

Lessons on Islamic Beliefs

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
The Unity of God	9
Divine Justice	31
Prophethood	47
Imamate.....	71
Resurrection	95
Bibliography.....	115

In the Name of God the Beneficent the Merciful

Introduction

The major beliefs among Muslims and also among adherents of other Abrahamic faiths are the same. These include the belief in the unity of God (*tawhid*), divine prophethood (*nubunna*) and resurrection (*ma'ād*). We all share the belief that there is only One creator, by Whom we have all been created. Out of His Mercy and Wisdom, He provides us with extra guidance through revelation, so He sent prophets. We also believe that there will be an eternal life after resurrection, and that we will be accountable for what we have done, and if we have acted and believed virtuously we will have everlasting bliss and salvation. These precepts are shared by all Abrahamic faiths and both Sunni and Shi'a¹ Muslims alike.

In addition to this, Muslims believe in the prophethood of

¹ The word *shi'a* lexically means 'follower,' and originally referred to those who followed Imam Ali b. Abi Talib and who recognised him as the Prophet's divinely appointed successor. Today it generally refers to the body of Muslims who recognise the twelve Imams from Imam Ali (a) to the rest of the Imams (a) from his and Fatimah (a), the Prophet's daughter's lineage.

6 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Prophet Muhammad (s) as the last prophet, after whom there would be no other prophet, and hence no further communication from God by way of prophethood.

When it comes to articulation of the precepts of faith, there is a difference between Sunnis and Shi'as. That which the Sunnis count to be the pillars of faith are the testimony of faith (*kalima al-shahādatayn*) and four other primary practices of worship (*salāt* - prayer, *ṣakāt* - alms tax, *sawm* - fasting, *hajj* - pilgrimage), whereas Shi'a scholars have tried to keep the doctrinal aspects (*usūl al-dīn*) separate from religious practices (*furū' al-dīn*) or those aspects that derive from the principles of religion.

Thus, 'principles of religion' include: the beliefs in the unity of God, prophethood, and resurrection. In addition to these three, the Shi'a believe in divine justice (*'adl*) and Imamate. From these branch out the various practices, ten in total, which are termed 'branches of religion' and include: prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, alms, *khums* tax, striving in the way of God, enjoining the good, prohibiting the bad, befriending the friends of God and disassociation from the enemies of God.

In this volume, we aim to deal with the five principles of religion, among which God's unity, prophethood and resurrection are shared by all Abrahamic religions, and divine justice and Imamate are specific to the Shi'a school of

thought. It must be mentioned here that there is no explicit *hadith*² that list these five as being principles of our faith. Rather, they have been laid down and developed historically because throughout the ages there have been many controversial issues that arose among Muslims, and the followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt*³, in order to distinguish their position, focused on these principles. For example, although all Muslims believe that God is just, Shi'a scholars have chosen the issue of justice as a very important factor to focus on in forming our doctrinal identity. This will be dealt with in detail in the section on divine justice in this volume.

This book is based on a series of lectures on Aqaid delivered during my sabbatical leave in 2006 - 2007 in London. I was asked by the Huijat Islamic Centre in Stanmore to discuss

² Tradition or report, specifically the traditions of the Prophet (s) and the infallible Imāms (a), i.e. their sayings, actions and tacit approvals of others' actions. *Hadith* as a concept is interchangeable with the word *Sunnah*.

³ *Ahl al-Bayt*: purified household of the Prophet (s) as per the verse in the Qur'an 33:33:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

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

These consist of the Prophet (s) himself, his daughter Fatimah (a), his son-in-law and first divinely appointed Imam, Ali (a), and their progeny of divinely appointed Imams, numbering twelve in total.

8 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

each principle of religion in two sessions. Later in 2007 and 2008, these lectures were transcribed and turned into a text on Aqaid by sister Nazmina Dhanji. Now after many years, I managed to review the whole work and make it ready for publication. I hope Muslims and non-Muslims who want to familiarise themselves with Islam would find this book useful and those who want to go further may refer to *Islamic Belief System*.

I take this opportunity to thank all the people who helped and supported. Here I would like to express my deepest gratitude to God for all His gifts esp. the gifts of learning and teaching.

May God bless all you who read this small book and take you nearer to Him, so much so that you would find Him closer to yourself than any intimate friend or loving relative!

Mohammad Ali Shomali

London, 12th January 2016

The Unity of God

Why unity or oneness? Why is it articulated as the belief in the unity of God, and why not in proving the existence of God, since the existence of God is more fundamental a starting point?

This is because the existence of God is not considered to be that much of a questionable matter or that much a point of contention. When you read the Qur'an, except in very few instances, the emphasis has always been the unity of God and not in proving that there is God. For example, God says:

أَمْ خُلِقُوا مِنْ غَيْرِ شَيْءٍ أَمْ هُمْ الْخَالِقُونَ

Were they created from nothing? Or are they [their own] creators? (52:35)

If someone does not believe in God as his creator, he must choose one of these two options - either he must say that he has been created from nothing, which is impossible, or that he is a creator himself, which is also impossible, for one must exist before they are able to create anything. So, very simply and rationally, God rejects the idea that someone

10 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

might present that they have come into existence without a creator.

In another verse, God says:

أَفِيْ اللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

Is there any doubt about God, the originator of the heavens and the earth?! (14:10)

The Qur'an takes it as a very obvious fact that He exists. This is because deep within every person, there is an innate knowledge about God, even though in some people it may be passive, and not activated until one is faced with certain circumstances such as dangers or threats, or when our hope of being saved by anyone other than God is lost. All of a sudden we become attentive to one who can save us. A famous *hadith* from the sixth Imam⁴ Sadiq (a) illustrates this very well. A man went to Imam Sadiq (a) and said, 'How can I know that God exists?' Imam asked him, 'Have you ever journeyed by ship or boat?' to which the man replied yes. He asked further, 'Have you ever been in such a critical situation whereby you are going to drown or your boat capsize, and you know you are not going to be able to save yourself?' He replied, 'Yes.' Imam asked, 'In that particular instance, did it

⁴ *imam*: leader of a Muslim community or of the congregational prayer. In Shi'i thought and practice, it is a term used to refer specifically to the twelve divinely appointed leaders and guides after the Holy Prophet (s), chosen by God to rule and to guide mankind to perfection.

occur to you that there is someone who can save you?’ The man again replied yes. Imam said, ‘That is God, glory be to Him.’⁵

So there is this innate inclination in every human being. There are also several rational arguments to prove the existence of God, and some Muslim philosophers have also developed a very sound argument to prove the existence of God, that does not necessitate anything but God Himself. It is called *burhan al-siddiqin* - the proof of the veracious. It was first mentioned by Ibn Sina (Avicenna), then further developed by Mulla Sadra, and finally by ‘Allamah Tabataba’i. Without going into detail here, they argue from the concept of being that there must be an infinite being. It is a very sound and well developed argument, being among the novelties of Islamic philosophy, not hitherto present in western philosophy.

Anyway, in spite of the rational arguments available to prove the existence of God, according to the Qur’an, the main emphasis is put on the unity or oneness of God, because the existence of God is seen as something not very difficult to understand. Even the pagans in Mecca or the Arab peninsula, did not deny the existence of a Creator. However, they also worshipped idols, whom they felt could help them get closer to God. As the Qur’an says:

⁵ *Al-Tawhid*, p. 231

12 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ، وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا
نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى

*Look! [Only] exclusive faith is worthy of God, and
those who take guardians besides Him [claiming,]
‘We only worship them so that they may bring us near
to God. (39:3)*

They thought that by worshipping these idols, whom they supposed to have certain powers, they could get closer to the main deity, which is God. They claimed that God had delegated some of His power and authority to various idols, though they knew that He was the creator. That is why the Qur’an says:

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ

*If you ask them, ‘Who created the heavens and the
earth?’ they will surely say, ‘God.’ (39:38)*

In any case, the issue of the existence of God is not as emphasised as the issue of the unity of God. This is why we have chosen divine unity as one of our principles. Also, it must be added here that the unity of God is a very substantial and fundamental part of our understanding of Islam. It is not just something we learn and repeat as ‘There is no god but God’, and something we will repeat when asked by the angel when we die. Divine unity, is something which, if understood properly, has far-reaching implications into all facets of life. If we fully understand and implement

divine unity, it would be no exaggeration to say that all our problems will be solved. There is no problem in this world, except as a result of lack of understanding, implementation or attention to divine unity. Conflicts, wars and moral dilemmas are all due to negligence in understanding that there is One Lord for the world, who is the most perfect and most pure, and that by submission to Him, we can achieve happiness. When we deny divine unity, consciously or unconsciously, that's when all the problems arise.

According to the great scholar, 'Allamah Tabataba'i, in his exegesis of the Qur'an titled *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, as far as we know, before the Qur'an, there have been two major attitudes among teachers of moral ethics. One was to ask people to be moral, virtuous or good, for a promise of a reward of Paradise that they can receive from God. If they want to have everlasting happiness in Heaven, they should be moral. This was the view of the previous prophets and past scriptures focusing on this idea of receiving reward or saving oneself from punishment through living a moral life. The second approach was the approach of the people who would stress on the outcomes of the acts themselves, for example, humbleness will lead to social acceptance, or honesty and reasonable pricing of goods by a shopkeeper will lead to more customers. Where the first group used the rewards in the afterlife as an incentive for moral behaviour, this group focused on the worldly outcomes and benefits of such.

14 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

The Qur'an, on the other hand, has a view different to both of these. Although at times it adopts both of these means, it has its own unique method, and that is to remind us that as servants of God, if we fully implement divine unity, then we will have both everlasting happiness for ourselves as well as being beneficial members of society. If we are greedy or jealous, fearful or ungrateful, it originally stems back to not being a good *muwabbid* (monotheist or believer in *tawhid*), not being one who fully implements divine unity. Why would one think that by being jealous he can add to what he has, or by being greedy he can have more, if he truly understood that it is only God who gives and takes, or who decides what is better.⁶

Anyway, divine unity is so important that whatever we were to write about it would not be enough. This is why the eighth Imam Rida (a), in the city of Nishapur where thousands of people had gathered to greet his arrival, when they insisted for him to share some words of wisdom with them, in such an important mass gathering, chose to say the following, 'I heard from my father, who heard from his own father, who heard from his father, all the way till the Prophet (s), from the angel Gabriel, from God, most glorified:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ حِصْنِي فَمَنْ دَخَلَ حِصْنِي أَمِنَ مِنْ عَذَابِي

To believe that there is no god but God is My fortress.

⁶ *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol. 1, pp. 355-360.

So whoever enters My fortress will be saved from My punishment.

He then walked a few paces, stopped and turned to the people again, perhaps to distinguish between the statement handed down from the Prophet (s) and between what he was about to add next. He said:

بَشْرُوطِهَا وَأَنَا مِنْ شُرُوطِهَا

*accompanied by its conditions and requirements, and I am one of those conditions.*⁷

To believe in the Imam as a person divinely appointed by God out of His Grace to guide us is one of the requirements of the belief in divine unity. It is one of the requirements of being ‘saved’ in the fortress of *tawhid*. So we can see how far-reaching and comprehensive the belief in divine unity is, that even Imamate is integrated within it.

The Prophet (s) himself used to say to the people, ‘Declare that there is no god but God and you will be successful.’⁸ You may say what about the rest? What about prophethood, resurrection, fasting, praying, pilgrimage, and all other details? If you are a good monotheist, and accept that there is no god but Him, and commit yourself fully to this, then

⁷ *Amāli*, p. 235

⁸ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 18, p. 202. The original text is as follows:

قُولُوا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ تَقْلِبُوا

16 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

everything will be generated as a result and fall into place.

