the Muslims.

According to the Sunnis, this was done and the first caliph was appointed. The first caliph then appointed the second caliph for the Muslims. And subsequently, the second caliph appointed a council of six persons to appoint his successor.

This council was composed of `Ali (s), `Uthman, `Abd al-Rahman Ibn `Awf, talhah, Zubayr, and Sa`d Ibn Abi-Waqqas.

This council, with the majority of three persons, i.e. Sa`d Ibn Abi-Waqqas, `Abd al-Rahman and talhah, appointed `Uthman as the third Caliph (The second caliph had emphasized if there was a vote three, three, the winner would be the side that included `Abd al-Rahman Ibn `Awf, `Uthman's son-in-law).

Towards the end of `Uthman's reign, people rose up against him and he was killed without having appointed a successor.

At this time all the Muslims gathered around `Ali(s) and swore allegiance to him as the successor to the Prophet(s) except for Mu`awiyah, who was the governor of Syria at the time and was well aware that `Ali(s) would depose him of his post.

Mu`awiyah rose up against `Ali(s) and brought forth deadly events in the history of Islam, causing the shedding of innocent blood.

In order to clarify some of the historic issues here we shall raise some questions:

Could the Muslim community appoint the Prophet's successor?

The answer to this question would be straightforward if we defined Imamate as the mere leadership of the Muslim community. Under such conditions, the successor would be appointed through the votes of the people.

However, if we defined Imamate under the conditions we have discussed so far, based on the Holy Qur'an, then nobody except God or the Prophet(s) could appoint either the Imam or the caliph.

In accordance with our interpretation of Imamate, the Imam should have complete knowledge of the major and minor principles of Islam. The Imam's knowledge should stem from heavenly sources and should be based on the Prophet's knowledge so that the Islamic Shariah could be protected.

Another condition for an Imam is for him to be sinless and infallible, i.e., he should be free from all sins so that he could fulfill the material, and spiritual leadership of his Ummah. Other traits he should possess are piety, avoiding sins, and courage.

The recognition and verification of such traits could only be done through either God or His Prophet. He is the one who knows who is genuinely pious and who could carry out such immense duties.

Those who relegated the task of appointing the Imam and caliph to the people have changed the Qur'anic concept of Imamate on purpose and see

in an Imam only the manager of people's worldly affairs. From the other point of view, the appointment of an Imam could only be carried out by God. It is He Who is aware of the necessary traits in an Imam.

The idea of relegating the appointment of the Imam to the people looks similar to the idea of appointing the Prophet by the common votes of the people. A Prophet is appointed by God and we know the Prophet through his miracles.

1. Did not the Prophet Appoint a Successor?

No doubt, Islam is a universal and eternal school and in accordance with the explicit verses of the Holy Qur'an, Islam is not specific to a special location or time.

It is also a fact that at the time of the Prophet's death, Islam had not passed beyond the Arabia Peninsula.

Thirteen years of the Prophet's life was spent in Mecca confronting blasphemy and idolatry. Still another ten years of his honorable life was spent in Holy wars and combating the imposed wars of enemies.

Although, the Prophet(s) spent his days and nights spreading Islamic principles and introducing it in all its dimensions, the analysis of many Islamic questions needed a prolonged period of time and a person similar to the Prophet (s) to carry out such a huge responsibility.

Beside these issues, the future of Islam and the provision for its continuity are among the most significant issues crucial for any religious leader, which he could never postpone.

Furthermore, the Prophet of Islam(s) had taken into consideration even the simplest issues of Islam. Why shouldn't he have worked out a schedule for the Imamate?

All these points lead us to believe that the Prophet(s) had considered the appointment of a successor. Later in our discussion, I shall present you with some Islamic narrations that will shed light on the issue.

These records irrevocably show that the Prophet had never stopped thinking of such a great issue all his life. However, after his death, there were some people who tried to accuse him of not having appointed a successor.

The Prophet(s) used to appoint a temporary successor whenever he left Medina to take part in a holy war (such as the war of Tabuk). How could we believe that he might not have appointed a successor to continue his tasks after his demise? How could he have left his nation surrounded by all sorts of political and social death? How could he have not thought out the best methods for the continuation of Islam?

It would have definitely been a great hazard for the newly founded Islam not to have a successor.

Our reasoning leads us to the fact that the Prophet had been mindful of such a crucial issue.

Those who claim that the Prophet had let people select their Imam through unanimous vote should present us with a record in which the Prophet had recommended such an action, however, they lack such records.

2. Consensus and Consultation

Let us assume that the Prophet(s) had not deliberated on this issue and that the people were supposed to elect the successor through unanimous vote or consensus which means the participation of all Muslims on this issue. However, such consensus never occurred with respect to the appointment of the first Muslim caliph.

Only a selected group of the Prophet's followers who lived in Medina decided on the issue. None of the Muslims living in the cities or towns had a chance to take part in this vote. Even in the city of Medina, `Ali(s) and a large group of Bani-Hashim did not take part in this decision making process. Therefore, such a vote did not reflect the consensus of the Muslims.

Besides, if this approach was valid, why did the first caliph select his own successor himself, and did not let him be elected? If there were only one person meritorious enough to carry out such a crucial task, the Prophet himself would be the only eligible person to do so.

Then there is a third problem concerning the third caliph. Why did the second caliph put aside the method by which he had been appointed? Why did he put aside the tradition by which he himself had been appointed? That is to say, he neither observed the process of consensus or personal appointment; rather, he put this responsibility on the shoulders of a select few.

Principally, if consultation had been the right way, why should only six persons take part? Why should have the votes of three out of six been accepted?

These are the questions raised by any researcher in the history of Islam, and the lack of proper answers to these questions is indicative of the fact that the way which was chosen was not the right one.

3. `Ali (s) had the Greatest Merit for the Imamate

Let us assume that the Prophet(s) had not introduced anybody as his successor and let us assume as well that this responsibility was placed upon the people. Would it have been possible to elect somebody superior to `Ali (s) in piety and knowledge?

A large group of Islamic researchers, including some Sunni elites, have explicitly indicated that `Ali(s) was more knowledgeable on Islamic issues than anybody else and the narrations and records that go back to him are indicative of such a reality. The history of Islam says he was a resource for the Muslim nation in their intellectual questions. Even the other caliphs used to ask `Ali(s) for answers when they were confronted with some intractable questions.

He was superior to everyone in bravery, courage, piety and other distinguished human traits. Now, if we accept the fact that the people had to elect the Prophet's successor, `Ali (s) should have been the best candidate for such a position since he was the most worthy.^[2]

THINK AND ANSWER

Why cannot people appoint Imams and Caliphs?

Does not reasoning point to the fact that the Prophet(s) had selected a successor?

What was the procedure for the appointment of the first three caliphs?
Were their approaches to selection based on scientific and Islamic considerations?
Why was `Ali(s) the most qualified individual?

Fifth Lecture: The Holy Qur'an and Imamate

The Holy Qur'an provides the best answers to the problems in our daily lives; it is the best guide for everything, especially on the issue of Imamate. It has dealt with this problem from different dimensions.

1. The Holy Qur'an considers Imamate as an Appointment by God

As we have already read about Abraham(s), the idol-breaker, the Holy Qur'an considers Abraham's imamate as a significant advancement which he attained only after certain trials. We read in verse 124 of Surah Baqara:

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا

And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely, I will make you an Imam of men. [Qur'an 2:124]

Both the historical and Qur'anic accounts indicate the fact that only after Abraham had struggled after his emigration to Syria and after he had built the House of the Ka'bah, and after he had taken his son, Ishmael, to slaughter, did he receive such a divine position.

When the position of prophethood is appointed by God, the appointment of an Imam, who is to provide leadership for mankind and bring about their prosperity, should naturally be done by God as well for this task could never be accomplished by the people.

Besides, the Holy Qur'an explicitly confirms the issue:

إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا

Surely, I will make you an Imam of men.

In the same way, in verse 73 of Surah Anbiya', referring to some of His great prophets, such as Abraham, Lut [Lot], Ishaq [Isaac] and Ya'qub [Jacob], God says:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا

And We made them Imams who guided people by Our command. [Qur'an 21:73]

Similar interpretations are offered in the Holy Qur'an which shows that such a divine position should be appointed by God.

Furthermore, in continuation of the above-mentioned verse, we read about Abraham's imamate and his request for the position to be given to other members of his family in future generations. He was told by God:

لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

My covenant does not include the unjust. [Qur'an 2:124]

Since the word "unjust" has a wide meaning including all sins such as apparent and hidden, polytheism and any kind of injustice done to oneself and others, and considering the fact that knowing all these weak points in man is only possible by God, we come to the conclusion that the position of imamate could only be appointed by God.

2. The Verse on Delivery

We read in verse 67 of Surah Ma'idah [Qur'an 5: 67]:

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ

O Apostle! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you have not delivered His message, and Allah will protect you from the people; Surely Allah will not guide the unbelieving people.

The tone of this verse shows the weight of the position of prophethood and the obstacles that accompanied it. The Holy Qur'an refers to the fact that his prophethood might be faced with certain hindrances. For this reason, the verse emphatically orders the Prophet to deliver the message of his lord and ensures him that God will protect him against probable hazards.

This important issue is not related to the issues of Monotheism, polytheism or struggle against the enemies of Islam, such as the Jews and other hypocrites because by the time of the revelation of Surah Ma'idah these problems had been solved.

The simple delivery of Islamic rulings also, did not create any worries because this delivery was on the same level as prophethood itself, one could not exist without the other. Then could the command "Deliver what has been revealed to you" refer to anything else other than the appointment of a successor? This is especially true when we consider the fact that this verse was revealed to the Prophet(s) during the final days of his honorable life and is in harmony with the issue of caliphate, which is a continuation of prophethood (nubuwwah).

Furthermore, there are a great number of narrations by the close followers of the Prophet, such as Zayd Ibn Arqam, Abu-Sa'id Khudri, Ibn 'Abbas, Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Ansari, Abu-Hurayrah, Hudhayfah, and Ibn Mas'ud that have been handed down to us through a large group of Sunni researchers and historians. All of these narrations depict the fact that the verse above is related to Imam 'Ali(s) and what happened on the Day of Ghadir. [For further information, refer to Ihqaq al-haqq, al-Ghadir, al-Muraja'at, and Dala'il al-sidq].

The event of Al-Ghadir will be dealt with in the discussions on "Narrations and traditions." But it is worth mentioning here that this verse is a clear sign for this fact that the Prophet(s) of Islam had the obligation of appointing a successor on his last Hajj pilgrimage during the last days of his life. For this reason, he appointed Imam 'Ali(s) as his official successor on that day and introduced him to all the Muslims.

3. The Verse on Obedience to Those in Authority

We read in verse 59 of Surah al-Nisa' [Qur'an 4:59]:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

O you who believe! Obey Allah; obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you.

Here obedience of "those in authority" is on par with the obedience of God and the Prophet(s).

Does the phrase "those in authority" mean the governors and statesmen in every place and time? For instance, do the Muslims of any country in our time have to obey their rulers unconditionally in the same way that a group of the Sunni interpreters tell us?

This is not in harmony with any logic whatsoever because the majority of rulers during the past centuries have been corrupt, filthy, tyrants or simply puppets in the hands of foreign powers.

Could this expression mean, “Obeying rulers on condition that their verdicts and commands are not against Islamic commands”? This, too, is in conflict with the absolute nature of this verse.

Therefore, we can clearly observe that this verse means the obedience towards a sinless Islamic leader in any period or age. This obedience should be unconditional and obligatory and his commands are to be taken as similar to those of God and the Prophet(s).

The numerous narrations in the Islamic sources concerning this issue have interpreted the expression “those in authority” to mean Imam `Ali(s) and the other Infallibles and are another proof of this claim.^[3]

4. The verse on Wilayah:

In verse 55 of Surah Ma'idah [Qur'an 5: 55], we read:

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

Only Allah is your Wali and His Apostle and those who believe, those who keep up prayers and pay the poor-rate while they bow.

The Holy Qur'an employs the word 'innama' at the beginning of this sentence to emphasize the fact that only three persons could be the wali of Muslims: God, the Prophet and those who believe and pay the poor-rate while they bow.

No doubt, “wilayah” does not mean friendship because friendship in general does not carry any pre-conditions: All Muslims are friends and brethren even if they do not pay the poor-rate while they are bowing. Rather, “Wilayah” means leadership, both material and spiritual. This interpretation is correct when we realize that the words God, the Prophet and Wilayah are used in a row.

It is also clear that this verse with the description that it contains, refers to a special person who paid the poor-rate while bowing, for, it is not compulsory for a person to pay the poor-rate while he is bowing in prayer. The use of this expression is only a sign, not a description.