Normally the scholars divide Unity into various classifications. We can divide it, in order to understand it better, into that which we need to believe in and that which we need to practice, i.e. divine unity in theory and divine unity in practice.

Divine Unity in Theory

The unity of God involves three things, in theory:

1) Unity with respect to His divine essence (*al-tawhid fi al-dhāt*): This is the belief that He has neither partner, nor parts to Him. He is simple, not compounded, and has no partner. There is nothing like Him. He is One reality which accepts no division or multitude.

This concept of unity of God is different from the unity that we understand with respect to things we normally talk about. When we refer to something as being one, it means one from a class of similar things. For example, to say there is one person in the room, one means that there is one person here right now, although this does not exclude the possibility of having a second or third. There is one now, but there may be more in future. With respect to God, He is One, and no second can be conceived or even imagined, let alone come into existence.

This may be easier to understand if we consider absolute

concepts such as the concept of whiteness, for example. We may have several white things, such as a white car, white clothes, white milk, but actual whiteness admits no second or third. You can imagine only one whiteness. To have two or more things called 'whiteness,' you would necessarily have to have some factor to differentiate one from the other. Whenever there are two or more things, they have to have some similarity but at least some point of difference between them and cannot be exactly alike. Two books which are exactly the same have to have some point of difference that necessitates being called two and not one, even if the difference is the fact that they occupy different spaces. You can refer to this one, and at the same time not refer to the other. Therefore, one cannot even imagine two 'whiteness,' since whiteness is only one. Similarly you may have several human beings, but 'humanity' as an absolute is only one concept. You may add aspects to humanity such as gender, where you would say male humans and female humans, or age, such as old humans and young humans, but the actual concept of humanity remains one and unchanged.

This is why Muslim philosophers say that whenever we have absolute concepts, they do not admit multitude or secondness or thirdness. This is the kind of understanding we need to have about God's unity, that no second can be imagined, let alone exist. Therefore, this is not the numeric sense of oneness but much more than that.

18 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

2) Unity with respect to His divine attributes (*al-tawhid fi al-sifāt*): This means that God's attributes are identical with His Essence. They are not accidental or additional to His essence. His knowledge is not something which has been added to His essence, and His power is not an external part of His essence. His knowledge is His power which is His Mercy which is His Will which is His Love, and which are all the same as His Essence. He is One being from which different aspects can be understood.

We always find ourselves in difficulty when wanting to refer to God, or trying to understand God, because we, being used to referring to creatures and describing creation, find ourselves limited. Our language is geared towards limited things most of the time. For example as soon as the word knowledge is mentioned, what comes to mind is the concept we hold of human knowledge. We may picture someone who learns, who tries to memorize, who may forget, whose knowledge may be mixed with illusions and errors, who has a mind and uses concepts and books. We need to refine the concept of knowledge and remove all the deficiencies and suppositions so we can get closer to God's supreme knowledge. When we talk about power, what comes to mind is normal power that we are familiar with: muscle power, or animal power, or machine power, or the power in engines, or even will-power. However, to imagine God's absolute power we need to remove all our pre-conceived notions of power and the means of generating power, and just imagine

the ability to do something, regardless of the means. One is powerful when he can do what he wants.

So when we talk about divine attributes, we must be very careful, lest we suffer anthropomorphism. This is to liken other things to human beings, in this case God, and is very dangerous. Unfortunately in religious traditions, even in Islam, we have had people who have had some kind of misunderstanding of God. For example, there used to be very small groups, known as *al-mushabbihah* and *al-mujassimah*. The former likened God to some of His creatures and the latter thought of God as having a physical body. , and liken Him to a human being. This is because neither their mind nor their language is equipped with a philosophical understanding of God and His qualities, and hence they try to liken Him to a human being. Having said this, there is still a great deal we can learn. Imam Ali (a) has a beautiful statement in which he says:

لَمْ يُطْلِعِ الْعُقُولَ عَلَى تَحْدِيدِ صِفَتِهِ وَ لَمْ يَخْجُبْهَا عَنْ وَاجِبِ
مَعْرِفَتِهِ

God has not made human intellects aware of all details of His qualities, but at the same time, He has not deprived them of understanding what is necessary.⁹

Unity with respect to God's divine attributes means that God's qualities are not different, in their existence, from

⁹ *Nahj al-Balaghah*, p. 88

20 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Himself or from each other. They only differ from each other in concept, but not in their reality. For example, when we talk about God's knowledge, and then God's power, and then God's life, and then God's will, and then God's love - are these different beings, where we have only One God, the essence of God, and then next to it, something called life, will, power, knowledge, etc. added to His essence, the way some early Muslims thought? The Ash'arites had the idea that there were eight eternal beings: God's essence and seven qualities of God. They concluded that since God's qualities cannot have been created, they must be eternal alongside Him and independent. This cannot be true, however, and amounts to polytheism in there being eight eternal, uncreated and independent existents. Not only that, but it implies that God in His essence does not have knowledge or will or power.

We have only One God - a being who is eternally existent and not created. His qualities are no different to God Himself, but are only different in our understanding and conceptualization of them. They have one reality from which we extract different concepts. This being must necessarily have knowledge and power in order to create. It must have will, or else it would necessitate someone else to have compelled Him to create. If He has no love, He wouldn't be giving, etc... In the end, we must know that it is only One being with different qualities. This is even more subtle to grasp than the unity of a person's various qualities

or roles, where the same person can be a man, a Muslim, a doctor, a teacher, an uncle, a son, a father, a cousin and a nephew all at the same time, and in the same person.

This example can bring us closer to understanding God's attributes but it is not quite enough. In our case, if we look carefully, we are not really one unit, independent of all else. We are one reality with many different badges, labels and additions. My knowledge, for example, is not the same as me. In my essence I may not have this knowledge. I acquired this knowledge, and it may come and go. Similarly my power is not the same as me. It is subject to increase and decrease, and I may lose it all, even the power to speak. Our qualities, therefore, are not the same as us, and they come and go. If my qualities were to be stripped from me, I would still be me; but if even one of God's qualities was to be stripped from Him, he would not be God. In Arabic, there is a very beautiful poem that expresses the reality of God's qualities:

عِبَارَاتُنَا شَتَّى وَحُسْنُكَ وَاحِدٌ

وَكُلُّهُ إِلَى ذَاكَ الْجَمَالِ تُشِيرُ

*Our expressions vary, but Your beauty is one, and all
these various expressions refer to the same beauty.*

Some people call this reality God, some call it *Allāh*, some call it *Khudā*, but all these other expressions refer to the same reality. Even within the same religion we have various ways of referring to Him: God, *Rahmān* (all-Merciful), *Rahim*

22 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

(Merciful), *Ghaffār* (all-Forgiving), *Khāliq* (Creator), even though we refer to one being, one reality. This is unity with respect to God's divine attributes - that they are the same in their existence, but different in our understanding in that they refer to different aspects of the same reality. None of the attributes of God are accidental or additional to His essence. There has been no time when God has lacked any of His qualities or acquired them.

3) Unity in His divine acts (*al-tawhid fi al-aʿfāl*): This means that whatever happens in this world is an act of God. There is no one who can do anything in this world except God. If we do anything, it is again created by God. We are able to act, and do, but it is all by extension of the power that God has created in us. An example to better understand this is when you insert a key in a lock and turn it to unlock the door. We may express it as the key unlocking the door, but in actual fact it is not only the key that is unlocking the door, it is your hand turning the key in the lock. And in reality, it is not even the key and your hand which are turning the key, it is you that is behind all these movements of the wrist, the fingers, the key and the lock. So, we do have some role in our actions, but after careful assessment we conclude that it is all an act of God, most glorified, and that there is nobody that can do anything in this world unless it has been, not only permitted and authorised by God, but also created by God. This is a very important requirement of unity.

Everything that happens in this world is an act of God. Whatever we do, whatever other humans do, whatever animals do, whatever happens in the environment is an act of God, because there is no other independent source of power or creation. Nothing else can influence the world which belongs to God. The only time we could have thought that there may be other doers is if there were to be two, three or more gods, each with their own sphere of action and territory within which to act. We have only one God, however, and one world which is very consistent, interrelated and interwoven.

This is one of the main reasons for the unity of God, for if there were to be two gods, there would have been chaos and endless conflict between the worlds which belonged to these two gods and their territories, and there could be no interaction between these two territories. It is philosophically impossible for two eternal beings to co-exist with their own territories. An example to further illustrate the impossibility of this is through the thoughts present in one's mind. The ideas present in my mind totally depend on me. If I was to imagine a car in my mind, there is no way that car in my mind can collide with the car that you imagine in your mind, even if we were to imagine at exactly the same time. There can be no interaction between them.

Therefore we have One God and one world, and whatever happens within it is created by Him. Even the bad things

24 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

that we do, without giving any legitimacy or endorsement to them, we must still accept that these are creations of God, carried out through a human being which has been given free will. I have the freedom to do what I freely decide to do. Thus, we must be fully responsible for what we do, and yet at the same time we should know that it is not us independent from God, who have been able to do this. Rather, it is God's will and power that enables us to do something. Even if we do something contrary to His pleasure, we still have to admit that we are only able to carry it out because of the ability and power that He has placed within us. He has enabled us to obey or disobey Him, and has given us free will in the matter, in order that He may distinguish between us.

Here we must distinguish between God's generative will (*al-irāda al-takwīniyya*) and God's legislative will (*al-irāda al-tashrī'iyya*). God's generative will encompasses everything - whatever we do must be preceded by a generative will of God, in that He must have permitted this to happen. Some of the things we do, however, are preceded by His legislative will too, and some are not. If I do something good, God's legislative will is with me, and if I disobey Him, then I have acted against His legislative will, even though my action is still under the umbrella of His generative will. So no sinner can think that by sinning he has defeated God, even though his sin has gone against God's [legislative] will.

An example to illustrate this is if I, as a parent, give my child some money to go and buy some nutritious food or a good book, warning him not to buy cigarettes or junk food. I may then watch him from distance to see what he would do. I have given him money to be used as he chooses, even though it is clear where my pleasure lies, and I am watching though not intervening. If he decides to buy cigarettes with his money, it goes against my pleasure but it is still within my will of putting the money at his disposal. If he buys good food, he has my extra blessing. Similarly God permits the bad that happens in this world as a natural consequence of the free will He has given us, but this does not mean that He endorses the bad that happens. Furthermore, he allows it to continue from His very mercy, giving respite and time for remorse and change and learning. He does not destroy or punish those who misbehave or commit sins and mischief immediately.

So, whatever happens in this world is an act of God, and this relates to the creation of the world as a first act, as well as the ongoing process of creation every single moment. The flow of the river is never the same river, just as you are not exactly the same person you were a second ago. There is a continuous process of creation happening, but because of the continuity, we feel it is the same. We are always being created, and if for a moment we cease to be created, we cease to exist. God has no need to destroy, He just has to not want us for a second and we would all cease to exist.

26 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Somehow similar to this is the process of thinking in our own minds. If I were to imagine a rose in my mind, this rose is totally dependent on me to exist. If I replace it with another thought, it will stop existing. I don't need to have someone come over, take it and throw it away. I simply have to stop thinking about it. As long as I pay attention, the rose is there. This is the way that God creates us and continues to create us. As long as He pays attention to us, we are there, but if He were to want for us not to be there, we would have ceased to exist. This is expressed beautifully by the Qur'anic verse:

كُلُّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ

Every moment He is engaged in some work (55:29)

This shows that creation is a continuous process. God is always creating and generating.