All these documents and signs refer to the fact that this verse refers to an incident in the life of Imam `Ali. He was once bowing in the Mosque of the Prophet when a poor man entered and asked for help. Nobody paid any attention to him. At that moment `Ali(s) signaled to the poor man to come to him and he removed a precious ring that he(s) was wearing and gave it to him.

The Prophet(s) noticed the event and after his prayer, he raised his hands toward heaven saying, “O God! My brother Moses begged you to expand his soul and make his affairs easy for him and make his speech fluent and make Aaron, his brother, as his helper. O God: I am Muhammad, Your Apostle, expand my breast, and make my affairs easy. Make `Ali, a member of my Household, my helper so that my back could become strengthened by him....”

No sooner had the Prophet ended his prayer when Gabriel descended and brought the above verse with him.

It is worth mentioning that most Sunni interpreters and historians have stated that the revelation of this verse is related to Imam `Ali(s) and more than ten of the close followers of the Prophet(s) have relayed this narration to us.^[4]

Concerning Wilayah there are many verses, four of which we have already discussed.

THINK AND ANSWER

According to the Holy Qur'an who appoints an Imam?

Under what conditions was the verse on delivery revealed to the Prophet?

Whom should we obey unconditionally?

How is the verse related to the leader and Imam?

Related to the issue of Wilayah, how could we use the verses of the Holy Qur'an?

Sixth Lecture: Imamate in the Prophet's Tradition

When we read books on Islamic narrations, especially those written by our Sunni brethren, we find many narrations that verify the imamate of Imam `Ali(s).

One wonders why there should be any doubt concerning `Ali's a successor ship despite the presence of so many documents and why should groups of believers follow paths different from that of the Infallible Ones(s).

These narrations, some of which are based on hundreds of documentation, and others, that rely on baseless documents, are all narrated in several famous Islamic books; they are so conclusive that we need no further documents to prove our point.

We will present you here with only a handful of these narrations. Those interested in further studies should examine the relevant sources.^[5]

The Narration of Ghadir

According to most Islamic historians, the Honorable Prophet of Islam performed the Hajj ceremony in the last year of his life. Then, together with a large crowd of his new and old companions and those enthusiastic Muslims who had come to the hijaz to take part in the ceremony, they reached a place, called Juhfah, between Mecca and Medina, and later arrived at a place called Ghadir Khumm, which was, in fact, a cross-roads where the pilgrims went their separate ways.

Before the pilgrims could separate and set off on their private destinations, the Prophet(s) ordered them not to separate but gather there. It was terribly hot, and there was no shelter in sight. The Muslims performed the mid-day prayer with the Prophet(s) who asked them to stay for an important message.

A pulpit was made out of camel saddles and the Prophet climbed up on it. After thanking God for His blessings, he addressed the people, saying: "In the near future I will go away from you to join Allah. I have a responsibility and so do you; how would you bear witness about me?"

The people raised their voice, saying:

نَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ قَدْ بَلَغْتَ وَنَصَّحْتَ وَجَاهَدْتَ فَجَزَاكَ اللَّهُ خَيْرًا

"We shall witness to the fact that you delivered your message and did good and did your best to guide us. May God give you your reward."

Then the Prophet(s) asked them: Would you bear witness to God's uniqueness, to my prophethood, to the authenticity of the Day of Judgment and to the Resurrection on that day?

Everybody answered: "Yes, we will bear witness that it is so." Then the Prophet(s) added: "O God bear witness to this."

Once again, he asked people: "O people, can you hear me?"

They answered: "Yes, we can."

Then silence prevailed upon the desert. Nothing could be heard except for the sound of the wind. The Prophet(s) continued:

"Now, tell me what you will do with the two weighty things I will leave behind?"

A person shouted from among the crowd: "Which two weighty things, O Messenger of Allah?"

The Prophet replied: Firstly, the Greater Weight, namely the Holy Qur'an, which you should not abandon so that you might not go astray; secondly the Lesser Weight, that is, the People of the House of the Prophet. God has ordered me that you should not leave these two until they join me in Paradise. Do not leave these two, or else, you will be destroyed."

Then he looked around, as if searching for someone and saw `Ali. He reached over and took `Ali's hand in his own and raised it high, so high that both their armpits could be seen.

Now, the Prophet's voice became more strident, and he said:

"Who is the most deserving among the Muslims?"

The people replied: "God and the Prophet know better."

The Prophet(s) then said:

"God is my leader and I am the leader for the believers." Then, he added:

فَمَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَعَلَيَّْ مَوْلَاهُ

"Anyone for whom I am his leader (Mawla), `Ali is his leader as well."

The Prophet repeated this sentence three times, some say four times. Then, raising his head toward the sky, he said:

اَللّٰهُمَّ وَاٰلِ مَنْ وَاَلَاهُ وَعَادٍ مَنْ عَادَاهُ وَاَحَبَّ مَنْ اَحَبَّهُ وَاَبْغَضَ مَنْ اَبْغَضَهُ وَاَنْصُرْ مَنْ نَصَرَهُ
وَاخْذُلْ مَنْ خَذَلَهُ وَاَدْرِ الْحَقَّ مَعَهُ حَيْثُ دَارَ

"O God, love `Ali's friends; be an enemy to his enemies; show affection towards those who love him; hate those who show hatred towards him; help his followers; stop helping those who abandon him and let righteousness be with him for ever."

Then he emphasized: "Those who are present should impart this news to those who are absent"

No sooner had the crowd dispersed when Gabriel revealed this verse to the Prophet(s):

...اَلْيَوْمَ اكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِيْنََكُمْ وَاَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِيْ

"Today, I made your religion complete and completed my blessings upon you."

At this moment, the Prophet(s) said:

اَللّٰهُ اَكْبَرُ اَللّٰهُ اَكْبَرُ عَلَىٰ اِكْمَالِ الدِّيْنِ وَاِتْمَامِ النِّعْمَةِ وَرِضَا الرَّبِّ بِرِسَالَتِيْ وَالْوَلَايَةِ لِعَلِيِّ مِنْ

بَعْدِي

"I glorify God because He perfected His religion and completed His blessings and declared His satisfaction regarding my prophethood; I thank Him since He has appointed my successor."

At this there was a strange commotion among the people and everybody congratulated `Ali(s) for this achievement. Among the crowd, both Abu-Bakr and Umar congratulated `Ali (s) by saying:

بَخٍ لَّكَ يَا بَنَ اَبِي طَالِبٍ! اَصْبَحْتَ وَاَمْسَيْتَ مَوْلَايَ وَمَوْلَى كُلِّ مُؤْمِنٍ وَمُؤْمِنَةٍ

"Praise be upon you, praise be upon you, O son of Abu-talib; you have become my leader and the leader of all the believers."

A large number of Islamic scholars have recorded the above narration in their books in different ways, some in detail and some in a concise manner. Nobody can doubt the validity of this narration. The great writer, `Allamah Amini, in his famous book, called Al-Ghadir, reports this narration from one hundred and ten of the Prophet's close followers and from three hundred and sixty famous Islamic books and writers. Among these scholars, there are some Sunni writers, as well.

A large group of Islamic writers have written books specifically on this issue. Among these writers is `Allamah Amini. In his reference, this writer mentions the names of twenty-six other Islamic authors who have written separate books on the event of Ghadir.

Those who have not found any fault with the authenticity of this narration have expressed their doubts about the issue of imamate and have interpreted the word "Mawla" in the Prophet's message as "friend" and not as "leader." However, the circumstances show that the issue was related to the issue of the appointment of a successor:

a) The verse on delivery, which was discussed earlier in this section, and which was revealed to the Prophet prior to this event, and which was expressed with emphasis and urgency, explicitly reveals the fact that it did not speak of mere friendship which is not a cause for concern. Furthermore, the verse of "perfecting the religion" which was revealed to the Prophet(s) later than the verse above, shows that the issue had been one of leadership and successorship.

b) The way the event took place in a hot, scorching desert, with such a detailed speech and requiring the presence of the people all lead to the correctness of our claim.

c) The congratulations which `Ali(s) received from the members of numerous groups and from people from different classes of society and the poems which were written on that day and afterwards, all refer to the fact that what the Prophet had declared was related to Imamate and Wilayah and nothing else.

THINK AND ANSWER

Describe the story of Ghadir.

How many narrations on Ghadir are there whose chain of transmission goes back to the Prophet and in how many Islamic books is this narration recorded?

Why is the word "Mawla" in the Ghadir narration taken to mean "a leader and an Imam" and not "a friend?"

What kind of invocation did the Prophet make regarding Imam `Ali(s) after the event of Ghadir?

Where are Ghadir and Juhfah located?

Seventh Lecture: The narration of Manzilah and the narration of Yawm Al-Dar

A large number of great Shi`ah interpreters and Sunni scholars have narrated the narration of Manzilah under verse 142 of Surah A`raf which deals with Moses going to the appointed place to talk to God and the appointment of his brother, Aaron, as his successor.

The narration goes like this: The Prophet(s) headed for the battlefield of Tabuk.^[6] He was informed that Byzantium had organized a large army to attack hijaz, Mecca and Medina and stop the further spread of Islamic ideology in their territory. The Prophet headed for Tabuk with a large army and left `Ali (s) at home in Medina.

`Ali(s) told the Prophet(s): Will you leave me among the children and women and refuse to let me come and take part in the Holy War and receive a great honor?

The Prophet(s) replied:

أَلَا تَرْضَى أَنْ تَكُونَ مِنِّي بِمَنْزِلَةِ هَارُونَ مِنْ مُوسَى إِلَّا أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ نَبِيٌّ بَعْدِي؟

“Are you not content that you are to me in the same capacity Moses’ brother, Aaron was to Moses with the exception that no other Prophet would come after me?”

The above expression is recorded in the most famous books of narrations of the Sunni scholars, i.e. sahih al-Bukhari and sahih Muslim. In sahih al-Bukhari’s account, the whole narration is recorded, but in sahih Muslim’s account the whole narration is recorded only once and the second time only the following sentence is recorded:^[7]

أَنْتَ مِنِّي بِمَنْزِلَةِ هَارُونَ مِنْ مُوسَى إِلَّا أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ نَبِيٌّ بَعْدِي

This narration is recorded in most Sunni books including the traditions of Ibn Majah, that of Tirmidhi, and the Musnad of Ahmad, and many other books. The number of close Companions of the Prophet(s) who have mentioned this narration is more than twenty. They include Jabir Ibn `Abdullah Ansari, Abu-Sa`id Khudri, `Abdullah Ibn Mas`ud and Mu`awiyah.

In the History of Baghdad, Abu-Bakr Baghdadi narrates from `Umar Ibn al-Khattab the following tradition: Umar saw a man cursing `Ali (s), and Umar said: “I think you are a hypocrite because I have heard the Prophet(s) say:

إِنَّمَا عَلَيَّ مِنِّي بِمَنْزِلَةِ هَارُونَ مِنْ مُوسَى إِلَّا أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ نَبِيٌّ بَعْدِي

`Ali is to me like Aaron is to Moses with the exception that there is no Prophet after me.”^[8]

The interesting point is that, in accordance with the authentic books on narration, the Prophet(s) used the above sentence not only in the event of Tabuk, but on seven other occasions.

1. In “the first gathering of the pact of brotherhood i.e. the day on which a pact of friendship was made among his followers, the Prophet (s) chose `Ali(s) as his closest friend and repeated this sentence.

2. In “the second gathering of the pact of brotherhood” in which the pact was made between the Emigrants (muhajirun) and the Helpers (Ansar), the Prophet(s) repeated the above sentence.

3. The Prophet(s) repeated the same sentence once again when he ordered that all the doors that opened up to the Great Mosque of the Prophet(s) be closed and only `Ali’s home could have direct access to the Mosque.

4. He repeated the same sentence once more in the war of Tabuk. He also repeated it on three other occasions, the records of which are presented in the books of Sunni scholars.

The content of the Narration on Status

If we could analyze the above narration without any prejudice or pre-judgment, we could easily come to the conclusion that `Ali(s) occupied all the positions that Aaron possessed among the Bani-Isra’il, without the position of prophethood, of course. This is because we observe that no pre-conditions have been mentioned in the narrations. Therefore, the following conclusions could easily be reached:

1. `Ali(s) was the most knowledgeable after the Prophet(s) [Because Aaron had such a position].

2. `Ali(s) was the Prophet’s helper, his special aide, and an associate in the Prophet’s program. This is because all these positions and attributes are confirmed for `Ali in the Holy Qur’an.^[9]

3. `Ali(s) was the successor to the Prophet(s) because nobody else could fill such a position in the same way that Aaron had filled these positions and had helped out his brother Moses(s).

The Narration of Yawm al Dar [The Day of invitation to his Home]

Based on Islamic history, the Prophet(s) was commissioned in the third year of his prophethood to make known and declare openly his call to Islam. This is clearly stated in Surah al-Shu’ara, verse 214:

وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ

And warn your nearest relations. [Qur’an 26:24]

After this, the Prophet(s), invited his close relatives to his uncle Abutalib’s house, after having had their meal, he started to say: O Children of `Abd al-Muttalib. I swear to God I know of no one among the Arabs who could have brought anything better than I have brought for you. I have brought for you prosperity here and for your future. God has ordered me to invite you to my religion. Who among you will assist me in being my brother, helper, and successor?

No one showed any interest except for `Ali(s) who was the youngest. He rose up, saying: “O Messenger of God. I will be your assistant in this affair.”

The Prophet(s) put his hand around `Ali’s neck and said:

إِنَّ هَذَا أَخِي وَوَصِيِّي وَخَلِيفَتِي فَيَكُنْ فَاذْعَبُوا لَهُ وَأَطِيعُوا

“This brother of mine is my helper, and successor. Listen to him and obey his commands.”

That ignorant tribe not only refused to accept such recommendations but also started making fun of him.

The above narration, known as Yawm al-Dar or “the day of invitation to his home,” is explicit and quite well known and has been recorded by many Sunni scholars, including Ibn Abi-Jurayr, Ibn Abi-hatam, Ibn Mardawayh, Abu-Na`im, Bayhaqi, Tha`labi, tabari, Ibn al-Athir, Abu'l-Fida' and a host of others.^[10]

If we impartially study the above narration, we will find out more facts related to the issue of Wilayah and `Ali's caliphate, since this narration explicitly refers to `Ali's Wilayah (successorship to the Prophet).

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the narration on status? How many times was it issued?

What positions does the content of this narration prove for Imam `Ali(s)?

In accordance with the Qur'anic verses, what was Aaron's position in relation to Moses?

Which scholars have related this narration?

Re-tell the Narration of Yawm al-Dar its content, chain of transmission and results.

Eighth Lecture: The Thaqaalayn and Noah's Ark Narrations

The Recording of the Thaqaalayn Narration

One of the most famous narrations for both Sunni and Shi'ah scholars is the Thaqaalayn Narration.

This narration is recorded directly from the Prophet by a large group of the Prophet's close companions, and according to some sources the number of these narrators was thirty persons from among them.^[11]

This narration is recorded and mentioned by a great number of interpreters, narration experts and historians. There is therefore no doubt concerning the authenticity or the validity of this narration.

The distinguished scholar, Sayyid Hashim al-Bahrani, in his book, called "Ghayat al-Maram," relates this narration with thirty-nine documents from Sunni scholars and eighty documents by distinguished Shi'ah scholars. Further research has been carried out by another researcher named Mir hamid husayn al-Hindi, who has narrated this narration from nearly two-hundred Sunni scholars and has collected his research concerning this issue in six large volumes.

Among those who recorded this narration were the following: Abu-Sa'id Khudri, Abu-Dharr al-Ghifari, Zayd Ibn Arqam, Zayd Ibn Thabit, Abu-Rafi', Jubayr Ibn Mut'im, hudhayfah, Samarah al-Aslami, Jabir Ibn `Abdullah Ansari, and Ummu-Salamah.

According to Abu-Dharr al-Ghifari, the narration is as follows:

"While holding the door of the Ka'bah, he looked at the people, saying: I have heard the Prophet (s) saying,

إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَعَتْرَتِي، وَإِنَّهُمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرَقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْخَوْضَ

"I leave you two weighty things: the Holy Qur'an and my Household. And these two will never separate till they both arrive at the Kawthar Pond near me. Therefore take care of these two."^[12]

This narration is recorded by the most reliable Sunni scholars, such as sahih al-Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, Musnad Ahmad, Kanz al-`Ummal and Mustadrak al-hakim.

In some versions of this narration the word "Thaqaalayn," two weighty things, is recorded. However, in others version the word Khalifatayn, meaning two successors is used. These two, however, are semantically identical.

It is worth mentioning that, according to sources on traditions, the Prophet(s) had related this on several occasions.

In the narration recorded by Jabir Ibn `Abdullah Ansari, we read that the above speech was given to the people during Hajj pilgrimage, on the day of `Arafah.

In the narration recorded by `Abdullah Ibn hantab, it is said that this speech was given to the people at Juhfah, a location between Mecca and Medina a designated site for some pilgrims to don the garb of ihram.

In the narration by Umm-Salamah, the place where the speech was heard was Ghadir Khumm.

In yet other narrations, it is mentioned that it was made by the Prophet during his last days while on his deathbed. And according to another narration, he made this speech from the pulpit in the city of Medina.^[13]

According to a narration recorded by the most famous Sunni scholar, Ibn hajar, in his book called al-sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, the Prophet of Islam (s), after having said this, took `Ali's hand and raised it, saying: "This `Ali is with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with `Ali; They are inseparable until the day when they meet me at Kawthar."^[14]

Thus, it becomes clear that the Prophet(s) had made this statement on significant occasions and had taken every opportunity to do so in order to stress that it shouldn't be forgotten.

The content of the Narration of Thaqalayn

The following points should be noted:

1. Presenting the Holy Qur'an and the Household as two caliphs or two weighty things is a clear reason why Muslims should never let go of these two, especially when we see that it emphasizes that "if you do not leave these two, you will never go astray."

2. Mentioning the name of the Holy Qur'an along with the name of the Prophet's Household indicates the fact that in the same way that the Holy Qur'an would never lead anyone astray the respectable and Honorable Household would always remain intact and flawless.

3. In some narrations, it is recorded that on the Day of Judgment the Prophet will ask the people about their treatment of the two weighty things.

4. However we interpret the word Household, `Ali(s) would always stand out as a prominent figure and member of this family, and in accordance with some reliable sources, he never strayed away from the Holy Qur'an. Furthermore, we see in many narrations that at the time of the revelation of the verse of Mubalah, the Honorable Prophet of Islam (s) called `Ali, Fatimah, hasan and husayn [May God praise them all] and said: These are the members of my Household.

5. Although the issues related to the Resurrection Day are not clear to us due to the fact that we are encompassed in the walls of this world, we understand from the narrations that Kawthar is a special river in Paradise with special qualities reserved only for the sincere believers, for the Prophet(s), the Infallible Ones and their followers.

From what we have read so far concerning this issue, we will come to the conclusion that the leaders of the Muslims after the Prophet(s) are the Imams from this Household.

The Narration of Noah's Ark

One of the interpretations made on one of the Prophet's statements, reported by both the Sunni and Shi'ah scholars, is the content of what is called "the Narration of Noah's Ark:"

In this narration according to Abu-Dharr: the Prophet(s) had said:

أَلَا إِنَّ مَثَلَ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي فِيكُمْ كَمَثَلِ سَفِينَةِ نُوحٍ؛ مَنْ رَكِبَهَا نَجَّى وَمَنْ تَخَلَّفَ عَنْهَا غَرِقَ

"My Household resembles Noah's Ark, those who heed their instruction shall be saved and those who separate themselves from them shall be drowned."^[15]

This well-known narration emphasizes the obedience of people towards `Ali(s) and the Prophet's Household(s).

Considering the fact that Noah's ark was the only safe place during that tremendous storm, it becomes clear that after the stormy events that took place within the Muslim community after the demise of the Prophet(s), the Muslims have no other option than resorting to the Prophet's Household(s).

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the content of the Narration of Thaqaalayn? What prerogatives does it ascribe to the Household?

Who narrated this tradition?

What does "Thaqaalayn" mean? Is there any other interpretation offered in its place?

And what time did the Prophet(s) declare it?

Describe the Narration of Noah's Ark with reference to its content and transmission.

Ninth Lecture: The Twelve Imams

The Narrations Concerning the Twelve Imams

Having proved the issue of the Imamate and Caliphate of `Ali(s), we now will discuss the Imamate of the other Imams.

A summary of our discussion is as follows:

There are numerous narrations recorded in the books of both Shi`ah and Sunni scholars which talk in general about the caliphate of “twelve caliphs and Imams” after the demise of the Prophet(s).

These narrations are recorded in the most famous sources of the Sunni scholars, such as sahih al-Bukhari, sahih al-Tirmidhi, sahih Muslim, Sunan Abi-Dawud, Musnad Ahmad, and the like.

In the book called “Muntakhab al-Athar,” there are two hundred and seventy one narrations dealing with this issue; most of these sources are written by Sunni writers, the rest by Shi`ah scholars.

For instance, in sahih al-Bukhari, which is the most well-known source of the Sunnis, we can read the following: Jabir Ibn Samara says: I heard the Prophet say:

يَكُونُ اثْنَا عَشَرَ أَمِيرًا - فَقَالَ كَلِمَةً لَمْ أَسْمَعْهَا - فَقَالَ أَبِي إِنَّهُ قَالَ كُلُّهُمْ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ

“There will be twelve commanders (princes, chiefs) after me”; then he uttered a sentence I could not hear; then my father said: the Prophet(s) said that all of them would be from Quraish.”^[16]

In sahih Muslim, this same narration is recorded in the following manner: Jabir says: I heard the Prophet says:

لَا يَزَالُ الْإِسْلَامُ عَزِيزًا إِلَى اثْنَيْ عَشَرَ خَلِيفَةً... ثُمَّ قَالَ كَلِمَةً لَمْ أَفْهَمْهَا، فَقُلْتُ لِأَبِي: مَا قَالَ؟ فَقَالَ: كُلُّهُمْ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ

Islam shall always remain respectable and honorable up to the time of the twelve caliphs and successors. Then the Prophet said a sentence I could not understand. Then I asked my father for an elaboration. He said the Prophet(s) had said: “all of them are from Quraysh”^[17]

The eminent follower of the Prophet, `Abdullah Ibn Mas`ud, records in Musnad Ahmad: that the Prophet(s) was asked concerning his caliphs. He replied:

إِثْنَا عَشَرَ كَعَدَدُ نَبِيَّائِ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

“They are twelve Imams, like the chiefs of Bani-Isra’il who were twelve.”^[18]

The Content of These Narrations

These narrations, in some of which Islam’s dignity is supposed to be dependent upon the twelve caliphs, and in some others the survival of Islam is said to rely on them and in others all the caliphs are said to be from the Quraysh and in yet others all the caliphs are said to be from Bani-Hashim, are harmonious only with the Shi`ah ideology. The interpretation of these narrations is quite straightforward for the Shi`ah, whereas such an interpretation has created many paradoxes for the Sunnis.

Could the number twelve refer to the first four caliphs, the Umayyad caliphs and the Abbasid caliphs?

We know that the number of the first caliphs was not twelve; neither was that of those caliphs in addition to the Umayyads and the Abbasids. The number twelve would not match with all these previous caliphs put together.

Besides, there were individuals like Yazid among the Umayyads, and Mansur Dawaniqui and Harun Rashid among the Abbasids, whose cruelty and injustice were known to everyone. They could never be identified as the Prophet's caliphs; neither could they be referred to as means for the dignity or honor of Islam, they were simply outside these designations.

Besides, the number twelve only pertains to the Shi'ah twelve Imams. Now in the words of a distinguished scholar among the Sunnis, Suleiman Ibn Abraham Qanduzi hanafi in his book, called Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, he says:

"Some scholars have said that there are well-known narrations which indicate the fact that the number of caliphs after the Prophet(s) was twelve. These have been narrated by a host of narrators. What could be drawn from this narration from the Prophet(s) is that these twelve successors were from his Household.

This is because this narration could not be attributed to the first caliphs, since they were not more than four; neither does it refer to the Umayyads since they were more than twelve. Besides, all of them except for Umar Ibn `Abd al-`Aziz, were cruel individuals and tyrants. Furthermore, in accordance with what `Abd al-Malik Ibn `Umar narrates from Jabir Ibn Saharah, these twelve were among the Bani-Hashim.

The reason why the Prophet referred to the tribe from which the successors should come in a whispered tone was that some were not happy with the idea of a government of the Hashemites. This narration does not cover the Abbasids, either, since their number was more than twelve. Besides, they did not act in accordance with the verse on mawaddah or love:

قُلْ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا إِلَّا الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَىٰ

Say: I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my close relatives. [Qur'an 42: 23]

Therefore, this narration implies that the twelve Imams only belong to the Household of the Prophet.

This is because they are superior to others due to their knowledge, their piety, and their family background; these people have inherited their knowledge directly from their great-grand father, i.e., the Prophet(s). This statement is confirmed by the narrations of Thaqalayn and numerous other narrations handed down to us by the Prophet(s)."^[19]

It is interesting to note that in my discussions with some Sunni scholars in the hijaz, they presented me with a quite different interpretation of this narration. Their interpretation makes it clear to me why they have met with a dead-end. They told me,

"Perhaps by twelve caliphs is meant the first four caliphs plus eight others who would come later!"

Our point to make is the following:

What is wrong with accepting the interpretation that coincides with the twelve Imams of the Shi`ah and abandoning that interpretation which leads us astray?