The problem only arises when expressing this in words. One may retort, for example, by saying that, 'This implies that when I speak it is actually God speaking.' Because the action carries limitations of the doer, the me and the you, space and time, we cannot limit God to the act and say this is God speaking, for it may even deify the person doing the act. However, when the act is stripped of the doer, we can say this is an act of God.

4) Divine Unity in Practice: Where the above three are all theoretical aspects of the unity of God that we need to believe in, there is also something that we need to practice in addition to what we know about God, and that is unity in worship or servitude - *tawhid fi al-'ubūdiyya*. We only worship God and serve only Him. It is not enough just to know this, but must be practiced in order to have full conviction in the unity of God.

For example, when we say that the only One worthy of worship is God, the same is true of obedience. The only One who deserves to be obeyed in this world is God, as He is the one who has brought us into being. The meaning of the word '*Allah*' in Arabic comes from the abbreviation *al-ilāh* (the one who is supposed to be worshipped), from the root '*a-la-ha* (to be worshipped). This practical and applied *tawhid* is the bottom line in order to be considered a believer in the unity of God. Belief in the theoretical aspects without worship and obedience is not enough to make one a true monotheist. Satan himself, before his fall from Paradise, was one of the intelligent beings who had understood God's unity very well. Not only that, but even as a worshipper, he worshipped God for six thousand years and was flawless in His worship. What he lacked, however, was obedience to God in its true sense, which led to his banishment. One cannot believe in God in theory and worship Him, but not obey Him. So obedience and practice upon one's belief is the crux of conviction in the unity of God.

28 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

God has created us free - no one can ask me to obey him, except for God. The people who have authority from God, like prophets, Imams, and parents, we do obey them, but only because God has asked us to obey them. God has commanded us to respect and obey our parents. Even if one has children and grandchildren, he must still obey his own parents. This is the authority that God has given to parents. If e.g. your father, however, asks you to do something contrary to God's commands, then he automatically loses that authority. We do not obey anyone by disobeying God. There may also be people that we voluntarily accept to obey, such as a leader or president that we choose to obey, but he does not actually have authority of his own - only the authority that we ourselves bestow on him. So, no one other than God has authority from himself. It is only God who deserves our obedience, for other than that we have been created free. This has lots of implications in the political theory of Islam. We are very free people in Islam, and no one has the right to impose authority on a people, and there are very specific guidelines and techniques on how to concentrate power in a way that does not conflict with the rights of people.

To summarise thus far, the major aspects of divine unity are these four: unity in His divine essence, that He has neither partner nor parts; unity with respect to His divine attributes, that all His attributes are one and the same in existence and identical with His divine essence, and only their concepts are

different; unity with respect to His divine acts, which means that everything which is created is an act of God, and everything that happens is an act of God, and no one but God can originate anything; and unity in worship and servitude, that nobody deserves to be worshipped and obeyed apart from God, most glorified.

Divine Justice

This topic is the second in the series on Islamic doctrines, and follows on sequentially and naturally from the essential topic of God's divine unity, dealt with at length in the first part. Before we continue with our treatment of the topic of divine justice, we should note, first and foremost, that God's justice is not the only quality that He has, nor is it any more characteristic than any of His other attributes, as He has many other attributes. We may have heard of God's ninety nine names, and indeed the Qur'an mentions more than a hundred qualities of God.

So why is His justice so important, and why have the Shi'a (and some Sunni Muslims like the Mu'tazilites) singled it out as one of the principles of faith? Why did they not focus on divine knowledge or divine power for example? Why so much focus on divine justice?

First of all, divine justice is important in its own right, but mainly because historically God's divine justice was questioned and undermined, and had become a point of contention and controversy between Muslims. So the Shi'a, in order to safeguard this very important aspect of Islam,

32 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

and in order to distinguish themselves from those who did not give justice its due place, stressed on this very issue.

What does God's justice mean exactly? If we mean by His justice that God does not treat human beings or his other creatures with injustice, does not violate their rights or oppress them, then this is not something that any Muslim would reject. Every Muslim would accept that God is just and does not mistreat human beings or any other creature. This is not the issue at hand. However, the question is how do we understand justice? What do we see justice as being?

In early centuries of Islam, a question arose which had arisen among the Jews and Christians as well. As Muslim theology developed and was articulated as such, the question arose as to the nature of goodness (*husn*) and badness (*qubh*) - what is [morally] good and what is [morally] bad?

Ash'arites had the idea that good was that which was commanded by God. This was simple and easy to understand, and yet was very problematic. They claimed that there was no good or bad in reality, but became good or bad as and when God commanded it or prohibited it. Honesty was only a good thing because God had commanded it, but not by virtue of itself. This meant that if God had asked us to act otherwise, then that lying or dishonesty would have been good. They did not believe in an objective good or evil. Their basis for their belief was the fact that whatever God

does is good, and even if He chose to place all the pious people in hell, that would be good, and if He chose to put all the evildoers into heaven, so be it.

On the surface, this theory, termed the divine command theory, looks very pious and devotional to say that good is good simply because it has been commanded by God.

However, the Shi'a and Mu'tazilites refuted this idea, highlighting its dangers in making religious commands arbitrary. Upholding such a theory was making light of religious commands and making them arbitrary, in that honesty and lying were no different to each other in their reality, only that God had chosen to command one and prohibit the other, and He could have chosen otherwise.

What we believe is contrary to this. We believe that there is a very real difference between good and bad, and they each have their own reality. There is an intrinsic difference between virtues and vices. A person who is honest and a person who betrays are different in reality. This is why you see that basic moral values are understandable, even by people who have no faith. A faithless person will still appreciate good qualities and intrinsically know the difference between right and wrong. On the day of Ashura, when Imam Husayn (a) saw the tents of his household being attacked and burned, he said:

يَا شِيعَةَ آلِ أَبِي سُفْيَانَ إِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَكُمْ دِينٌ وَكُنْتُمْ لَا تَخَافُونَ
الْمَعَادَ فَكُونُوا أَوْفَرًا فِي دُنْيَاكُمْ

*O followers of Abu Sufyan! Even if you have no faith
and do not fear Resurrection, at least be noble in your
worldly life.¹⁰*

That means that you do not need to be Muslim or Christian or Jew or faithful at all to know that it is wrong to harm innocent people. Even if one is brought up in the middle of nowhere, with no access to religious teachings or knowledge about God's commands and prohibitions, he would still acknowledge that attacking innocent people is wrong.

We believe, therefore, that whatever is good is commanded by God, and whatever is bad is prohibited by God. Divine commands and prohibitions are based on real reasons. His legislation is very much like that of a benevolent expert doctor who tells us what is good for our health and what is to our detriment. There is no benefit for Him in outlining these for us. He merely tells us what is the objective relation between that act and our health. We may even be able to discover some of these through other means. We believe that whatever God prescribes for us in Islam is all based on real benefits to us, and whatever He prohibits is based on averting real harms to us. Sometimes we may understand them, and sometimes we may not, but everything in religion,

¹⁰ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 45, p. 5

regardless of our understanding, is based on real standards and real criteria.

Therefore, for us, justice became a very important issue to uphold as a tenet of faith. Then, what made it even more important was not only having a rational understanding of justice, but following on from that, that divine justice must be translated and reflected into our daily life. It was no use theorizing a concept of divine justice and not drawing practical consequences from it. There were some who believed in the concept, but did not see any relation between that and endorsing an unjust ruler for example. They held that whoever ruled was not important, what is important is that God is just. The Shi'a, however, from the very beginning, had the idea that divine justice must be reflected in society, and this is the idea of social justice. God says in the Qur'an:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ
النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

*Certainly We sent our apostles with manifest proofs,
and We sent down with them the Book and the
Balance, so that mankind may establish justice...*
(57:25)

It is interesting to note that the prophets are not sent to establish justice. They are sent to teach the people to establish justice themselves.

36 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

The Shi'a concerned themselves with social justice from the very beginning, and whether the ruler of the time was legitimate or not, whether he was treating people with justice or not. That is why we see that throughout history, there have been many movements initiated by the Shi'a against tyrannical or unjust rulers. Imam Husayn (a) quoted from the Prophet (s), saying:

إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ الْجِهَادِ كَلِمَةٌ عَدَلَ عِنْدَ إِمَامٍ جَائِرٍ

Surely, the most privileged type of jihad (struggle) is to utter words of protest in front of an unjust ruler.¹¹

This is why justice became very important for us historically, and why social justice remains one of the main components of the spirit of Shi'a Islam. In the book *Shi'i Islam: Origins, Faith and Practices*, an entire chapter has been devoted to defining the spirit of Shi'i Islam, which boils down to its spirituality, its rationality and its quest for justice. These three sum up the core teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Our Imams themselves were not merely pious people who ignored what was happening in society. They were very rational, very spiritual and at the same time, very much pro-justice.

¹¹ *Usul al-Kafi*, vol. 5, p. 60

The problem of evil

Most of the time in Islamic theology, this issue is addressed within the discussion on divine justice, where the question arises that if God is just, why are there problems or 'evil' in this world. There are two general types of evil that are referred to in the philosophy of religion: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil refers to the problems suffered at the hands of human beings, such as war, murder, theft, injustice, tyranny, oppression. Although these are caused by human beings, the question arises that why has God created human beings in such a way whereby they can kill each other and cause harm to each other as well as to other creatures, or why does God give power to tyrants and unjust rulers where they can oppress people. The other evil is natural evil which includes natural catastrophes that cause suffering such as earthquakes, droughts and floods, and the question here is: why has God created the world in such a way where people have to suffer such calamities?

Normally our scholars address this issue within divine justice, but also within their discussion on divine unity, as a refutation of dualism, where people believe in the forces of good versus the forces of evil as two separate divine entities, or the god of good versus the devil. In modern books on the philosophy of religion, the problem of evil is discussed at length from the point of view of the existence of God,

38 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

where they discuss whether the problem of evil can be taken as an argument against the existence of God or not.

One of the most recent articulations of this problem in modern times was put forward by an Australian philosopher named John Mackie (1917-1981), who claimed that the root of the problem lies in religious people's belief and acceptance of three prepositions: 1) that God has absolute power, 2) that God is absolutely good and benevolent, and 3) that there are catastrophes. He claimed that in order to reconcile this problem, one of these must be denied, and they cannot all be believed to be true at the same time. According to him, since the third premise that catastrophes exist is obvious and cannot be denied, then we have to either deny that God has absolute power, and hence cannot stop earthquakes or the rule of a tyrannical leader; or to deny that He is absolutely good, and that he is indifferent to the suffering of human beings.¹²

The answer to this is that neither his nor any other argument can be taken as a refutation of the existence of God, as they may like to conclude. They cannot disprove the existence of God through the problem of evil, but only highlight a misunderstanding in their concept of God. Although, normally this is discussed within divine justice, it is not really God's justice that is being questioned, but rather the power

¹² Mackie, J. L., "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind, New Series*, vol. 64, no. 254. (Apr. 1955), pp. 200-212

of God, or the benevolence of God or the wisdom of God that is being questioned.

It is a misunderstanding in the core belief in the divine unity of God and the nature of His quality of wisdom. Justice is to give everything its due right that it deserves. When it comes to our relationship with God, there is nothing that God owes us or that we are deserving of, whereby we may accuse Him that He has not given us our due. The entire process of creation is a mercy upon us, and we are all at His mercy anyway. Even if we were to suppose a situation where God destines someone to be poor from the dawn of creation, of His own will, even then he cannot claim injustice on God's part because there is no debt that God owes Him nor any right that he has over God whereby God has to give him his due. Whatever he has in any case is from God. He has simply chosen to give some more than others. In this case, His justice is not at stake because the act is one of original benevolence – He does not owe us anything. What we may question is the reason behind such an act. Since God is wise, there must be a reason why He has chosen to give some more than others. So, it boils down to understanding God's wisdom, and not His justice.