Distinguishing the Imams by Their Names

The interesting point to note is the following:

In some of the narrations which have been handed down to us through Sunni scholars narrated from the Prophet(s), the names of the twelve Imams are explicitly mentioned with their names and characteristics.

Sheikh Sulayman Qanduzi, the distinguished Sunni scholar, in his book, called Yanabi` al-Mawaddah, reports the following:

A Jew, called Na`thal, had the honor to meet with the Prophet(s). He asked the Prophet about his successors. The Prophet(s) introduced them in the following way:

إِنَّ وَصِيَّيَّ عَلِيٍّ بَنُ أَبِي طَالِبٍ وَبَعْدَهُ سِبْطَايَ الْحُسَيْنُ وَالْحُسَيْنُ، تَتْلُوهُمْ تِسْعَةُ أُمَّةٍ مِنْ صُلْبِ الْحُسَيْنِ

قَالَ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ، فَسَيِّهِمْ لِي

قَالَ: إِذَا مَضَى الْحُسَيْنُ فَأَبْنُوهُ عَلِيٌّ. فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ مُحَمَّدٌ، فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ جَعْفَرٌ، فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ مُوسَى، فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ عَلِيٌّ، فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ مُحَمَّدٌ، فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ عَلِيٌّ، فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ الْحُسَيْنُ، فَإِذَا مَضَى فَأَبْنُوهُ الْحُجَّةُ مُحَمَّدُ الْمَهْدِيُّ؛ فَهَؤُلَاءِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ

“My successor is `Ali Ibn Abi-talib, then his two sons hasan and husayn; then there will follow nine other Imams from his generation.

The Jew asked the Prophet(s) to call their names. The Prophet(s) replied: “When husayn passes away, his son is `Ali and when `Ali passes away, his son will be Muhammad and when Muhammad passes away, his son will be Ja`far, then his son Moses, then Moses’ son will be `Ali and then his son Muhammad. And when Muhammad passes away, his son will be `Ali. After `Ali, his son will be hasan. Upon the death of hasan, his son will be Muhammad Al-Mahdi. These are the twelve Imams.”^[20]

In the book, Yanabi`, there is also another narration reported from another book, called “Kitab al-Manaqib,” which has named the twelve Imams by their names and refers to the last Imam who is now in occultation but will someday rise and fill the earth with justice.^[21]

Of course, the number of Shi`ah writers who have dealt with this narration is countless.

One Who Dies Without Having Known His Imam...

In a narration from the Prophet(s) recorded by Sunni scholars, we read:

مَنْ مَاتَ بِغَيْرِ إِمَامٍ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً

“One who dies without having known his Imam, his death would be a death in ignorance”^[22]

This narration vividly shows that there is a sinless Imam in every period of time who should be identified. Not recognizing him would place a person on the way of destruction.

Does the word Imam in this narration refer to leaders like those who are the heads of world governments, such as Genghis Khan, Harun Rashid or puppet governors of different types?

No doubt, the answer is negative. This is because many political leaders are generally dishonest, tyrannical, sometimes affiliated to either the east or west and agents of foreign countries. Naturally, adopting them as Imams would send one to Hell.

Thus, it becomes clear that at every period of time, there should be an infallible Imam who should be identified and followed.

Of course, the veracity of the imamate of any Imam is possible not only through the above approach, but also through the confirmation handed down to us from the previous Imam about his successor and by observing their miracles.

THINK AND ANSWER

In which books can narrations related to the twelve Imams of the Shi`ah be found?

What is the content of these narrations?

What are the unsuitable interpretations of these narrations?

Do the names of the twelve Imams appear in the narrations recorded by Sunni scholars?

What is another way to prove the existence of the twelve Imams?

Tenth Lecture: Imam Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam and the World's Great Reformer

The End of a Dark Night

When we look at the deplorable state of the present situation where crime, murder, bloodshed, wars, and international conflicts prevail, we are faced with the following question: will this situation continue to exist? Are these murders and crimes going to destroy mankind altogether?

Is there a small window of hope for man's salvation there are two answers to these questions.

According to pessimists and materialists, the horizon is dark and time is replete with hazards. For those who believe in the Divine religions, especially the Muslims, and the Shi'ah in particular, there is an optimistic view to this dilemma; that is there is a morning of hope that follows behind this dark and gloomy night.

According to this latter view, these dark clouds, and morbid storms and destructive floods will ultimately vanish and a clear sky, a shining sun and a calm environment will prevail.

This view holds that these horrifying whirlpools will be removed and the shores of safety will become visible in the distant horizon.

They maintain that the world awaits a great reformer who will change the world for better through a revolution. This reformer is called by different names by the followers of different religions. In the words of an Arab poet:

“We make use of different names, But your beauty is just one thing. And all our statements refer to your beauty.”

Innate disposition and the Appearance of the Great Reformer

Inner inspiration, whose reflections are at times greater than our natural wisdom, are our guides not only in the issue of knowing God but also in all religious thinking.

The signs for such inspirations are the following:

First: General love for universal justice. This is because all people of the world, despite their differences, all love, justice and peace.

We all work for peace, justice, and endeavor to implement them.

There is no better reason than this for the innate orientation to this Great Reformer's appearance. This is because the general nature of wants and desires in general lead us to believe that those wants and desires are natural and innate.

Any genuine and innate love leads us to believe that there is an outside attraction for it.

How could God create such a thirst for love inside our brains and souls without there being a source that natures it in the outside world?

That is why we claim that man's innate desire for justice proclaims that one day everywhere in the world there will be peace and justice and the very bases of cruelty and injustice will be extinguished, and humanity will live peacefully as a unified nation under one single banner.

Second: The universal anticipation of all religions is for a great world reformer. In almost all the religions of the world one can find this phenomenon.

The belief that a great savior will come to alleviate man's deep-seated worries and griefs does not belong only to Muslims. Indeed, records and documents illustrate the fact that this idea has been in existence since antiquity among all nations and religions both in the east and the west and since Islam is a more complete religion, it places more emphasis on this issue.

In one of the books of the Zoroastrians, called the Zand after mentioning the permanent struggle between Izad (God) and Ahriman (Shaitan), it is written: then "the great victory will be for And those who believe in Izad and those who believe in Ahriman will be defeated. The world will achieve genuine prosperity and man will settle on the throne of magnanimity"

In the Zoroastrian book Jamasb Nameh, we shall read: "A man will rise from the land of the Arabs... a man with a large head, a large body, and large legs, of the religion of his ancestors, with large armies and will spread justice over the earth."

In one of the books of the Hindus, called the Vashn Jok, we read: "Finally the world will return to someone who is in love with God and is one of his special servants."

In another book of the Hindus, called the Bask, we will read: "At the end of the world, there will be a just king who will be the leader of all angels and men alike; he will be right and will acquire whatever is hidden in the earth or in the seas. He will be aware of what goes on both in the heavens and on the earth. There will never be anyone greater than him."

In the Psalms of David, which is one of the books of the Old Testament, we read: "The wicked shall vanish, but those relying on God shall inherit the earth." Further on we read: "the honest ones and well-wishers shall inherit the earth and shall live therein for ever." Similar statements, too, are recorded in the other books of the Old Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 24, we read "As the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so it is with the son of man..."

And in the twelfth chapter of Luke, we read: "Be well-prepared and ready, keep your lights burning; act like those who are awaiting the arrival of their master, and who will open the door as soon as he bangs on the door."

In the book called, "The Signs of His Appearance" we'll read: "The belief in the arrival of a great reformer can be seen in the ancient books of the Chinese, the Indians, Scandinavians, the ancient Egyptians, the natives of Mexico and the like."

Rational Proof

a) The order of creation teaches us that man's world must finally surrender to the law of justice and submit to a just order and a permanent reformer.

It should be pointed out that the world of existence, as far as we know, is a collection of systems. The existence of regulating laws in the entire universe indicates the unity of this system.

The issue of law order and accountability is one of the most important and fundamental issues of this universe.

Every system, whether it is the macrocosm or a tiny atom, of which several millions could be placed on a needlepoint, follows a strict set of rules.

Every organ in our bodies whether it is a single cell with its complicated structure, our nervous system, our hearts or our lungs, has a precise order that is like a very exact watch. Compared with the most delicate computers, the structure of the human body is complex, indeed.

In such an organized world, in which man is just a tiny component, could man always live in chaos, lawlessness shedding blood and practicing injustice?

Could injustice, ethical and social corruption, which are modes of lawlessness, prevail over the human community forever?

We, therefore, come to the following inevitable conclusion: The observation of the system of existence leads us to believe that the human community has to ultimately submit to order and justice and return to the original path of creation.

b) The gradual advancement of human communities is an indication of man's bright future since we cannot ignore the fact that man has been advancing since the time he has known himself.

In the physical and materialistic dimension, man was once living in the lowest possible conditions of life and this applied to his shelter, clothing, food, transportation and means of production. Today, however, he has reached such degrees of advancement that it surprises even the human intellect.

In the dimension of sciences, knowledge and culture, man makes discoveries daily. This law of perfection one day will no doubt include the spiritual, ethical and social dimensions as well, and will put man on the straight path of just laws, peace and permanent justice, so when we see ethical corruption prevailing, it will no doubt set the stage for such a revolution.

We are not saying that corruption should be encouraged rather, we are saying that when corruption goes out of hand, ethical revolution will step in.

People should be prepared for the principles brought by a divine leader at a time when they are faced with obstacles created by their own involvement in sins, when they see the deplorable consequences of their wrongdoings, and when they are no longer able to carry on with their lives.

The Holy Qur'an and the Appearance of the Mahdi

There are numerous verses in the Holy Qur'an that deal with the auspicious news of the Mahdi's appearance. However, here we will deal with only one verse: In verse 55 of Surah Nur, we read:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ

Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers in the earth as He made rulers of those before them.

This verse clearly shows that the government of the earth shall one day be taken from despotic tyrants and the deserving believers shall take their place.

The rest of this verse deals with some of the promises concerning the establishment of religion and the spiritual impact of Allah's government on men's hearts:

وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ

He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them.

Among these promises are the following, as well: the change from insecurity to security.

وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا

And that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange.

And that the root of blasphemy shall be eradicated from the earth altogether:

يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا

While they worship me not ascribing any partners to me.

Imam `Ali Ibn Al-husayn(s), in interpreting this verse, said:

هُمْ وَاللَّهِ شَيْعَتُنَا؛ يَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ بِهِمْ عَلَى يَدَيِّ رَجُلٍ مِنَّا وَهُوَ مَهْدِيُّ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ

"I swear to God that this group includes those who are our Shi`ah. God will realize this issue through a man from our Household and he is the leader and guide for this Ummah."^[23]

The Mahdi in the Traditions

The number of those narrations that deal with the establishment of a universal government based on peace and justice through a member of the Household, called Mahdi, is extremely numerous in both Shi`ah and Sunni sources.

Those narrations dealing with the fact that Mahdi is the twelfth Imam, a successor to the Prophet(s), the ninth descendant of Imam husayn(s) and the son of Imam hasan `Askari, are indeed numerous in the Shi`ah sources.

The frequency of narrations dealing with Mahdi's appearance that are recorded in Sunni sources is so high that Sunni scholars have had to refer to it explicitly in their books. In a treatise published recently by Rabitat al-`alam al-Islami, one of the most distinguished religious centers in the hijaz, says: "He is the last caliph of the twelve rightly guided caliphs to whom the Prophet(s) refers in the siha and the narrations dealing with the Mahdi's appearance are reported from many of the companions of the Prophet(s)."

Having mentioned the names of twenty of the Prophet's companions who have spoken of the Mahdi's appearance narrating directly from the Prophet(s), this treatise continues to say: "A great group of others, too, have reported such narrations... some Sunni scholars have written special books on the Mahdi.

Among them are Abu-Na`im Isfahani, Ibn hajar al-Haythami, al-Sakuni, Idris Maghribi, and Abu'l-`Abbas Ibn `Abd al-Mu'min." Then it continues:

“A group of ancient and contemporary Sunni scholars emphasize the fact that there are many narrations dealing with the Mahdi’s appearance.”

After mentioning the names of Sunni scholars who have dealt with narrations concerning this, the treatise brings its discussion to an end: “A group of reciters and narrators have stated explicitly that they believe the narrations dealing with the Mahdi are correct (sahih) and good ones (hasan) and naturally are among those Hadith that go back to many sources (mutawatir). Belief in Mahdi’s uprising is obligatory and this is one of the fundamental beliefs of the Sunni and the Muslim community and nobody will doubt it except for those who are ignorant, or those who follow heresy.”

The Narrations on the Mahdi Relayed by Shi`ah Scholars

Suffice it to say that there are hundreds of narrations concerning the Mahdi relayed by both the Prophet’s Companions and by the Imams(s). The notion of the Mahdi’s appearance is a fundamental Shi`ah’s belief. Every Shi`ah believes in his appearance and is aware of al-Mahdi’s characteristics and the signs of his appearance.