Historically there have been various answers or solutions to the problem of evil. Some religious traditions and also some philosophers deny that evil really exists. They explain that evil is basically the absence of good. Only good truly exists,

40 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

and bad is simply the absence of it, just as death is the absence of life, illness is the absence of health, and darkness is the absence of light. They concluded that God had only created good, and that evil had no external existence in the world. Although as an argument, it has grounds for truth within it, it is not a fully developed argument and does not solve the problem of evil. Denying that suffering exists does not make it any easier to bear. Poverty being a lack of money undermines the problem and makes it appear as an illusion but does not solve it.

It seems that a better answer was one that was first articulated by Plato (427-347 BC), then further developed by Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina (980-1037 CE) and Mulla Sadra (c. 1571/2-1640 CE). They said that suffering and evil have to be acknowledged as problems, whether dependent or independent. However, it must be acknowledged at the same time that they are relative.

To elaborate further, this world consists of three major parts: 1) God as the Creator of this world, who is the most perfect Being, necessarily existent, with no deficiency in His essence, 2 & 3) the created world or the universe, which itself is divided into two major realms: the immaterial realm and the material. The material world is the lowest level of existence, where everything tangible exists, such as nature, plants, animals and people. In both the Creator and the immaterial or abstract realm, we have no problems or

discrepancies. The immaterial or spiritual realm is one of laws, abstract concepts, intellects and angels that have fixed positions. They are not subject to change or fluctuation. They are as good as they could possibly be. The material world, however, is a world full of potentialities and possibilities, along with its fair share of problems that cannot be denied. It has droughts, famines, immorality, oppression, illiteracy, and earthquakes *by nature* of being the material world. By its very definition, the material world consists of lots of limited beings with unlimited potentialities and possibilities in themselves and in their interaction with their surroundings and with other material beings. This is the nature of the material world. It cannot be perfect, as it is in a state of becoming, as opposed to the immaterial world where everything is fixed in its best position. In this state of becoming, these billions of beings, humans and animals, earth and sea, have lots of potentialities, lots of scenarios, lots of choices – and this in turn may result in lots of clashes, conflicts, and even problems, which in the big picture are all *relative*. What may be evil or problematic for me may not be so for you.

The hierarchy in the food chain is a prime example of this. It may seem evil and cruel if a wolf were to attack a man in the forest and eat him. His family would suffer as a result of his death and would say that the wolf was bad for having done such a thing, or God unjust for having allowed such a thing to happen, or for having created such a creature. But neither

42 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

can the wolf be blamed nor God for having created it. The creation of the wolf is not bad in itself, nor is the fact that it gets hungry, nor the fact that it eats meat. It is simply part of the material world, and cannot be classified as evil or bad. It is only when something conflicts with human interests that we think it is bad.

The problem lies in the fact that we think everything should be subservient to our interests and even when it comes to our interests we normally have very limited understanding of our long term interests are. Even two human beings may have conflicts of interests and clashes with each other as a result of the free will placed within us, and the unlimited potential we have to act. We cannot say that everything should have been created to only produce good for us, because then we would neither have this material world with all its potentialities, the nature of which is imperfection, nor would we have free will to do as we please.

There is a narrative to illustrate this beautifully that Prophet Moses (a) once saw a worm or cockroach, and asked God why it has been created. It is said that God replied, 'That's an interesting question, since this also asked me why I have created you?'

So this is a very relative issue. We think that we are very important in the world, but so is everything else in it. We must also acknowledge first and foremost that this material

world is not perfect; matter is not perfect and cannot ever be perfect by its very nature. This world is the best possible material world, and its problems are part and parcel of it.

When we understand God's wisdom and benevolence, and take into account the relativity of these problems, we realize that it is not necessary for us to know the reasoning behind each and everything. After thousands of years of research into the human body, we still only know a fraction of how the human body works, or the function of each and every organ. There are many things that we know but the things we are ignorant about supersede that. And we cannot say about the things that we do not understand that because we do not understand them they must be useless. We cannot be so presumptuous as to say, for example, that the appendix in humans is useless simply because we are mystified by its lack of a biological purpose. If we have belief in God, then we must trust in His wisdom. We can never prove that there is something in this world that is not useful and beneficial in its own right. We would only be able to do this if we had absolute knowledge about it and everything it interacts with and all its constituents. Therefore, we can never prove that there is a fault in creation.

Some people have a tendency to ask enigmatic questions such as why God could not have created a world free of such problems, or is God able to create a rock that He himself cannot lift, and other such things. Imam Ali (a) was

44 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

once asked such a question to which he gave the most precise answer. He was asked, 'Does God have the power to put the whole world inside an egg, without the egg becoming any larger, or the world becoming any smaller?' Imam (a) replied, 'God' cannot ever be attributed with incompetence or inability, but what you ask is impossible.¹³ The powerful one is one who can do possible things, not one who can do impossible things - these are not really things that can even be taken into consideration. The best mathematician in the world cannot and will never be able to make $2+2=5$, but that does not mean that he is flawed as a mathematician or that there is a deficiency in his knowledge. The problem itself is an impossibility and it is preposterous to even ask such a thing.

Therefore, it is impossible to have a material world free of problems. It is not that God has no power to stop them or that He is indifferent. They are part and parcel of it. Furthermore, many of these sufferings and difficult things that are painful and bitter to bear can be avoided, especially those that result from human actions and interactions. If we took instruction from prophets and divine revelation we would see that we have the means to make the world much

¹³*Al-Wāfi*, vol. 1, p. 322. The original text is as follows:

عن أبي عبد الله (ع) قال: قيل لأمر المؤمنين (ع) هل يقدر ربك أن يدخل
الدنيا في بيضة من غير تصغير الدنيا أو تكبير البيضة قال: إن الله تعالى
لا ينسب إلى العجز والذى سألتني لا يكون.

better for ourselves and humans in general. Is it really necessary to have so much poverty in the world? Despite its limitations, can the world really not produce enough food for all humans, or is poverty a result of mismanagement of the world's resources on the part of some human beings and the greediness of others, since God's stores are inexhaustible. Even when it comes to natural catastrophes, or the growing problem of global warming which in turn is causing changes in weather, increased earthquakes, droughts, floods, is a problem initiated and exacerbated by human beings in the last few decades.

Many of these problems are avoidable and many are unavoidable. Deaths resulting from car accidents might be unavoidable. That is not to say that iron is bad for being hard or the human body should not have been created soft. The hardness of metal and the softness of the human body are each beneficial in their own right, but in certain conditions and interactions may be otherwise. A fire may burn down our house, but can we say that a world without fire would be better? These clashes are part of living in the material world.

We need to simply be wise enough ourselves to put everything in its rightful context and to realize the relativity of these so-called problems. The creation of the eyebrow, for example, when taken out of context may seem as useless as a few strands of hair, but when put in the context of the

46 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

face it has an indispensable role to play in the protection of the eye amongst other benefits. There is a Farsi poem that expresses this beautifully:

جهان چون خط و خال و چشم و ابروست

که هر چیز به جای خویش نیکوست

*The world is like the lines, moles, eyes and eyebrows
on the face. Each of which is beautiful and useful only
when in its own place¹⁴*

Decree and Destiny

We believe that God, through His being all-knowing, knows in advance what is going to happen, but this does not mean that we have no choice. Our human voluntary actions have not been predestined or pre-determined, and His knowledge does not interfere with our free will or choice. The only predestination is the fact that we have been destined to have free will. It is part of his plan of the world that we have free will. There is no conflict at all between the concept of divine decree and human freedom. Predestination is a plan of God that includes human free will.

¹⁴ *Golshan-e Rāz*, p. 75

Prophethood

Muslims believe that by virtue of God's divine wisdom and justice, it is only befitting for Him to send guidance for mankind in the form of prophets. We believe God's provision of legislative guidance for His creation as being an important and essential principle.

This topic is divided into two sections, dealing first with our belief in general prophethood as shared by all Abrahamic faiths, and second with the specific prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (s).

All Abrahamic religions believe that throughout history there have been people appointed by God with a divine message for humans. In Christianity, however, there came to be a difference in that they believe in the prophets of the Old Testament like we do, but that in the new era, revelation was transformed into a different message when God decided to reveal Himself by sending His own son. Thus, they don't believe Jesus to have been a prophet who received revelation. According to them, Jesus himself was the revelation; "And the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14).

48 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

The Need for the Prophet:

Why do we need to have prophets? Why can we not say that God's endowing us with reason is sufficient? What is the philosophy behind prophethood? This would hold true especially nowadays, with the development of various sciences, disciplines, the wealth of human experiences, and advances in information technology. The answer to these questions is very clear - although we have been provided with reason, which is very important in its own right, is very honoured in that it distinguishes us from animals, and is not to be undermined at all, it has its own place alongside prophets. Prophets were sent to compliment and support what man's good reason pointed him towards. Prophets are external reason (*'aql*) or reason personified, and reason is but an internal prophet.

In modern times, there have been many 'isms,' movements, ideologies and even cults that have attracted many people e.g. communism, feminism, socialism and humanism. In a special way, if one was to study the history of philosophy, there have been many different philosophies that attract people in hoards, and as the trend goes, they find a fallacy therein and move on to something else. This proves that human reason and understanding is prone to modification and change, and man may fervently hold on to something, believing it to be true until it is disproved. Can we rely on it then to help us in our moral dilemmas and disagreements? Even sciences and disciplines such as psychology which is

heavily relied on today, cannot help us solve disagreements and doubts when the psychologists themselves disagree in the very definition, methodology and subject matter of psychology. Since the sixties, when they were concerned primarily with behavioural psychology, and everything was attributed to that, they are in a constant process of self-correction and amendment, and so these disciplines, as the most evolved in human reason, cannot give us a unified message or save us from going astray.

In modern societies too, especially in the developed world, where all ideologies or experiences are taken on board, where every opinion supposedly counts, there are constant changes in legislation, opinions, scientific theories, and even religions themselves. If everything is left to human experience and trial and error, there is no time to learn from them all. We have only this life to live to the best and we cannot take such risks. Moreover, we believe that since God has created us for a purpose, He cannot take the risk of leaving us to our own vices, our own selves and our own trial and error. He is very much concerned about every single human being. Each of us is important to Him in our own right and not just the evolution of society as a whole.

It has been said that there was once a prophet who had preached to his people so much, and when they refused to correct their ways, he cursed them and asked God to punish them. God asked him to first prepare a plot of land for

50 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

tilling. He was to prepare the soil, fertilize it, plough it, and plant seeds therein. Then God asked him to tend to each shoot, water them, nurture them to full grown plants, and just before their fruition, God asked him to burn the entire plantation down. No doubt, this was extremely hard for the prophet to do and he understood the gravity of what he had asked of God in seeking for Him to punish His own creatures. He understood that just as he had come to love each bud and each plant, and waited in anticipation for the fruits that they would bear, similarly is each human being precious to God, and He cares for the well-being and guidance of each and every one.

When Moses was asked by Pharaoh who his god was, he replied:

رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it. (20:50)

God has a very specific purpose and plan to everything, even on a cellular or atomic level. He says in the Qur'an, describing Himself:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى

who created and proportioned, who determined and guided. (87:2-3)

He guides each one of His creatures, from the inanimate to insects like bees and ants, guiding them through their basic instincts to their sustenance and teaching them how to build their homes, how to defend themselves from predators, etc. and when it comes to humans, He has given them extra guidance to just their reason and instincts in the form of external guides or prophets, the point of which is not to replace our reason but to support and supplement it.