Since the first centuries of the advent of Islam up to the present time, the great Shi`ah scholars have written many books on this topic and have collected a tremendous number of narrations dealing with this issue.

Here we will present you with two or three of such traditions and refer readers who are interested, to books such as “Al-Mahdi; the Great Revolutionary,” “The Good News of Peace and Security,” and the translation of the book “Al-Mahdi,” by the honorable writer Sayyid sadr al-Din al-sadr.

The great Prophet of Islam has stated:

لَوْ لَمْ يَبْقَ مِنَ الدَّهْرِ إِلَّا يَوْمٌ لَطَوَّلَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ حَتَّى يَبْعَثَ رَجُلًا مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي يَمْلَأُهَا
قِسْطًا وَعَدْلًا كَمَا مِلْتُمْ ظُلْمًا وَجَوْرًا

“If there were left only one day of the earth’s life, God would prolong it until the time when a member of my Household would rise by God’s command to fill the earth with justice.”^[24]

In another narration reported from Imam sadiq (s) we read:

إِذَا قَامَ الْقَائِمُ حَكَمَ بِالْعَدْلِ وَارْتَفَعَ الْجَوْرُ فِي أَيَّامِهِ وَأُمِنَتْ بِهِ السُّبُلُ وَأُخْرِجَتِ الْأَرْضُ
بَرَكَاتِهَا وَرُدَّ كُلُّ حَقٍّ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ... وَحَكَمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِحُكْمِ دَاوُدَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ وَحُكْمِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى
اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ. فَحِينَئِذٍ تُظْهِرُ الْأَرْضُ كُنُوزَهَا وَتُبْدِي بَرَكَاتِهَا وَلَا يَجِدُ الرَّجُلُ مِنْكُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ مَوْضِعًا
لِصَدَقَتِهِ وَلِبَرِّهِ لِشُمُولِ الْغِنَى جَمِيعِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“When the revolutionary Imam rises up, he will base his government on justice. Injustice and hegemony will vanish during his reign. Roads will become safe in the light of him; the earth will pour out its wealth; every right will return to its possessor; He will judge among people in the way Dawud and Muhammad (s) judged. At this time the earth will reveal its hidden treasures; it will manifest its bounty; nobody will be able to find any poor person to give his poor-rate to; this is because all believers will become affluent...”^[25]

We know that during the Mahdi's absence (occultation), the continuation of the line of imamate will continue through his deputies i.e., the jurisprudents.

THINK AND ANSWER

What is the difference between the outlook of theists and materialists concerning the future of the world?

Can the Mahdi's appearance be inferred from our innate disposition? How?

Do we have rational reasons for such an appearance? What are they?

What does the Holy Qur'an have to say regarding this?

What does Sunni research reveal regarding this issue?

Notes

[1] Nahj al-Balaghah, Maxims, Sentence 147.

[2] For these issues we have lots of documents available. However, we lack the space to introduce them here.

[3] For further information refer to Tafsir Nemuneh, Third Volume, p. 435.

[4] For further information see the precious book of Al-Muraja'at.

[5] For further information refer to the translated copies of the following books: Al-Ghadir, Novid Amn Va Aman.

[6] Tabuk was a location north of the Arab peninsula next to the border of Byzantium.

[7] sahih al-Bukhari, Section 6, Page 3; sahih Muslim, Vol. 1, P 44 and Vol. 4, P 187.

[8] Tarikh Baghdad, vol. 7, P 452.

[9] Refer to Surah ta-Ha, verses 29-32.

[10] For further information, see Al-Muraja'at, p. 130, and the following pages and the book of Ihqaq al-Haqq, Vol. 4, P 62 and the following pages.

[11] Sirat al-Hilli, Vol. 33, P 308.

[12] Reported from Jami' al-Tirmidhi, as recorded by Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, P 37.

[13] Al-Muraja'at, P 42.

[14] Al-sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, P 75.

[15] Mustadrak al-Hakim, Vol. 3, P151.

[16] sahih al-Bukhari, Section 9; Kitab Al-Amqam, p. 100.

[17] sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Imarah, the chapter of Annas Tia' li Quraysh.

[18] Musnad Ahmad, Vol. 1, P 398.

[19] Yanabi' Al-Mawaddah, P 446.

[20] Yanabi' Al-Mawaddah, P 441.

[21] Ibid, P 442.

[22] Almu'jam al-Mufahras li-Alfaz al-hadith al-Nabawi, Vol. 6, P 302.

[23] The interpretation of Majma' al-Bayan, under verse 55 of Surah Nur.

[24] This narration is reported in most books of the Shia and Sunni scholars.

[25] Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 13, (old printing).

Ten Lectures on Eschastology

First Lecture: One Crucial Question: Is Death Considered as One's End or Beginning?

Why do Most People Fear Death?

Death has always manifested itself as a horrendous monster in the eyes of man. The very thought of it has made life miserable for many.

These people not only fear the name of death, but also abhor the graveyard. They decorate the graves in order to forget about the very nature of death.

In literature, expressions such as “the monster of death,” “the claws of death,” and “the blow of death” are prevalent.

When people want to mention the name of a dead person, they use euphemisms such as “away from now,” “may my tongue be mute,” “may there be seven mountains distance between him and you,” “May you continue his life,” in order to create a wall between the listener and the memory of the dead person.

Now let us analyze the roots of such fear among human beings. Why did some people in the past have a different view on death and did not fear it and instead they welcomed death as an honor?

We read in history books that while a group of people sought after the elixir of life, another group lovingly took part in holy wars and laughed in the very face of death. Sometimes, they would complain about their longevity and wished for a day when they should join the Great Love. Today, too, we can witness this phenomenon in the struggle between right and wrong by these people who enthusiastically welcome martyrdom.

The Real Reason Behind This Fear

An analysis of such fear will show us that there are two reasons for it:

1. An Interpretation of Death as Extinction

Man has always escaped from extinction: he fears illness which is the absence of health; he fears darkness which is the absence of light and he fears poverty which is the obliteration of affluence.

He is sometimes disturbed by an empty house or a desert since he cannot see anybody there. Strange to say, people are often frightened by the very presence of a dead body in a room, whereas when the latter was living, they enjoyed that persons presence.

Now let us see why man fears nonexistence. The reason for such an irrational fear is clear; nonexistence is foreign to existence; therefore, our abhorrence towards nonexistence is quite natural. Now if we consider death as the end of everything, we are correct to fear it, even its very name, since according to this view the death takes away everything from us.

But if we assume that death is the start of a new life that it is eternal and is a window opening upon a great world, then naturally we would never fear it and would congratulate those who enthusiastically embrace it.

The Dreadful Record

We know of a group of people who do not consider death as non-existence and who do not deny life after death, but who fear death, anyway.

This is because the record of their deeds is so dark and black that they fear the painful chastisement that they would face after life.

They are right to fear death because they look like dangerous criminals who fear being released from jail because they know that as soon as they are removed from their cell, they will be executed. Therefore, they desperately cling to the prison bars. They do not abhor freedom; but they fear it because the consequence is execution.

But why should those who neither consider death as extinction nor possess black records fear death? No doubt, they, too, desire life enthusiastically, but since they want to enjoy life after death, they should welcome a death which brings forth God's satisfaction.

Two Different Points of View

We have seen that there are two kinds of people. A group that includes the majority of people, who abhor death. But there is a second group who welcomes a death which is for an honorable purpose, such as martyrdom or at least are not fearful when their lives come to an end.

The reason for this is that they have two opposing viewpoints:

The First Group: Either this group does not believe in life after death or they still have some doubts about such a life. Therefore, they consider the moment of death as a farewell to everything. Of course, it is extremely horrible to say farewell to everything; it is quite painful to leave the light and enter the darkness.

By the same token, it is quite horrifying for a prisoner to leave his cell and enter a court to be tried.

The Second Group: This group considers death as a new life, an escape from a limited, dark world into a wide, illuminated world. Death is freedom from a narrow, small cage and the opportunity to fly into the boundless, immense sky; it is like leaving a location which is the centre of fights, struggles, injustice, hatred and vengeance and entering a place of purity. It is natural for them not to fear such a death and declare like Imam `Ali(s):

لَا بِنُ أَبِي طَالِبٍ أَنَسُ بِالْمَوْتِ مِنَ الْوَلَدِ بِشَدِيٍّ أُمِّهِ

"I swear to God that the son of Abu-talib's interest in death is more than the interest shown by an infant towards its mother's breast."

This group might repeat the following poem written by a Persian poet:

Tell death to come to me if it is man enough,
So that I may hold it tightly in my bosom;
So that I would take away from it its eternal life,
But it could take away from me only a colorful robe.

This is why we encounter some personages like Imam husayn(s) and his supporters in the history of Islam who became happier as their martyrdom came closer.

In the same way, we can read in the honorable life of Imam `Ali(s) that he uttered the expression:

"I swear to the God of the Ka`bah that I am victorious and free," when the sword of that filthy criminal came down on his head.

Of course, this does not mean that it is advisable for us to jeopardize our lives and abandon the great asset of life.

Rather, it is meant that one should benefit from life properly and never be worried about its end, especially losing it in those paths where excellent objectives lie.

THINK AND ANSWER

Why do people fear death?

Why do some people laugh in the face of death and are in love with martyrdom in the way of Allah?

What could the moment of death be likened to? How do true believers feel towards death? And how do faithless people feel towards it?

Have you ever seen anybody who did not fear death? What memories do you have of him?

What was `Ali's logic about death?

Second Lecture: Resurrection Provides Life With Meaning

Life here in this world would be in vain if the life in the other world were not taken into consideration. Life here without life in the other world resembles life as an embryo without life outside the womb.

If the fetus, which lives in a small area, in a dark room inside the mother's womb, could think and reason, it would be amazed and wonder why it was imprisoned inside a body not knowing what its future would be like.

However, if it is informed that this restricted life is for its organs to develop and that after nine months it would get its freedom and that it could then walk in a world where there is the sun and the moon and in which there are green trees and flowing rivers, and in which there are all sorts of great things, it would then feel at ease and would say that it had found the philosophy behind its creation.

It would realize that that embryonic life was a preliminary stage for a flight into another stage, a higher one.

Now if the fetal life is disconnected from the life here of this world, everything would look dark and gloomy; life and would resemble a prison.

The same issue holds true in the comparison between life here and the future life. Why should we stay here seventy years or more and suffer?

Why should we acquire knowledge and by the time we have acquired it feel completely old? What are we living for? Why do we eat, clothe ourselves, and sleep? What is the use of this repetitive existence? Are these skies and earth created to witness us eat, drink, dress ourselves, and continue a corrupted life?

Now, the absurdity of life for those who do not believe in the resurrection becomes clear: they simply cannot fathom these minor events of life and also do not believe in the other world.

For this very reason, some of them decide to commit suicide in order to free themselves from such a boring existence.

However, life here would not seem absurd and meaningless if we believed that this world was a preparation for the other one, a place in which we could sow seeds so that later we could benefit from the harvest. If we believed that this world was a college in which we could gather information that could better our future lives, then life here would come to be regarded as an introduction for an eternal life.

So we see that the belief in the Resurrection gives content and meaning to human life and makes man free from anxieties and absurdities.

Belief in the Resurrection: an Important Factor of Education

Furthermore, a belief in the existence of a great court in the other world has a great impact on our present lives. You could imagine how life would seem during a day in an imaginary country if it were announced by the government that on that day, no police station would be opened and no court would be in session.

Belief in the Resurrection is a belief in a great court which cannot be compared with any court here in this world.

The characteristics of such a court are as follows:

1. It is a court in which there is no favoritism, in which law rules and no judge could be bribed;

2. It is a court which does not need the formalities used here; records are known instantaneously and verdicts are issued immediately.

3. It is a court in which the wrong deeds of an individual present themselves to the court to help the judge to decide.

4. The witnesses at such a court are the individual's limbs and organs, eyes and ears, tongue and skin and even the piece of earth on which the crime or wrongdoing had taken place.

5. In this court, the judge is God who is aware of everything and who is Just.

6. The chastisement is not conventional; it is our deeds that stay next to us hurting, disturbing and torturing us.

Faith in the resurrection could raise man's soul so high as to be able to utter the words which `Ali(s) had uttered:

"I swear to God I would rather sleep on thorns instead of on a bed, and be chained up during the day and be dragged along the streets than partake in God's Great Court, if I have ever committed an unjust act against anyone of God's servants or if I have ever usurped anybody's right."^[1]

It was a faith in such a court that forced Imam `Ali(s) to threaten to burn his brother's hand because the latter had asked him for some money from the nation's treasury. The Imam(s) told him:

You cry because you are exposed to a small fire but force your brother to face a horrendous Fire in the other world.^[2]

Could such a person with such a strong faith ever be deceived? Could he ever be bribed? Could he ever be driven away from his righteous path by threats?

The Holy Qur'an says: when sinners look at the record of their deeds, they would say:

مَا لِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا

Ah! Woe to us! What a book is this! It does not omit a small one [sin] nor a great one, but numbers them all. [Qur'an 18:49]

THINK AND ANSWER

What would happen if there were no other world except for this one?

Why does a group of disbelievers in the Resurrection try to commit suicide?

What is the difference between the court of Resurrection and a court here in this world?

How does a belief in the Resurrection influence our acts here?

What did Imam `Ali(s) tell his brother, `Aqil?

What did he ask for and how did Imam `Ali(s) respond?

Third Lecture: An Example Of The Day Of Resurrection within Our Souls

Since the issue of the afterlife and the great court of the Resurrection would seem strange for someone who has lived inside the prison in this world, God has established a small court inside each one of us which is called the court of conscience.

To explain in more detail: A person will be tried in many courts for the crimes he has done the first court is the usual courts in this world with all its shortcomings.

Although the very presence of such courts would lessen the number of crimes, they are based on such feeble foundations that nobody expects them to act in complete accordance with justice.

If wrong laws are enforced in a court, if judges are busy taking bribes and are subject to nepotism and partisan influences, then we could not expect justice to prevail in such a court.

Even if some courts might be presided over by pious judges, there are still those clever criminals who could escape punishment.

The second type of court, which functions better than the first one, is the court of the consequences of our own deeds. Our acts have consequences which affect us sooner or later.

We have seen many governments that were engaged in tyranny and engaged in all forms of injustice, but were soon caught up in the traps they had made for themselves. They collapsed as a result of their wrong actions, caught in the consequences of what they had done earlier.

Such a court has the shortcoming that it is neither public nor universal. Therefore, it could not make us feel that we do not need the court of the resurrection.

The third court, which is more elaborate than the preceding one is the court of the conscience. In the same way that the solar system, with its wonderful system can be observed in the tiny structure of an atom, we could claim that the court of our conscience is a tiny example of the court of the resurrection.

This is because there is a mysterious force inside our inner self which is called “practical wisdom” by the philosophers, “the reproaching soul” by the Holy Qur’an and “conscience” by others.

As soon as man does a good or bad act, this court starts to operate immediately and issues its verdicts in the form of mental punishments or mental rewards.

This court of conscience at times beats the wrongdoer inside with such a force that he or she would prefer death to this life. Such a person would write in his will “if I commit suicide it was because I wanted to get rid of the tortures of my conscience.”

This court of conscience at times encourages man for his good work to the extent that he becomes extremely delighted. He then feels at ease in his soul, and he could never find such a source of delight anywhere in the world.

Such a court has its own characteristics:

1. In this court, the judge, the witness, the officer to carry out the court's verdict, and the audience are the same person. It is the force of conscience that acts as a witness, that judges and finally carries out the verdict.

2. Contrary to normal judicial procedures which would sometimes take years to complete, the trial here at this court is momentary; it does not take time. Occasionally some time is needed to remove the obscurities from the eyes of the beholder, however, as soon as the documents are in, the verdict will be issued.

3. The verdict of such a court does not require one to go to a court of appeal; it only has one stage.

4. This court will not only punish; it will also reward those who perform their duties. In such a court, both the good-doers and the wrongdoers are tried and receive rewards or punishment accordingly.

5. The punishment of such a court does not have anything in common with ordinary punishment in the sense that they do not require prisons, whips, or executions. However, at times they are so torturous for a person's soul that no punishment could compare to it.

In sum, such a court does not resemble any worldly court; it rather resembles the court of the Resurrection. The greatness of the court of conscience is so tremendous that the Holy Qur'an swears by it, associating it with the court of the Resurrection:

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ * وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ * أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنْ نَجْمَعَ عِظَامَهُ * بَلَى
قَادِرِينَ عَلَى أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنَانَهُ

Nay! I swear by the Day of Resurrection. Nay! I swear by the self-accusing self. Does man think that we shall not gather his bones? Yea! We are able to make complete his very fingertips. [Qur'an 75:1-4]

Naturally, such a court, due to its material nature, does not make us feel that we do not need the court of the Resurrection. This is because:

1. The sphere of human conscience is not all-inclusive; rather, it is based on one's way of thinking.

2. At times, a treacherous man could deceive even his own conscience.

3. At times, the call of a wrongdoer's conscience is so weak that he cannot hear it.

Here, the significance of the fourth court, i.e., the court of the Resurrection will become clear.

THINK AND ANSWER

In how many courts is man tried?

What are the characteristics of the first court and what is it called?

What are the characteristics of the second court?

What are the characteristics of the third court?

Mention the weak points and the strong points of the court of conscience.

Fourth Lecture: Resurrection with Respect to Innate Nature

It is said that theism resides deep inside man's inner being or nature and if we study the unconscious and sub-conscious aspects of the mind, we will find an interest in a super-natural being who has created the universe.

But this is not true only of Monotheism and Theism. All the major and minor principles of religion should also reside within man's soul or else the necessary coordination between divine legislation and creation would not occur.

If we examine our hearts and the very depths of our souls and inner being, we will definitely find our conscience telling us that life here does not end with death; rather, death is a window towards the land of eternity.

To uncover this truth, let us observe the following:

1. Love for Survival

If man was created for extinction, he should have been in love with extinction and loved death as the end of his life. However, we see that the face of death (in the sense of extinction) has never been tolerable to man: rather, he has been escaping from it with all his energy.

To chase after a longer life and to search for the elixir of life are signs of this truth. This very love for survival shows that we have been created to be eternal. This love would have been baseless if we had been created to die.

All the basic loves inside us are created to complete our beings; the love to survive is of the same sort.

Remember that we embark on the discussion of resurrection only after we have accepted the Being of God. We believe what He has put inside us has been placed there for a reason. For the same reason that our love of immortality has been given to us, however, this love would not exist without a belief in the other world.

2. Resurrection in History

The history of mankind attests to the fact that in the same way that religion has always existed even among ancient peoples, the belief of a life after death has always been in existence.

The evidence left behind by ancient peoples in pre-historic times, the way they constructed their graves and the way they buried their dead all indicate the fact that they had a firm belief in life after death.

This deeply rooted belief cannot be taken as an easy matter; neither could it be interpreted as simple habitual behavior.

When we observe a deep-rooted belief in a nation of the past, we should look for it in the innate disposition of the people of that nation. This is because it is only man's nature which could stand against the passage of time, thought and social changes and remain intact; otherwise these customs, rites and indoctrinations would have been forgotten with the passage of time.

Wearing a special mode of dress is a habit; therefore, it changes with time, but a mother's love towards her baby is an instinct, it is innate nature so it does not change with time, neither will it be forgotten or neglected. Any such force within the human soul has roots within the innate nature of man.

When a scientist says: “In depth research has shown that early man believed in a sort of religion because of the fact that they buried their dead under certain rules and put their vocational instruments beside them, this shows their belief in the existence of the other world,” [The Sociology of Kenning, P 192], we easily become convinced that these peoples had believed in life after death despite the fact that they erroneously assumed that that life resembled this one and that the same vocational instruments would be needed then.

3. The existence of man’s internal court, called conscience, is another way to prove that the concept of resurrection is innate to man.

As we have already discussed, all of us have this convincing feeling that there is a court inside our souls and minds which evaluates our acts, either punishing us for what wrongs we have done, or rewarding us for what good things, we have performed, making us so delighted in this way that we have no means to express it.

It has happened that some people who had committed capital crimes, such as murder, and had escaped, voluntarily submitted themselves to be tried and executed so that they could escape the pangs of conscience.

By observing this innate court, man could ask himself the following question: I am a small, tiny being with a court inside me, how is it therefore possible for the universe and the world of creation to lack such a court?

Therefore, we could prove that our belief in the resurrection and life after this one has its roots in our innate nature in three ways:

1. By way of our love for immortality;
2. By the existence of such a belief in the history of mankind;
3. And through the belief that there exists inside us a small example of the resurrection.

THINK AND ANSWER

How could we distinguish innate acts from acquired ones?

Why does man love to be immortal and how can this love for immortality be an indication of the innate nature of the resurrection?

Did past nations believe in the Resurrection?

How does the court of conscience punish us or reward us? Why? Provide some examples.

What is the relation between the court of conscience and the great court of the Day of Resurrection?

Fifth Lecture: Resurrection in the Scale of Justice

A cursory look at the system of creation will reveal to us that everything is systematic and governed by rules.

In the body of man, this system is so delicate that any imbalance would lead to either sickness or death.

For instance, in the structure of the eyes, heart, and brain this order is readily noticeable. The same order, systematization, and justice prevail over all of creation.

بِالْعَدْلِ قَامَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ

Through justice, the skies and the earth have been erected.

An atom is so tiny that millions of them could be located in the point of a needle. Such an atom must be extremely precise and ordered in its structure to allow it to exist for millions of years.

This happens because of the justice and exact calculations that are employed in the construction of an atom.

Is man such an exceptional being as to be free to do what he pleases? Is he free? Or is there something hidden here?

Free will and Freedom in Decision-Making

One distinctive feature that distinguishes man from all other creatures is that he possesses freedom of action. Why has He created him free and given him the freedom of will to carry out what he wants?

The reason rests in the fact that if he were not free he would never develop. This freedom has ensured man's spiritual and ethical development.

Suppose one is forced at gunpoint to help and assist the needy and carry out those acts which are beneficial to the community. Even though his acts would be naturally useful to everyone no ethical or human perfection or maturity would have taken place. Whereas, if he had carried out these actions voluntarily and he only did one hundredth of what he could have done, he still would have taken a big stride towards his perfection and development.

Thus, the first condition for spiritual and ethical perfection is to have a free will; man should do good things on his own and not through force. This great asset has been given to man just for this purpose.

Of course, this great asset is like a beautiful flower which is accompanied with thorns which represent the misuse of this free will.

Naturally, it would be quite easy for God to punish a man for his unjust deeds, to inflict him with all sorts of miseries, to make him blind, or dumb, or paralyzed altogether.

Under such circumstances, nobody would dare to do wrong things. But this abstention and piety then would be by force and could never be counted as a point of honor for man, for this piety would have been due to his fear of a great punishment.

Thus, man should be free. He should be exposed to God's different trials and not be threatened by immediate punishment so that he could show his true worth.

But there remains one issue to be solved. If each person could be free to do whatever he desires, this could negate God's Justice which governs the world.

That is why we become convinced that there should be a court for mankind in which everyone should be present and be tried to receive punishments if they had wronged others or given rewards if they have been just in their deeds.

Is it possible for Nimrods, Pharaohs, Genghis khans and korahs to commit atrocities carry out all sorts of unjust acts and then go away with no punishment whatsoever?

Could criminals and pious people be equal on God's scale of justice?

Regarding this, the Holy Qur'an says:

أَفَنَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ * مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ

What! Shall We then make those who submit as the guilty? What has happened to you? How do you judge? [Qur'an 68:35-36]

Regarding this, the Holy Qur'an says elsewhere.

أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الْمُتَّقِينَ كَالْفُجَّارِ

Shall We make those who guard against evil like the wicked? [Qur'an 38:28]

It is a fact that some of the wrongdoers would be at least partially punished in this world for their devilish acts. It is also a fact that the court of conscience exists. It is also a fact that the consequences of one's unjust and devilish acts would inflict him later. But if we consider the matter carefully, we will find out that no tyrant or sinner receives a punishment in this world proportional to the degree of his devilish acts. There are some who even escape the consequences of their wrongdoing.

So there should be a universal court in the other world to judge them justly and impartially or else the principle of justice would vanish forever.

Therefore, the acceptance of God and His system of Justice entails the acceptance of the Resurrection and the other world. These two are faces of the same coin.

THINK AND ANSWER

How are the heavens and earth based on justice?

Why is man given the asset of free will?

What would happen if wrongdoers got their punishment in this world?

Why can't the consequences of one's wrongdoings, his court of conscience and the consequences of his deeds free him from the court of the Resurrection?

What is the relation between God's Justice and the issue of the Resurrection?

Sixth Lecture: The Resurrection in This World

The sacred verses of the Holy Qur'an clearly illustrate the fact that idolaters and other unbelievers, not only in the time of the Prophet(s), but in all times have been astonished at the very notion of the Resurrection and life after death and even considered anybody who said it as mad:

هَلْ نَدُّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ يُنَبِّئُكُمْ إِذَا مُرِّقْتُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ * أَفَتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ؟

[And those who disbelieve say]: shall we point out to you a man who informs you that when you are scattered with the utmost scattering you shall then be most surely raised in to a new creation. He has forged a lie against Allah or there is madness in him. [Qur'an 34:7-8]

In those days, due to people's lack of knowledge, belief in life after death and in the dead coming back to life was considered madness or forging a lie against Allah.