Duties of the Prophets:

1. To activate and revive people's intellects. In Sermon One of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Imam Ali (s) has summarized the duties of the prophets and the philosophy behind sending prophets very eloquently, and with regards to this first task of theirs, he says:

يُشِيرُوا لَهُمْ دَفَائِنَ الْقَوْلِ

*[They have been sent] to excavate for people the hidden treasures in their intellects*¹⁵

They have been sent to remind people of what they are capable of understanding with their own reason, for example basic precepts of morality. We believe that human beings can understand basic moral values by virtue of their reason and conscience and do not need to be Christian or Muslim or adherents of any other religion to understand that honesty is good or that stealing is bad. Every human can understand

¹⁵ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon One

52 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

that. To attain salvation and the perfection that humans have been created for, they need to simply use their reason and heed the prophets, and this is illustrated in the following verse in the Qur'an, where the inmates of hell asked by its keepers whether or not they were sent a prophet. They acknowledge, look back regretfully, saying:

قَالُوا بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَاءَنَا نَذِيرٌ فَكَذَّبْنَا وَقُلْنَا مَا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ مِن شَيْءٍ إِن
أَنتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ كَبِيرٍ وَقَالُوا لَوْ كُنَّا نَسْمَعُ أَوْ نَعْقِلُ مَا كُنَّا فِي
أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ

They will say: 'Yes, a warner did come to us, but we impugned [him] and said, 'God did not send down anything. You are only in great error.' And they will say, 'Had we listened or applied reason we would not have been among the inmates of the Blaze.' (67:9)

2. To teach us many things that we would not be able to deduce with our reason but that are essential for our growth and salvation, for example, how God wants us to worship Him, what types of worship are fruitful for the eternal life, how to best lead one's life on earth, what are the consequences of doing or not doing particular acts, and many other such things of the unseen or the unknown that we cannot deduce ourselves. A lot of the time, awareness about heaven and hell, the afterlife and the consequences of our actions are what motivate people to act and worship, or to keep away from prohibited things.

3. To exemplify what they say in their own lives, and being living examples of all that they preach. For people, being taught matters of faith and devotion and seeing them being practiced in actuality and witnessing someone live their faith are two very different things. The prophets were tasked to practice what they preached, and invite people to goodness through their own actions and conduct. This is why Shi'a believe in complete infallibility of the prophets. We believe that the prophets did not commit sins, neither minor sins nor grave ones, both prior to and during their prophethood. Some Muslims believe that prophets were only infallible in their delivery of the message, but not in their personal life and not prior to their prophethood, but we believe otherwise. We will go into this in further detail below.

4. To remind us of the blessings of God in our lives, that people often take for granted. Imam Ali (s) says here:

لِيَسْتَأْذُوهُمْ مِيثَاقَ فِطْرَتِهِ وَيُذَكِّرُوهُمْ مَنْسِيَّ نِعْمَتِهِ

*[They have been sent] to urge them to fulfil the innate covenant of their creation and to remind them of the blessings of His that they have forgotten.*¹⁶

Often the more affluent man becomes, or the loftier and taller his buildings and the more advanced his achievements, the more he forgets his source, where he came from and who gave him his resources and talents. The prophets were

¹⁶ Ibid.

54 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

sent to remind people of what they had forgotten, especially urging them to maintain their covenant that they had made with God prior to entering this world.¹⁷

In the Qur'an 25 prophets are mentioned by name, especially the Semitic ones from the lineage of Abraham that the Arabs, to whom the Qur'an was first revealed, would have heard of and known about. However, the Qur'an itself says that there are many prophets not mentioned therein. From our corpus of hadith, however, we know that God sent 124,000 prophets to all nations, to every group of people in every corner of the earth, since He has never and would never leave any nation without guidance out of His divine justice and wisdom. All these prophets were sent in the language of their own people, and were more often than not, chosen by God from among themselves, to increase their credibility among them.

We also know from the Qur'an and hadith that divine revelation is benefitted from by both men and Jinn.¹⁸ Jinn

¹⁷ For further information on the covenant with God, one may refer to the commentaries on the following verses:

When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, [He said to them,] 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes indeed! We bear witness.' [This,] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed we were unaware of this,' (7:172) 'Made I not covenant with you, O children of Adam, saying, "Do not serve Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. Serve Me. That is a straight path"?' (36:60-61)

did not have prophets of their own as their own capacity for receiving revelation was not enough, but they followed the human prophets. They enjoy freedom and free will just like us and receive further guidance just like us. They too have been created to serve, as stated in the Qur'an:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I did not create the Jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me. (51:56)

The way to know how to serve God is of course only through divine revelation brought by the prophets.

To be a Muslim, one needs to believe first that God sent prophets throughout history, and secondly one needs to believe specifically that the last prophet with revelation for our time was Prophet Muhammad (s). We confirm the prophethood of all the prophets and do not discriminate against any of them, but believe in the prophecy of the last prophet as being relevant to us and to all people until the Day of Judgment.

¹⁸ The word "jinn" is derived from a word meaning "to hide" or "to be hidden." It refers to a creature made of fire that possesses both a body and a soul. The jinn have free will and are held morally and legally accountable before God. Some of them are believers and some of them do not believe.

How were prophets distinguished from others?

We believe that in addition to their unquestionable character, God provides his prophets with some clear signs and proofs, in order for people to commit themselves to them and be certain that these are true messengers of God, to distinguish them from false claimants. Even until today, there exist such claimants with their own cults or followings.

These clear proofs vary according to the time, the age, the understanding of people. For example, in the time of Prophet Moses (a), people considered magic to be the highest skill achievable by man, and magicians were highly respected. Moses (a) came with miracles far greater than any magician could do. The magicians were the first to believe and declare that Moses (a) was a divine prophet, being experts in the field, and admitting that these were feats that no human could perform. Not only did they believe but they were committed to their conversion to such an extent that they would rather be killed than renounce their faith, because they attained conviction in this prophet:

فَأَلْقَى السَّحَرَةُ سَاجِدِينَ قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ رَبِّ مُوسَى وَ
هَارُونَ قَالَ ... لَأَقْطَعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ وَ
لَأَصْلَبَنَكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ قَالُوا لَا ضَيْرَ إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا مُنْقَلِبُونَ إِنَّا نَطْمَعُ أَنْ
يَغْفِرَ لَنَا رَبُّنَا خَطَايَانَا أَنْ كُنَّا أَوَّلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Thereat the magicians fell down prostrating. They said, We believe in the Lord of all the worlds, the

Lord of Moses and Aaron.' He said, '... Surely I will cut off your hands and feet from opposite sides, and I will surely crucify you all.' They said, '[There is] no harm [in that]! Indeed we shall return to our Lord. Indeed we hope our Lord will forgive us our iniquities for being the first to believe. (26:46-51)

Similarly at the time of Jesus (a), advances in medicine were highly respected and people strove to find cures for common diseases that they feared such as leprosy and blindness. This is why Jesus (a) was sent with miracles of that nature to support his claim further, whereby he cured the blind and the lepers, and even gave life to the dead.

As for Prophet Muhammad (s), although he came with phenomenal miracles such as the splitting of the moon, the most important miracle he came with was the Qur'an, because rhetoric, prose and poetry were skills and advances highly respected at the time, and the Arabs were highly talented at this. The Arabs who were at the peak of eloquence were the first to admit that the Qur'anic verses were divine words and could not have been composed by any human. Even those poets who remained opposed to the Prophet (s) could not keep themselves from listening to and enjoying the words of the Qur'an, and they would hide behind his house at night to listen to the verses secretly, whilst at the same time discouraging others from listening lest they get affected by the words, or 'bewitched.' They could not deny the eloquence of the Qur'an, so they

58 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

explained it away as being magic or bewitchment on Muhammad's part, to disqualify the power and the attraction of the Qur'an.

There was also no record of the Prophet (s) as having studied under anyone or as having been schooled to the level of literacy, so the Arabs could not claim that he had composed these verses himself.

The uniqueness of the Qur'an lies mainly in that it is a living miracle, available for generations to come, until the end of time, unlike the miracles of Moses (a) or Jesus (a), from which Jews and Christians are no longer able to benefit today. God has promised to preserve it and protect it till the end of time, and just as the Arabs of that time were challenged to bring something like the Qur'an, or like a chapter of it, or a verse of it, the same challenge stands strong till today uncontested.

For something to be considered scientific, theoretically there must be a way to falsify it. Falsifiability is a very important requirement of rational and scientific claims and ideas. If there is no way to falsify a claim or idea it has then no scientific or rational significance; this means that one has made a claim that can never be established whether it is true or false so it is not verifiable. One of the beauties of the Qur'an is that it actually volunteers to show the way it can be falsified. First the Qur'an foretold of some events and if

they had not happened as the Qur'an had foretold the Qur'an was automatically refuted. For example, the Qur'an (30:2-4) informed about the victory of the Romans against the Persian polytheists in the near future, which of course happened exactly as it had described. And secondly by challenging the pagans to bring something like it (17:88) or like ten chapters of it (11:13) or even one surah (2:23; 10:38); had they done so the Qur'an was automatically defeated. Not only does the Qur'an ask for falsification, it even shows people how to do it. But no one has managed to challenge it.

The technical definition of a miracle in theology is: 'Any extraordinary act that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws, performed by someone who claims to be a prophet, and is accompanied by a challenge.'¹⁹ Therefore, a miracle must be extraordinary, in that it is not attainable through learning or practice. Also a true miracle cannot be performed by Imams or impious people or regular people - extraordinary acts at their hands are technically termed '*karāmah*' or 'divine grace,' not miracle. God may allow an extraordinary act to emanate from an ordinary person, as a result of their devotion or piety, but as soon as they falsely claim prophethood, they are exposed and not allowed to deceive others. A true miracle must also be accompanied by a challenge - since it is must be un-learnable and not doable

¹⁹ *Ilābiāt*, vol. 3, p. 69

60 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

by anyone else anywhere in the world, even if they put all their resources together.

The infallibility of the prophets:

We believe infallibility to be a requirement for all prophets. All of them were infallible, or immune from committing sins or mistakes. Here there arises a difference between Muslims. All Muslims accept it to a certain extent. Usually our Sunni brothers accept it in respect to those things related to the mission and message of the prophets i.e. they never made mistakes in their understanding or presentation of the revelation. However, they claim that they may have made mistakes and even sins in their personal lives, and furthermore, they were not infallible before they became prophets.