However, the Holy Qur'an uses different kinds of reasoning which can be used by scholars and ordinary people alike, each one to the extent of his or her own capacity.

Although a complete description of the arguments of the Holy Qur'an needs a separate book, here we shall present only some portions of it.

1. Sometimes, the Holy Qur'an tells them: you see with your own eyes daily scenes of the Resurrection: you notice how some creatures die and then come back to life and then you have doubts concerning the issue of the Resurrection.

وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيَّاحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَسُقْنَاهُ إِلَى بَلَدٍ مَيِّتٍ فَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا كَذَلِكَ النُّشُورُ

And Allah is He Who sends the winds so they raise a cloud, then We drive it on to a dead country, and therewith We give life to the earth after its death; even so is the quickening. [Qur'an 35:9]

When we look around during winter everything in nature reminds of death; the trees are naked of leaves, flowers and fruits; what has remained is dry wood; there are no flowers; no buds blossom; nor is there any sign of life in the mountains, or in the deserts.

Spring, however, brings a mild climate; the life-giving drops of rain fall; suddenly, there is a magnificent commotion in nature: the flowers blossom, the trees give forth leaves; birds settle themselves on the branches and start their beautiful songs: and life is a commotion of activity.

If life after death did not mean anything, we would never witness this scene each year. If life after death were an improbable or insane act, we would never touch it so vividly every day.

2. Sometimes, the Holy Qur'an points towards the beginning of creation, that is, the first stages of creation. It tells Muhammad how to answer that nomadic Arab who came to him carrying a rotten piece of bone in his hand: "O Muhammad! Who is able to give life to this piece of bone? Tell me who can?" assuming he has offered a convincing argument against the issue of the Resurrection. The Holy Qur'an ordered Muhammad(s) to say:

قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنْشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ

Say: He shall quicken them Who originated them the first time. [Qur'an 36:79]

What differences should there be between the beginning of creation and its repetition? In the next verses, the Holy Qur'an answers this question succinctly by saying:

كَمَا بَدَأْنَا أَوَّلَ خَلْقٍ نُعِيدُهُ

As We originated the first creation, so We shall reproduce it. [Qur'an 21:104]

3. The Holy Qur'an at times mentions God's Great Power over all of creation:

Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like of them? Yea! And He is the Creator of all, the Knower. His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, and it is. [Qur'an 36:81-82]

Those who showed their doubts concerning these problems were those whose sphere of understanding was very limited or else they should have known that re-creation and bringing the dead back to life is easier than creation in the first place.

4. Sometimes, by "resurrection" they understand the word "energies" and say: "see, God who is able to make fire out of the green trees is able to give life to the dead."

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنْتُمْ مِّنْهُ تُوقِدُونَ

He Who has made for you the fire to burn from the green tree, so that with it you kindle fire. [Qur'an 36:80]

Regarding this verse of the Holy Qur'an, science tells us that when we burn a piece of wood to make a fire, the heat produced is the same energy that the piece of wood had received from the sun for long years and is now emitting it. We used to think that the sun's energy had died, but now we see it has come back to life again and puts on a new dress of life.

Is it difficult to revive the dead for a God who has stored light and energy inside a tree for years to be released later?^[3]

THINK AND ANSWER

Why are the unbelievers shocked by the notion of the Resurrection?

How could we see resurrection in the life pattern of plants every year?

Some verses, of the Holy Qur'an refer to the embryonic life of the child as a sign of resurrection, why?

What is the resurrection of energies?

Why does the Qur'an put emphasis on the expression "green tree"?

Seventh Lecture: The Resurrection and the Philosophy of Creation

Many people might ask: Why did God create us?

Sometimes they go beyond this and ask: What is the philosophy of the creation of this world?

A gardener plants trees to reap their fruits later on. A farmer plows the ground and plants seeds. Why has the Gardener of Creation created us?

Did God have any shortcomings and wanted to make up for them by creating us? If so, He would have been in need of something, however, being in need would not be compatible with God's magnanimity and infinity.

In answer to such questions, many views have been propounded. Here we will try to give an answer to them in a few sentences:

Our greatest error occurs when we compare God's attributes with those of ours. Since we are limited beings we engage in a lot of activities to satisfy our needs. We study to compensate for our lack of knowledge. We work hard so that we might not be in need. We practice hygiene and seek medical treatment to ensure our health.

But since God is infinite and without need in every respect, then we must seek the objective for anything He does outside His being. He would not create to His benefit, rather, He wants to show His Generosity towards His servants.

God is a sun with endless rays. He sends out His rays all around Him without being in need of any sort. He desires for everyone to benefit from His rays. It is in His very Nature to help mankind proceed towards perfection.

Our creation from nothing was a step forward to our perfection; the mission of the prophets and the revelation of Divine Books - the Holy Qur'an and others, each had their effect on our perfection. "As Imam `Ali has said in the famous narration called al-Dunya Mazra`at al-akhirah in the Nahj al-Balaghah:

"This world is a great university and we are its students, a ready field and we are its farmers, a lucrative business center and we are its businessmen."

How could we not imagine an objective for man's creation when we see that every tiny creature is created for a special function?

In the amazing construction of our bodies, no organ is created without a specific purpose: even our eyelashes and the arch in the soles of our feet have a special aim behind them.

How is it possible for every cell of our being to have an aim, but for our whole body to lack such? Then let us look around ourselves: every system has a specific objective. The sun shines for a specific reason; so does the rain that pours down; how is it possible for the whole world to lack specific objectives?

The fact is that inside this gigantic world it seems there is a big signboard which shows the ultimate objective for its creation; however, due to its huge size we are not able to grasp it at the moment we look at it. These words are written on that board: "education and perfection."

Now that we are familiar with the objectives behind our creation, let us ask this question: could our short lives, with all their hardships and failures, be the ultimate objective of creation?

Suppose I lived sixty years in this world and worked all day to earn my living and came back home tired and miserable at night and ate several plates of food and drank several liters of water and tried hard to provide myself with a shelter and finally I left all and passed away. Was it worth all these troubles?

Those who do not believe in the Resurrection and life after death would consider life here as absurd and pointless. It is commonly heard in their speech that life here has no specific objectives, some of these people at times try to commit suicide because they are tired with what they call “a boring life.”

What gives life an objective and makes it meaningful is to consider this life as a prelude to another eternal life. If we assume this second life to be true all our endeavors here become meaningful.

We will present here an example we offered in a previous section: If an unborn child were told that there would be no other world than this embryonic life, it would complain, saying, “Why should I be imprisoned here in this dark space? Why should I be confined to this terrible place after which nothing exists? What was the Creator’s objective for this creation?” But if it became certain that this period of nine months was a transitory interval to prepare it for a better world, a world in which there was light and glory, in which there were possibilities of all kinds, it would then be convinced that its embryonic life had a special flavor and then it would be tolerable. The Holy Qur’an, states: regarding this,

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ النَّشْأَةَ الْأُولَىٰ فَلَوْلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ؟

And certainly, you know the first growth, why do you not then mind?
[Qur’an 56:62]

In sum, this world clearly proclaims that there is another world after it, or else it would be worthless.

Let us listen to the Holy Qur’an for a moment:

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ؟

What! Did you then think that We had created you in vain and that you shall not be returned to Us? [Qur’an 23:115]

This refers to the fact that if the Resurrection which is indicated by the words “a return to Allah” did not exist man’s creation would be an absurdity.

To conclude: the philosophy of creation tells us that there should be a world after this one.

THINK AND ANSWER

Why can’t God’s Attributes be compared with those of man?

Why were we created?

Could the life of this world be the ultimate objective of creation?

What could we learn from a comparison of the embryonic life with this life here on the earth?

How does the Holy Qur'an use the creation of this world to confirm life in the other world?

Eighth Lecture: The Continuity of the Soul as a Sign for the Existence of The Resurrection

Nobody knows when man began to think of his soul. The only thing we might say is that man could see a difference between himself and other creatures from the very beginning of his creation. He could observe himself in comparison to stones, wood, the mountains, the desert and the beasts.

Man observed the status of his sleep and the death of others and noticed that both sleep and death occur to man with no drastic changes. From there he could realize that he had a jewel, called a soul at his disposal.

He could observe, as well, that he was different from the animals in that his decision-making was based on his free will whereas the life of animals was based on instincts and compulsory behavior.

Man could see that there was a mysterious force at work when he dreamt during his sleep and while his organs were silent at night. He then called this mysterious force the “soul.”

When thinkers established philosophy, the idea of the “soul” became a significant philosophical issue. Since then all philosophers have been discussing this to the extent that according to some Islamic scholars, there have been a thousand theories concerning the soul and other related issues.

Now, let us try to answer the following: Is the soul material or non-material? In other words: Does it exist on its own or is it a chemical or physical property of the brain or of the nervous system?

Some materialistic philosophers insist that the soul and mental phenomena are material and that it is the function of brain cells. They think the soul dies away as soon as the body dies in the same way that a watch ceases to work as soon as we strike it with a hammer.

Opposed to the material philosophers are the divine philosophers and a small number of materialistic philosophers, as well, who believe in the independence of the soul; for them the soul stands on its own and does not vanish with physical death.

To prove the independence of man’s soul, these scholars have offered numerous complicated reasons. Here we will deal with them, using simple language so that the reader could benefit from them:

1. We Cannot Place a Gigantic World Inside a Tiny One

Suppose you are sitting on the shore of a huge sea surrounded by lofty mountains. The turbulent waves strike at the rocks on the shore and furiously return to the sea.

The blue sky, dominates these mountains and the sea, and shows its glory at nighttime. We look at this magnificent scene closely for a while, and then we close our eyes and try to visualize the scene.

No doubt, such a mental mapping needs a huge storage space because there is no space to store such a huge picture inside the tiny cells of our brain that is to say, a huge map cannot occupy a small dot, nevertheless we do visualize such a huge, magnificent scenery in our minds.

This will show that, besides brain cells, there is a jewel inside us which can reflect any map no matter how huge it might be. For sure, such a jewel

should transcend material nature. This is because there could never be such a phenomenon in nature.

2. The Ability of the Soul to Reflect the Outside World

There are many physical and chemical reactions inside us. The functions of the stomach and heart are physical in nature, but the effects of the saliva and the stomach juices are chemical in essence.

Why are our souls and thoughts so different from those other bodily traits that are physical and chemical in nature?

Our thoughts and soul connect us with the world outside our bodies. But the chemical properties of saliva and stomach juices and the physical movements of the eyes, tongue and heart lack the capacity to connect us with the world outside.

In other words, we feel we are connected with the world outside our bodies and are familiar with what goes on there. Is it the outside world that enters our bodies? Definitely not. Then, what is going on?

The map of the world appears to us and through the capacity of our souls to reflect the outside world we are able to recognize the world outside us. This characteristic does not exist in any of the physical or chemical phenomena of our bodies.

Let us look at it another way: In order to recognize items that exist outside our bodies we should have some sort of domination over them. This domination however cannot be exerted by means of the brain cells for brain cells themselves are influenced by external factors, in the same way that other body cells are.

This difference shows there is something other than physical or chemical changes at work in the body which will make us dominate over the external world. This cannot be anything except for our soul, it is a reality beyond the world of matter.

3. Empirical Reasons for the Fundamentality and Independence of the Soul

Fortunately, scientists in recent years have proved the fundamentality and independence of the human soul and have accumulated significant data to fight against those who deny its existence or those who attribute physical properties to it.

1. Hypnotism is one proof that confirms these recent findings. Here we will give a short description of this phenomenon.

By using scientific procedures the hypnotist puts the subject into a trance and the latter becomes susceptible to his suggestions. During this induced sleep, the hypnotist communicates with his patient, and can even engage in a dialogue with him.

The hypnotist could send the subject's soul to different places to bring back news or become informed of the things he did not know earlier.

Sometimes subjects speak a foreign language they were not familiar with and even solve difficult mathematical problems when under the trance.

2. Clairvoyance or relations with souls after death is another sign of the fundamentality and independence of the soul.

There are now groups of scholars all over the world who are doing research work on the spirit or the soul. According to Farid Wajdi, the famous Egyptian scholar, there are nearly three hundred magazines and newspapers published in the world that deal with this delicate issue. Famous people take part in their sessions and in their presence make connections and communicate with souls as well as see extra-ordinary things occur.

There are, of course, a lot of swindlers who, with no scientific ways to communicate with souls, pretend to know this knowledge and in this way, rob people of their money. But this fraud does not force us to abandon such a branch of knowledge altogether which deals with communication with souls.^[4]

3. The dreams we experience while we are asleep, the sceneries we see in our dreams and the predictions of future events which become known to us in advance all refer to the real and independent nature of the soul.