The Ash‘arites believed that the prophets did not commit intentional sins, but they were prone to committing sins unintentionally, so they may tell lies or even drink unintentionally. The Mu‘tazilites believed that they were infallible when it came to major sins, intentionally or unintentionally, but that they could commit minor sins, even intentionally. The historian al-Baghdadi says in his famous work *al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq*, about Sunni Muslims, “They believe in the infallibility of prophets.” Then he adds that the Sunni Muslims take the instances that might suggest that the

prophets acted improperly to have occurred before their prophethood had actually started.²⁰

Our understanding, however, is different. ‘Allamah Hilli, one of our greatest scholars, says:

Truly the prophets are infallible from the beginning of their lives till the end, because the hearts of people do not incline to or believe in someone whom they have previously seen to commit sins or hateful acts.²¹

Infallibility of the prophets can be studied in two stages:

a) With respect to sins after prophethood: The prophets were infallible with respect to these; otherwise how can someone claim that they receive direct communication from God, then he himself disobeys God and does not observe His laws. The whole point of sending a message is lost and undermined if the messenger himself is not committed. Also their very job was to live their teachings and walk the talk, so one can ever learn piety from one who is sinful. And since they are required to practice what they preach themselves, it is not logical to distinguish between the message and the personal life, because people do not trust someone who cannot manage his own life without mistakes, or

²⁰ *Al-Farq Bayna al-Firaq*, p. 343

²¹ *Al-Bab al-Hadi ‘Ashr*, p. 38

62 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

forgetfulness, or lapses, and would find it hard to distinguish where they can be trusted and where not. To be able to attract billions of people in all centuries to come, such that they are able to sacrifice everything for their faith, cannot ever be possible if people cannot trust in the messenger.

b) With respect to sins before they became prophets: If up until yesterday, the Prophet (s) was like many other people in Mecca, committing sins, and today claimed to be a new person who will never again sin, no one would take him seriously. One of the main reasons that people believed in the Prophet (s) when he brought the message was because he had lived the last 40 years of his life as an honest and trustworthy man, and was widely reputed to have integrity. And there were people who bore witness that Muhammad (s) was different from them, that he was special, trustworthy, and honest, and yet continued to have issues believing in his message, then how would they ever believe in a hitherto sinful man.

Also people who believe that one can sin and then ‘become’ a prophet have not really understood prophethood. It is not a job or position for which they are appointed. To be able to receive direct communication from God, this needs a very great heart, with great capacity to be able to contain and receive the weighty word of God, because the word of God is the highest manifestation of God. Even Prophet Muhammad (s), when he was receiving the revelation had a

difficult time - he would sweat, tremble, faint. It was physically difficult for him, even though the Prophet (s) had the greatest heart. The prophets were different to each other in their capacity for receiving the message. They did not always see or meet Gabriel. Sometimes, they would hear the words of God from a bush, or behind a veil, or inspiration, according to their capacity.

Even if people were to trust a person who used to commit sins, it is impossible to suddenly change and 'become' a prophet. One needs to have led a pious life, worked hard and be utterly devoted so one may become deserving of prophethood. Prophets must be qualified for the job, and only God has absolute knowledge about people, about who is persistent and consistent in his piety and actions:

اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ حَيْثُ يَجْعَلُ رِسَالَتَهُ

God knows best where to place His apostleship.
(6:124)

The Shi'a concept of infallibility, therefore, is that prophets are immune and protected from sins both before their prophethood as well as during, from both minor as well as grave sins, and also from mistakes.

64 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

In his *Talkhis al-Muhassal*, Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi²² (1201-1274) discusses the very concept of being immune or infallible from sinning and says:

Infallibility is when the servant [of God] is able to perform sins, *but* he does not wish to do so at all. And this lack of will [for sins] or the existence of something that prevents him from that is a divine grace for him. So he does not disobey God, not because he is unable to do so, but because he does not will to do so, or because there is something that overrides his will. Thus, considering his power (and free will) it is possible for him to perform sins, but considering his lack of will or the existence of the overriding obstacle, it is impossible.²³

This means that the prophets were human beings and had desires just like all human beings so they could have committed sins. However, they had such a great understanding of God, and were so pious that sinning simply did not appeal to them. Their love and awe of God were such that they could not even allow themselves to be negligent of Him. Even this negligence would be a great crime for them. For example, Prophet Muhammad (s) used

²² A great Shi'a philosopher, theologian, astronomer and mathematician who was able to reconcile between *kalām* and philosophy.

²³ *Talkhis al-Muhassal*, p.525

to ask for forgiveness, for the seconds that he may have been negligent from the complete devotion to God.²⁴

We too are immune from certain things, because we understand the disgust in certain things, for example, we would never walk in the street naked, or drink blood, or kill our own children, or play with faeces. Most of us are immune from such things, not because we are unable to, but because we have understood the baseness of such sins. They would not even occur to us, or seem appealing. For the prophets, all sins had this kind of disgust attached. This came from their piety and understanding. And with respect to mistakes, God protects them from mistakes when they try their best to keep away from sins, so that they are protected from even unintentional sins. When they do their best, God facilitates this for them and protects them from mistakes out of His divine grace.

The seal of prophethood

As a precursor to discussing the issue of prophethood coming to an end, we must understand God's plan for human beings. God, out of His wisdom, has a plan of perfection for human beings - to give us maximum opportunities and possibilities as far as this world can accommodate. Alongside our free will and reason, He has

²⁴ *Al-Majāzāt al-Nabawiyah*, p. 351. The original text is as follows:

إِنَّهُ لَيَمَانُ عَلَى قَلْبِي حَتَّى أَسْتَغْفِرَ اللَّهَ مِائَةَ مَرَّةٍ

66 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

given us all opportunities, tools and external support necessary for our perfection. External support comes in many different forms. One of them is His provision of divine guidance through prophets. We have internal facilities too, including reason, conscience, instincts, an infinite capacity for knowledge, desires to achieve good things, and being able to conceptualize higher ideals. God has provided all of humanity, every corner of the world, generation by generation with divine revelation and guidance. This message was renewed throughout time, as people became needy of new legal systems for newer conditions. Basic morality and basic principles never changed, especially with respect to beliefs. However, divine law and legislation changed according to new eras, where societies were changing considerably and understanding had evolved to such an extent that they needed a new set of laws.

Between Moses (a) and Jesus (a) were many prophets, none of whom brought new legislation or a new message, but who upheld the message brought by Moses (a). Communication at that time was limited, so to spread the message needed time and new prophets to communicate the same message. The era was not a new era and conditions were not fundamentally different to necessitate a new book or new legislation, until the time of Jesus (a) when external conditions had changed considerably and man had evolved considerably in his understanding and capacity.

How long does this cycle need to continue for however? Would God need to send new prophets after new prophets? Or would there come a time when human understanding was evolved enough to be able to maintain the final message, at least in its literal form, until the end? Taking the example of human beings, each generation is better or more evolved than its predecessors, since they assimilate all previous knowledge to their own and learn from previous experiences. However, there has to come a time when mankind as a whole has reached a certain level of maturity beyond which it does not evolve drastically. If all of mankind were to be represented by a single human being through time, it makes sense for him to one day reach the maturity designed for him and befitting him, where he has now come of age to understand concepts, generals and particulars, and is able to make full use of the resources at his disposal, without needing further newer resources.

Thus we are able to deduce rationally that this process must come to an end at some point, when human beings become mature enough and understanding enough to receive the message of God and protect it. And this is one more reason for sending the Prophet Muhammad (s) with the Qur'an as a literary and intellectual miracle. Throughout the ages, the miracles became more sophisticated. Where Moses (a) had come with physical phenomena as proofs of his prophethood, Jesus (a) came with slightly more subtle

68 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

miracles to do with healing inside the physical body, which albeit hidden from the eyes, were still physical proofs.

It was only in the time of the Prophet of Islam that the miracle given to him was something related to human intellect and understanding, a book. For example, a very young child cannot be made to be pleased or satisfied with an expensive book or sophisticated software. It takes only a cheap chocolate or lollipop. A university student, however, would appreciate a book or software. When humans became mature enough to understand a book and keep it and look after it, God sent the final miracle down. Even at that time, there were individuals who were not mature enough to understand it or accept it, and asked the Prophet (s) for physical signs, such as the moon to be split - which he performed - or for angels to come down and manifest themselves. However, society in general had evolved to such an extent that it was the dawn of a new era of understanding and development all over the globe. People had the capacity to save and protect the Qur'an.

The challenge for us today, more than its protection, is understanding the Qur'an, and it is a challenge that will continue to keep us devout, as we question ourselves whether we understand to its full capacity, as it was meant to be understood. After fourteen centuries, we are privileged that we have the same thing that Muslims in the first generation were given.

Is there any need therefore, for a new book or new legislation? No - we already have it, and it continues to please us, to guide us, to teach us, and to amaze us, and is as fresh today as it was fourteen hundred years ago.

Do we need a new prophet to come after Prophet Muhammad (s) to teach us the Qur'an or not? In the case of previous prophets, they were often sent to supplement and fill in gaps that were missing in the message. Parts of the book had either been lost or misunderstood, and the prophets were sent to remind and corroborate, to restore and fill in the original. For us, the message is still the same, preserved as it came down. There are no gaps to fill in, no restoration to be made, no need for direct communication from God.

Bearing in mind the tasks and duties of the prophets as discussed above, the only thing we need after the Prophet (s) is teachers to explain to us the true teachings of the Qur'an, to help us to understand further, and we need role models who live the way God wants us to live. This leads us to the discussion about the Imamate which is the topic for next chapter.

Imamate

In the last part of the previous chapter, we discussed whether or not there was a need for more prophets to be sent for mankind after Prophet Muhammad (s), and we concluded that in light of the duties of the prophets and the purpose of sending prophets, there was no need for a new prophet to come. In our case, the message remained the same and has been preserved as it came down. There are no gaps to fill in, no restoration to be made, no need for direct communication with God. The only thing needed after Prophet Muhammad (s) were teachers to explain to us the true teachings of the Qur'an, to help us to understand further, and we need role models who live the way God wants us to live - perfect men who are closest to God, and with whom He is pleased, and who act as perfect channels for God's mercy on this earth.

In previous times, the prophets fulfilled their duty as perfect human beings and role models who walked their talk. In our time today, after the Prophet (s), we continue to need perfect role models and teachers, and the world continues to need a *hujja* of God to act as a channel for his mercy,

72 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

without which nothing would subsist or flourish. The existence of at least one such perfect human being on earth is essential for its survival and for the descent of divine mercy and grace. We believe that the earth has never and cannot ever be devoid of a *hujja* of God on it. We have a famous hadith that says:

لَوْ خَلَتِ الْأَرْضُ طَرْفَةَ عَيْنٍ مِنْ حُجَّةٍ لَسَاخَتْ بِأَهْلِهَا

*Were it not for the presence of the hujja, the earth
would have swallowed its people up.*²⁵

In every age there must be at least one *hujja* on earth, be it as a prophet or as a perfect role model in the form of an Imam. After the prophet of Islam, we ceased to need new revelation or any new prophet, but we continue to need a *hujja*, firstly because he is a teacher, and secondly because he is the channel for receiving God's mercy and grace. Therefore, up until the end of this world the need for a *hujja* will always remain, and in our age, Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) is that *hujja* of God. Man can never be self-sufficient and needless of God's vicegerent and authority on this world.

What about a teacher, however? Does man continue to need teachers and trainers throughout existence? Going back to seeing mankind as a single person, first came the day when he came of age or became mature and was able to preserve

²⁵ 'Iṭlāl al-Sharā'ī', p. 199

and protect the divine guidance that came down for him. Then comes the stage of training where he is taught how to apply that message until he is finally able to fend for himself with the Qur'an and with the techniques that his teachers have taught him in the form of the Sunnah.

This training took around 260 years, where the infallible teachers were continuously present, which was followed by a period of gradual transition in the form of the minor occultation, where the teacher (the 12th Imam) was no longer available, yet accessible if the need arose. It would be a big change for the people to suddenly be without an infallible teacher among them, to whom they had got habituated.

After 69 years, when the people were able to manage with the tools and skills that they had acquired, the Imam went into major occultation, where there was no longer any need for direct access to him through specific persons, and where they could now refer to those amongst themselves best qualified to answer their questions and those who best understood the Qur'an and the Sunnah who are, of course, the scholars and the jurists (*mujtabids*). If they come across an issue or problem to which they do not know the answer, they no longer have access to the teacher, but they have all the tools, skills and the divine book and Sunnah at their disposal to be able to look for the answers to these questions.

74 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

We have reached a state whereby we can survive. After about 1170 years, we find that we are as fresh and strong in our belief as the people of that time would have been, and in our mastery of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and in the organisation and systematisation of these tools and techniques, we can even say that our scholars have evolved and become better than scholars in that era, as they built on the scholars' knowledge over the years. Of course, for our own ease and convenience, it would be ideal to have an infallible teacher in our midst all the time, and perhaps we would have benefited much more, but God knows best what is most conducive to man's growth and evolution, just as eventually a student must attain some kind of independence from his teachers and prove that he is able to apply what he has been taught, and prove his commitment and loyalty to these teachings even in the absence of his teachers.

Being able to have an overview of the role of divine guidance, its gradual descent, the maturity of man in his ability to preserve and protect that guidance, and the teachers that were sent to train him and then leave him answers many questions for us about the role of the Imams, the reason for the minor and major occultations respectively and the role of the scholars. It also goes to highlight the mistake of the people who do not understand and appreciate the need for divinely appointed teachers after the Prophet (s). They believe that those 23 years of the Prophet's teaching people was enough, but that is a mistake, and we

see that those who did not believe in Imams after the Prophet (s) faced lots of questions after him that they could not answer.

The Prophet (s) taught the people alongside and at the same time as the descent of revelation, for only 23 years. Such a short period of time for training mankind, in the infancy of their maturity, to be self-sufficient forever, is not enough. In those 23 years, he was not even able to teach the people continuously.

The first three years were spent secretly and covertly. The next few years were faced with many trials and tribulation e.g. in the persecution of the Muslims, their exile in *Shi'b Abi Talib*, migration to Medina and the wars that took place in Medina. The Prophet (s) was not able to be a full-time teacher who sits with the people and teaches them. Also, the opportunity for some questions for the Muslim community at large never came up. The Muslims who lived under attack and torture in Mecca could never even have imagined how to deal with issues that came up when Islam was later to be expanded into many parts of the world, where Muslims were to be in the majority, or faced with other cultures, traditions and religions. It is tantamount to expecting a child to have been taught about marital relations and leading congregational prayers.

76 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Those 329 years when the Qur'an was accompanied by its teachers was just enough to see the Muslim community through many different experiences, various challenges, and exposure throughout most of the world. That was just enough for mankind to be trained. But 23 years was certainly not enough, and the proponents of this view necessarily came across various problems that they could not answer, and from this were born presumptuous and flawed principles of deriving legal rulings such as *qiyās* and *istihsān*, where situations are compared and what is 'deemed' good is commanded or prohibited.

Islam is a religion of certainty and conviction and leaves no room for methods which are not certain or do not produce knowledge and are just based on guessing or suspicion: *"...indeed conjecture is no substitute for the truth. Indeed God knows best what they do (10:36)."*

Legal matters may lend themselves to such flawed deductions or assumptions, but matters of spirituality certainly do not, and we see throughout history that even those who did not accept the Imams as divinely appointed teachers continued to refer to them for their spiritual needs. Almost all Sufi orders can be traced back to the Ahl al-Bayt (a) and the teachings of the Imams.

Imamate in the Qur'an

According to the Qur'an, there are certain concepts which refer to Imamate and indicate that in every age there must be a divinely-appointed leader. This leader is not appointed by people, neither through elections nor through a council, but by God Himself.

The first such concept is that every nation will be called on the Day of Resurrection to join its leader:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ

The Day We shall summon every group of people with their imam (17:71)

For every generation there is a divinely appointed leader that people should follow. Those who actually follow those leaders in this world will be asked to join them on the Day of Resurrection and those who instead follow bad leaders will be asked to join them.²⁶

The second Qur'anic concept of Imamah is that of divine guidance; that for every group of people and for every generation there is a divine guide:

²⁶ This is discussed at length by the great scholar and exegete 'Allamah Tabataba'i in his exegesis of the Qur'an *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 13, pp. 165-168

وَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنْذِرٌ وَ
لِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ

The faithless say, 'Why has not some sign been sent down to him from his Lord?' You are only a warner and there is a guide for every people (13:7)

God tells the Prophet (s) that he is truly a warner, and that every group of people has been provided with a guide, whose role is distinct from the role of a warner. Who is that guide?

God himself gives the answer to this in the Qur'an, explaining that a guide is one who guides, without first having had to acquire his knowledge or his own guidance through learning. He guides others by virtue of having been appointed and himself guided by none other than God:

أَفَمَنْ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ أَحَقُّ أَنْ يُتَّبَعَ أَمْ مَنْ لَا يَهْدِي إِلَّا أَنْ يَهْدَى
Is He who guides to the truth worthier to be followed, or who he who cannot guide unless he is [himself] guided? (10:35)

God poses a question and leaves the judgment to us - is one who guides to the truth worthier of being followed or one who needs to find the path of truth first in order to guide others. Man is given two options of which he must choose one. The guidance that we are discussing is that which comes directly from the source. Those who are themselves

in need of guidance cannot be guides in this all-important sense of leadership and guiding towards God and ultimate truth and salvation. So in summary God tells us in the Qur'an that for every group of people, He has appointed a guide who guides to the truth without first having had to learn from others.

The third Qur'anic concept of Imamah is that of a witness (*shahid*). In Arabic, '*shahid*' is often used to mean *martyr*, but its original meaning is 'witness,' and that a martyr is called such because he is living and is a witness. And we believe that just as in every generation, there must be a leader and a guide, so must there be a witness over the people. These persons are one and the same, and are but different qualities of the same divinely-appointed Imam. God says in the Qur'an:

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جِئْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ بِشَهِيدٍ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ
شَهِيدًا

*So how shall it be when We bring from every nation a
witness, and We bring you as a witness over them?*
(4:41)

Therefore, every generation, on the day of resurrection, will be brought forth and made to answer in front of the witness appointed to them, which God will call to witness over them - how did they believe and behave? Did they accept you or reject you? Were they true believers or hypocrites or

80 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

disbelievers? That witness will answer for every single member of that nation, and such a person must necessarily have divine knowledge and have lived alongside those people in order to act as a witness.

وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ
شَهِيدًا عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ

The day We raise in every nation a witness against them from among themselves, We shall bring you as a witness against these. (16:89)

God mentions the same thing in this verse and in several other verses in the Qur'an, that a witness will be brought forth from among themselves, who will bear witness over them. A witness over all people can only be someone who has been vested with authority over them, and has knowledge of them, and being from among them means that he has to have lived with them. The verse further mentions that the Prophet (s) is a witness over them too, which corroborates the previously quoted verse: "*the day we shall raise every people with their Imam (17:71).*" All these verses mirror and support each other beautifully, and confer the same meaning.

All Muslims, Sunni or Shi'a, believe in these verses, in that on the Day of Judgment, there will be a witness for every group of people from among themselves who will bear witness and act as a testimony to what they have done with

their lives on earth. The only difference between how Shi'a and Sunni scholars interpret these verses is that normally Sunni scholars hold that this witness does not necessarily have to have been a contemporary to the group of people he is bearing witness over. For example, in his *al-Kashshāf*, Zamakhshari several times stresses on the idea that each prophet will act as a witness for his nation and in particular he mentions that Prophet Muhammad (s) will act as a witness for his *ummah* (nation) and this seems to include the people of his own time as well as all people who come after him.²⁷ The Shi'a, however, believe differently. Although the

²⁷ For example, in *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, p. 628, he says:

شَهِيداً عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَعْنِي نَبِيِّهِمْ، لِأَنَّهُ كَانَ يَبْعَثُ أَنْبِيَاءَ الْأُمَمِ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ وَ
جِئْنَا بِكَ يَا مُحَمَّدَ شَهِيداً عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ عَلَى أَمْتِكَ.

In vol. 1, p. 512, he says:

إِذَا جِئْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ بِشَهِيدٍ يَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمَا فَعَلُوا وَ هُوَ نَبِيُّهُمْ، كَقَوْلِهِ: (وَكُنْتُ
عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيداً مَا دُمْتُ فِيهِمْ).

In vol. 3, p. 429, he says:

وَنَزَعْنَا وَ أَخْرَجْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيداً وَ هُوَ نَبِيُّهُمْ: لِأَنَّ أَنْبِيَاءَ الْأُمَمِ شُهَدَاءُ
عَلَيْهِمْ، يَشْهَدُونَ بِمَا كَانُوا عَلَيْهِ.

In vol. 1, p. 199, he says:

«لَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ» رَوَى «أَنَّ الْأُمَمَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَجْعَدُونَ تَبْلِيغَ
الْأَنْبِيَاءِ، فَيَطَالِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِالْبَيِّنَةِ عَلَى أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ بَلَّغُوا وَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ، فَيُؤْتَى
بِأَمَّةٍ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَ سَلَّمَ فَيَشْهَدُونَ، فَتَقُولُ الْأُمَمُ: مَنْ أَيْنَ عَرَفْتُمْ؟
فَيَقُولُونَ عَلِمْنَا ذَلِكَ بِإِخْبَارِ اللَّهِ فِي كِتَابِهِ النَّاطِقِ عَلَى لِسَانِ نَبِيِّهِ الصَّادِقِ،

82 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Prophet (s), even after his death, is aware of what we do, to be a witness in this sense is an official position and formal responsibility given to the *hujja* of God in every generation. He must also be a contemporary to the people and have lived with the people of his generation. God himself mentions in the Qur'an a formal conversation that will take place between Himself and Prophet Jesus (a) on the Day of Judgment:

...وَكُنْتُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا مَا دُمْتُ فِيهِمْ، فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّيْتَنِي كُنْتُ أَنْتَ
الرَّقِيبَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنْتَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

...And I was a witness to them so long as I was among them. But when You had taken me away, You Yourself were watchful over them, and You are witness to all things. (5:117)

This is a very important proof that suggests that a witness is one who lives with his people. And although Jesus (a) still lives and is not dead, he is no longer living with his people and thus cannot act as a witness over them, just as the Prophet (s) does not act as a witness over us in this particular sense. The famous Sunni scholar, Fakhr al-Razi, in his exegeses of the Qur'an, entitled *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, maintains that the verses which talk about witnesses over people refer to witnesses who will bear witness over people

فيؤتى بمحمد صلى الله عليه وسلم فيسأل عن حال أمته، فيزكهم ويشهد
بعدالتهم...

in every age. The prophets are included amongst the witnesses but it is not limited to the prophets, for there was a long period of time before Prophet Muhammad (s) that people were devoid of a prophet, as well as the long period of time after his passing that there will be no prophet after him. Regardless of this, according to these verses, there must necessarily be a witness among them.²⁸

Therefore, in every generation, there must be a person vested with this responsibility of bearing witness over the people of his time, which he would present as a testimony on the Day of Judgment. In addition to what has been said above, we have two more verses of the Qur'an which support this fact, both referring to the time after the Prophet (s). The first verse is as follows:

وَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَسْتَ مُرْسَلًا. قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي
وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَمَنْ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْكِتَابِ

*The faithless say, 'You have not been sent [by God].'
Say, 'God suffices as a witness between me and you,*

²⁸ *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, vol. 25, p. 13. The original text is as follows:

و قال آخرون بل هم الشهداء الذين يشهدون على الناس في كل زمان و
يدخل في جملتهم الأنبياء و هذا أقرب لأنه تعالى عم كل أمة و كل جماعة
بأن ينزع منهم الشهيد فيدخل فيه الأحوال التي لم يوجد فيها النبي و هي
أزمنة الفترات و الأزمنة التي حصلت بعد محمد صلى الله عليه و آله و سلم
فعلموا حينئذ أن الحق لله و لرسله.