Most people tell us about dreams that have become true and the outer manifestations of those dreams. This shows that our souls connect with other worlds while we are asleep. Under those conditions, we could pre-view coming events.

All these discussions clearly show that the soul is not material, neither is it the result of the physical or chemical reactions of our brains, rather, it is a reality beyond physical nature. It is a supernatural being which does not vanish with the death of the body. Thus, this notion paves the way for the acceptance of the Resurrection and life after death.

THINK AND ANSWER

Concerning the issue of the soul, what is the difference between the divine philosophers and materialistic philosophers?

What is meant by the following expression with respect to the fundamentality of the soul?

“We cannot put something gigantic in a small space.”

What do you know of hypnotic sleep?

What is meant by connecting with souls?

How could real dreams (those dreams which come true) be taken as reasons for the fundamentality and independence of the soul?

Ninth Lecture: Bodily Resurrection and Spiritual Resurrection

An important question regarding the issue of the Resurrection is whether resurrection pertains only to the spirit or whether the human body becomes alive in the other world once more and whether man enters the new life with the same body and soul, of course a little better than before.

Some of the ancient philosophers believed only in a spiritual resurrection and considered our bodies as vehicles which contained our souls. They thought that after death we would no longer need this body; that is to say, at the time of our departure to the other world we would just throw our bodies aside.

However, some great Islamic scholars contend that the Resurrection pertains both to body and soul alike. It is true that death causes our bodies to disintegrate, but the Almighty God will put the tiny particles of our bodies together and dress them with a new life. This is what scholars mean by “the Resurrection of the body.” This is due to the fact that the resurrection of the spirit has been taken for granted by these scholars.

Thus, all the verses in the Holy Qur’an which deal with the Resurrection have in mind the resurrection of the body as well.

Bodily Resurrection in the Holy Qur’an

We have already referred to that nomadic Arab who showed the Prophet(s) a rotten piece of bone, asking him: who can revive this rotten bone? And we saw that the Prophet(s), taking his command from God, answered him in this fashion: The same Being who created this bone for the first time, is the same Being who has created the sky and the earth, He is the same Being who brings out fire from within a green tree. These verses can be read at the end of Surah Yasin.

Elsewhere, of Resurrection the Holy Qur’an says:

On the Day, you shall leave your graves.^[5]

And we know that the graves are places where bodies are buried, not souls.

Basically, the unbelievers wondered how it was possible for our bodies which disintegrate and disappear to return to life once again:

وَقَالُوا أَءِذَا ضَلَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَإِنَّا لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ؟

And they say: What! When we have become lost in the earth, shall we then certainly be a new creation? [Qur’an 32:10]

And the Holy Qur’an replies: God who created everything for the first time has the Power to do it again.

What! Do they not consider how Allah originates the creation, then reproduces it? Surely, that is easy to Allah. [Qur’an 29:19]

An Arab of the pre-Islamic era had asked:

How could this man promise you that upon your death and after the disintegration of your bodies you would return to life once more? What! Does he threaten you that when you are dead and become dust and bones that you shall then be brought forth? [Qur’an 23:35]

All these interpretations of the Holy Qur’an indicate the fact that the Honorable Prophet of Islam always talked of the Resurrection of the body

and the near-sighted unbelievers wondered how this could ever happen. We have seen that the Holy Qur'an presented some examples of the Resurrection of the body, such as the rebirth of the dead plants to let them know of God's Power to give new life to dead bodies.

It would be therefore impossible for a Muslim who knows even a little bit of the Holy Qur'an to deny the Resurrection of the body. Such a denial would be the denial of the principle of the Resurrection in the eyes of God.

Rational Examples for the Resurrection of the Body

Besides these arguments, our wisdom tells us that our souls and bodies are two different entities related to each other; both nourish and become perfect, and naturally need each other for a later eternal life.

These two entities, during the purgatory or Intermediate state, are separated from each other temporarily. However, this separation for a longer duration would be impossible since the body without the soul is imperfect, and the soul without the body would be defective, as well. Our soul is the commander which forces us to move around, and our body is obedient to the soul. No commander could work without obedient servants.

Since the soul occupies a higher position than it had in this world, the body has to improve proportionally and this happens naturally. In other words, our bodies lack the malformations and defects which they have in this world.

Thus, the body and the soul are like twins, they are a pair so resurrection could not have only a spiritual or bodily manifestation.

Besides, the law of justice says: Resurrection should exist for both the soul and the body since anyone who commits a sin has carried out this sin with his body and soul together; therefore, both should be punished. By the same token, if a man has done anything good, both his body and soul should be rewarded. This view observes the law of justice.

Questions Related to the Resurrection of the Body

Some scholars have raised some questions related to this topic some of which will be dealt with here:

1. According to research by natural scientists, the body of a man changes several times within his lifetime. This resembles a pool of water which changes constantly due to the inflow it regularly receives.

2. The change of body tissues takes place once every seven years. Therefore, we change several times during our lifetime.

Now this question is raised: Which one of these bodies will return to hold our soul?

This is our answer: The last body will return, since in the above verses we saw that God will revive us from our rotten bones. This means that our last body will return. Our rising from the graves, too, embodies the fact that our last body will rise from the grave.

The point to ponder on is that our last body contains all the traits and structural specifications it had during our whole life.

In other words, our decayed bodies or skeletons will preserve all the physical characteristics the body had during its lifetime, because the

previous body gives its specific traits to the next one. Therefore, our last body will possess all our necessary traits.

3. Some researchers make the point that since with death our bodies disintegrate and become absorbed in the earth these particles of our bodies become parts of plants or the bodies of other human beings, so what would happen on the Day of Resurrection?

Several answers have been advanced for this important question, we will present a simplified version of them here.

Basically, those particles which have entered the body of another human being would go to the first body from which they have come [the verses in the above sections vividly indicate this fact].

Then this question would arise: Would the second body be now defective? We answer: Not necessarily, since the body from which the particles were taken would be reduced in size.

Thus, neither the first body, nor the second one vanishes. The only thing which happens is that the second body is reduced in size and this does not create any problem, because we are aware that at the Resurrection, our bodies become perfect and that shortcomings and defects vanish altogether in just the same way that a small child grows while his personality remains intact. Defective bodies rise in perfect shape at the Resurrection.

THINK AND ANSWER

What does “The Resurrection of the Body” mean?

What reasons are presented by those who deny the resurrection of the body and how does the Qura’an answer them?

What are the rational arguments in support of the resurrection of the body?

What is the relationship between the resurrection of the body and God’s justice it?

What does the concept “the eater and the eaten” mean and what answer is there for the questions raised thereby?

Tenth Lecture: Paradise, Hell, and the corporealization of Deeds

Many people ask this question: Does the world after death look like this one? What are the differences, if any? Are its pleasures, punishments, and rules similar to the ones in this world? In answer to this question, we may explicitly declare that in accordance with many documents, there are differences between this world and the next one. What we know of the other world, however, looks like ghosts in the distance.

We had better make use of the metaphor of the fetus once again. The same difference that exists between the embryonic life and this world exists between this world and the other world. If an unborn child wanted to have a real picture of the outside world, of its sky and the earth, of its sun and the stars and of its mountains, forests and seas, it definitely could not conceive of it.

For an embryonic child, who has been surrounded by the womb, the concepts of the moon, the sun, the seas, waves, tornadoes, the flowers, and the beauties of this world, would not exist. Its lexicon would be very limited, indeed.

The same differences apply when we compare this world and the other one. Therefore, we shall never have a complete understanding of the other world.

For this reason, we read in a narration:

فِيهَا مَا لَا عَيْنٌ رَأَتْ وَلَا أُذُنٌ سَمِعَتْ وَلَا خَطَرَ عَلَى قَلْبِ بَشَرٍ

“There is pleasure in Paradise which no eyes have ever seen, nor has any ear heard, nor has been recorded in anyone’s heart.”

And the Holy Qur’an says the same thing in other words:

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاء بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

So no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes; a reward for what they did. [Qur’an 32:17]

The rules governing the other world are also completely different: In the court on the Day of Resurrection the witnesses are man’s deeds, his hands and feet, his skin and even the piece of land on which he had committed a sin or had done a good deed.

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَى أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

On that day We will set a seal upon their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness of what they earned. [Qur’an 36: 65]

وَقَالُوا لَوْلَاذِهِمْ لَمْ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

And they who shall say to their skins: why have you borne witness against us? They shall say: Allah who made everything speak has made us speak. [Qur’an 41: 21]

Once it was quite hard to visualize such a phenomenon. However, with the advances of science in the recording of photographs and sounds, there is no place for wonder.

Thus, despite the fact that we are able to visualize only some feeble images of the pleasures in the other world and we are not able to see the magnitude of such pleasures, we know that the pleasures in the other world have both spiritual and material aspects to them. This is because the Resurrection has these two phases. Therefore, both rewards and punishments should have these two aspects. This is explicitly stated in the Holy Qur'an:

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ... وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

And convey good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that they shall have gardens in which rivers flow; whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: this is what was given to us before; and they shall be given the like of it and they shall have pure mates in them, and in them, they shall abide. [Qur'an 2:25]

Regarding the spiritual pleasures, the Holy Qur'an says:

وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ

...and best of all is Allah's goodly pleasure. [Qur'an 9: 72]

The dwellers in Paradise greatly enjoy the fact that God is satisfied with them and this pleasure they enjoy cannot be compared with anything. Regarding the denizens of Hell, for them there are physical tortures as well as God's dissatisfaction which is worse than any torment and torture.

The Corporealization of our Deeds

In accordance with many Qur'anic verses, our deeds become alive on the Day of Judgment and they accompany us everywhere. This Corporealization of rewards and punishments makes the system of recompensation function.

Injustice and aggression shall surround us in the shape of a gloomy and dark cloud. According to a narration from the Prophet(s):

الظُّلُمُ هُوَ الظُّلُمَاتُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Transgression is the very darkness on the Resurrection Day.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَى ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا وَسَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيرًا

As for those who swallow the property of the orphans unjustly, surely they only swallow fire into their bellies. [Qur'an 4:10]

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

On that day, you will see the faithful men and faithful women with their light running before them. [Qur'an 57: 12]

الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

Those who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation and cut asunder what Allah has ordered to be joined, and make mischief in the land; it is they who are the losers. [Qur'an 2:27]

The wealth which hoarders amassed and did not observe the rights of the oppressed out of it would be a chain round their necks on that day. They would be no longer able to move about.

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ

And let not those deem, who are niggardly in giving away that which Allah has granted them out of His Grace, that is good for them; nay, it is worse for them. [Qur'an 3:180]

Sciences and man's knowledge tell us that nothing is perishable in this world. Matter and energy constantly are converted into each other without getting lost. Our deeds are not outside this domain; therefore, they are perpetual even if they change form.

Concerning the Day of Judgment the Holy Qur'an, states succinctly:

وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا

And what they had done they shall find present there.

In fact, they are facing the consequences of their own deeds. In the same Surah, God says:

وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا

Your Lord shall not do any injustice to anyone. [Qur'an 18:49]

Concerning the Day of Judgment, we read in the Holy Qur'an:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِيُرَوْا أَعْمَالُهُمْ

On that day men shall come forth in sundry bodies that they may be shown their works. [Qur'an 99:6]

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ * وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

So he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it. [Qur'an 99:7-8]

The very fact that our deeds, either small or large, good or evil, remain constant and do not perish and shall be with us on the Day of Judgment, could be used as a warning to everyone so that they could refrain from committing evil actions and eagerly perform good deeds.

Strange to say, nowadays there have been some instruments designed to detect sounds recorded in the artifacts of ancient peoples. A scholar writes:

Today scientists are able to reproduce the voices of the Egyptian jar-makers of two millennia before. This is because there are two thousand years old jars in Egyptian museums that have recorded in them the voices of the workers which have made them. Today, those sound waves have been detected and can be heard by us.^[6]

Thus, we could find solutions regarding the issue of the Resurrection, the permanency of the rewards of the good-doers and the chastisement of the evildoers by considering the corporealization of our deeds and being aware of the fact that every good work or evil deed has an impact on our souls.

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Qom: The Qom Seminary

Nasir Makarim Shirazi

THINK AND ANSWER

Does man's life at the Resurrection resemble life in this world?

Can we understand and visualize the punishments and rewards of the Day of Resurrection?

Are the pleasures of Paradise and the tortures of Hell physical in nature?

What is meant by the corporealization of our deeds and how does the Holy Qur'an deal with it?

What kinds of problems related in the section on the Resurrection could be solved through belief in the corporealization of our deeds?

Notes

[1] Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 224.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Please note that it is only green trees which absorb the Co2 with sunlight.

[4] For further information refer to “The Return of the Souls” and “Resurrection and the World after Death.”

[5] Ya-Sin, verse 51 and al-Qamar, verse 7.

[6] From the book called “The improvements made.”

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