84 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

and he who possesses the knowledge of the Book.
(13:43)

The Prophet (s) is told to say to the faithless that God is a witness over them, but also a human being who has the knowledge of the Book. In Arabic there is a big difference between the phrases “*ilmun min al-kitāb*” (some knowledge of the Book), and “*ilm al-kitāb*” (the knowledge of the Book). The Qur’an mentions an incident where someone with some knowledge of the Book was able to perform an extraordinary feat in the story of Prophet Solomon (a), where a sprite or Jinn managed to bring him the throne of Balqis, the Queen of Sheba, in the blink of an eye, because of his partial knowledge of the Book:

قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَن يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ
طَرْفُكَ فَلَمَّا رَآهُ مُسْتَقِرًّا عِنْدَهُ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي أَ
أَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ وَمَن شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَن كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي
غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

The one who had some knowledge of the Book said, ‘I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.’ So when he saw it set near him, he said, ‘This is by the grace of my Lord, to test me if I will give thanks or be ungrateful... (27:40)

Here, however, this human witness is supposed to have ‘the knowledge of the Book,’ meaning complete knowledge of the Book. Throughout history if all of mankind is to be

given the challenge of bringing whom they would present as having been the human to possess such complete knowledge at the time of the Prophet (s), besides him and God, no one would deny that this could be none other than Imam Ali (a). Although people in history, have disputed about his appointment to caliphate and other such matters, but no one has ever disputed his knowledge.

The second verse reads as follows:

أَفَمَنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّنْ رَبِّهِ وَيَتْلُوهُ شَاهِدٌ مِّنْهُ...

*Is he who stands on a manifest proof from his Lord,
and whom a witness of his own follows? [like one who
is not such?] (11:17)*

God tells the unbelievers that not only does the Prophet (s) have a manifest proof with him, but he is also followed by a witness from himself (*min-hu*). This *min-hu* can best be understood in light of an important hadith narrating the descent of the verses from Chapter *Barā'ah*, addressed to the pagans of that time. When these verses were revealed, the Prophet (s) asked Abu Bakr to go and deliver them to the unbelievers. While on his way, the Prophet (s) sent a man to call Abu Bakr back. He returned while he was very concerned and according to some versions, he asked the Prophet (s) whether any verse was revealed against him. The Prophet (s) replied, 'No, but Gabriel came to me and said that this verse must be delivered either by myself or by a

man from me.’ And then he sent Imam Ali (a).²⁹ Even though Abu Bakr was a very important figure and a well-known Muslim, he was recalled and a man from the Prophet (s) had to be sent. Being of the Prophet’s own does not have anything to do with being his relative, just as Prophet Noah’s son who was from Noah’s own flesh and blood was denounced by God against being his own because of his disbelief. Rather being from the Prophet (s) requires being as

²⁹ *Al-Durr al-Manthur fi Tafsir al-Ma'thur*, vol. 3, p. 209. The original text is as follows:

أخرج ابن مردويه عن سعد بن أبي وقاص (رضى الله عنه ان رسول الله
 (صلى الله عليه وسلم) بعث أبا بكر (رضى الله عنه ببراءة إلى أهل مكة ثم
 بعث عليا (رضى الله عنه) على اثره فأخذها منه فكان أبا بكر (رضى الله
 عنه) وجد في نفسه فقال النبي (صلى الله عليه وسلم): يا أبا بكر انه لا
 يؤدى عنى الا أنا أو رجل منى

In *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad*, Musnad al-Ashrah al-Mubashsharin bi al-Jannah, no. 1299, we read:

حدثنا عبد الله حدثنا محمد بن سليمان لوين حدثنا محمد بن
 جابر عن سماك عن حنش عن علي (رضى الله عنه قال لما نزلت عشر
 آيات من براءة على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم دعا النبي صلى الله عليه
 وسلم أبا بكر (رضى الله عنه فبعثه بها ليقرأها على أهل مكة ثم دعاني النبي
 صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال لي أدرك أبا بكر (رضى الله عنه فحيثما لحقته فخذ
 الكتاب منه فاذهب به إلى أهل مكة فاقرأه عليهم فلحقته بالجحفة فأخذت
 الكتاب منه ورجع أبو بكر (رضى الله عنه إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال
 يا رسول الله نزل في شيء قال لا ولكن جبريل جاءني فقال لن يؤدى عنك
 إلا أنت أو رجل منك

much like the Prophet (s) as possible and to follow him one hundred per cent.

In another hadith, narrating an incident where the Prophet (s) sent a group of Muslims on a conquest under Imam Ali's command. They won the battle, and Imam Ali (a) distributed the war booty, the distribution of which some three people were not very pleased and questioned its fairness. They decided to return to Medina ahead of the army and report the matter to the Prophet (s). Before entering his house, they met another group of people who also encouraged them to do the same. They themselves narrate that they were too much in awe to even look at the face of the Prophet (s), but regardless, the first one gave his side of the story as did the second and third, after which the Prophet (s) became angry, saying, 'What is your problem with Ali? He is from me and I am from him.'³⁰

³⁰ This hadith has been mentioned in many major Sunni collections of hadith. For example, one may refer to the following: *Jāmi' at-Tirmidhī*, vol. 5, Bab Manāḡib Ali b. Abi Talib, no. 3712; *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad*, vol. 4, no. 19426; *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir*, vol. 18, no. 265.

عن عمران بن حصين قال: بعث رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم جيشا واستعمل عليهم على بن أبي طالب فمضى فى السرية فأصاب جارية فأنكروا عليه وتعاقد أربعة من أصحاب رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقالوا: إذا لقينا رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم أخبرناه بما صنع على وكان المسلمون إذا رجعوا من السفر بدءوا برسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فسلموا عليه ثم انصرفوا إلى رحالهم فلما قدمت السرية سلموا على النبي صلى الله

Therefore, to be from the Prophet (s) is very significant.

These verses and hadiths prove that there must be someone after the Prophet (s) vested with this knowledge and authority over the people. And this responsibility of bearing witness, of course, continues after Imam Ali (a) until the end of time. And the witness in our time is Imam Mahdi (a).

Imamate in Hadiths

In addition to the Qur'anic verses, there are many hadiths to support the doctrine of Imamate. There is, of course the very famous hadith of al-Ghadir - the narration of the event that took place immediately after the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage, where he stopped the caravan at a place called Ghadir of Khumm, made a stage from all the saddles, and raised Imam Ali's hand in his own, saying, 'For whomsoever I am a *mawla*, Ali is his *mawla*,'³¹ amongst the final verses of revelation of the Qur'an and other important departing messages for the Muslims, after which they paid allegiance to

عليه وسلم فقام أحد الأربعة فقال يا رسول الله ألم تر إلى علي بن أبي طالب صنع كذا وكذا فأعرض عنه رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ثم قام الثاني فقال مثل مقالته فأعرض عنه ثم قام الثالث فقال مثل مقالته فأعرض عنه ثم قام الرابع فقال مثل ما قالوا فأقبل رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم والغضب يعرف في وجهه فقال ما تريدون من علي ما تريدون من علي ما تريدون من علي إن عليا مني وأنا منه وهو ولي كل مؤمن بعدي.

³¹ . The original text is as follows:

مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَهَذَا عَلِيٌّ مَوْلَاهُ

Imam Ali (a).³² The controversy that surrounds this hadith is not in its authenticity or in the narration of the event, but rather in how people choose to interpret the word *manla* as either 'master' or 'friend.' Our Sunni brothers prefer the latter.

Even if we were to assume that by *manla*, he meant friend, the very fact that the Prophet (s) asked thousands of Muslims to gather together in the heat of the midday desert sun just to proclaim that Ali is his friend should be enough to tell us that we must follow him.

There are many other hadiths too. A very famous hadith quoted in many canonical Sunni works of hadith, is the one wherein the Prophet (s) says that he will be succeeded by either twelve leaders (*amir*)³³ or twelve caliphs (*khalifa*),³⁴ and

³² *Al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn*, vol. 3, p. 118, *Rundha al-Wa'ezin wa Basirah al-Mutta'zin*, vol. 1, p. 94.

³³ For example, in *Sahih* of Bukhari (Kitab al-Ahkam, Bab al-Istikhlaf) no. 6796, we read:

حدثني محمد بن المثنى حدثنا غندر حدثنا شعبة عن عبد الملك سمعت جابر بن سمرة قال: سمعت النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول: يكون اثنا عشر أميراً فقال كلمة لم أسمعها فقال أبي إنه قال كلهم من قريش

³⁴ For example, in *Sahih* of Muslim (Kitab al-Imarah, Bab-u al-Nās Tāba'un li Quraysh wa'l-Khilāfat-u fi Quraysh) , we read:

عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ سَمُرَةَ، قَالَ: دَخَلْتُ مَعَ أَبِي عَلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَسَمِعْتُهُ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ لَا يَنْقُضِي حَتَّى يَمُتْ فِيهِمْ اثْنَا عَشَرَ خَلِيفَةً.

90 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

that they would all be from the clan of Quraysh, and that Islam would have dignity as long as there are these twelve.

Other than Twelver Shi'a, Muslim theologians faced great difficulties in identifying who those twelve leaders or caliphs were. If they started counting chronologically the first twelve caliphs after the prophet (s) they had to count Yazid b. Mu'awiya too, whose corrupt and immoral ways were confirmed by all, and could not be admissible. And furthermore, counting Caliphs in this manner meant that there was no significant difference between the twelfth and the thirteenth Caliph or between the eleventh and the twelfth. Some tried to be selective so they began to count arbitrarily the first four, and then the good ones thereafter. But again this was a whimsical and subjective way of counting. The only count that makes sense and is corroborated by divine appointment is that these are the twelve infallible Imams (a).

Ahl al-Bayt, the Authoritative Teachers of Islam

For many people, dwelling on the politics and history of that time may seem useless and continues to burden our movement forward, and so the most important questions we are left with now are: how do we understand Islam today? What are the sources from which we should learn our Islam?

قَالَ: ثُمَّ تَكَلَّمَ بِكَلَامٍ خَفِيَ عَلَىَّ، قَالَ: فَقُلْتُ لِأَيِّ: مَا قَالَ؟، قَالَ: كُلُّهُمْ مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ.

The Prophet (s) in his very famous hadith of *Tbaqalayn* (the two weighty things) said that he was leaving behind for his community so that they would never go astray as long as they held on fast to these two things, which were inseparable from each other. The first is the Qur'an and the second his household (a). They will never separate from each other till they come to him near the Fountain of Kawthar.³⁵ Now let us reflect on the content of the hadith, i.e. the fact that the Prophet has left among Muslims two weighty things: the

³⁵ For example, in *Sahib* of Muslim (Kitab-u Fada'il al-Sahabah, Babun min Fada'il Ali ibn Abi Talib), we read:

قام رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يوما فينا خطيبا بماء يدعى خما
بين مكة والمدينة فحمد الله وأثنى عليه ووعظ وذكر ثم قال: أما بعد ألا أيها
الناس فإنما أنا بشر يوشك أن يأتي رسول ربي فأجيب وأنا تارك فيكم
ثقلين أولهما كتاب الله فيه الهدى والنور فخذوا بكتاب الله واستمسكوا به
فحث على كتاب الله ورغب فيه ثم قال وأهل بيتي أذكركم الله في أهل بيتي
أذكركم الله في أهل بيتي أذكركم الله في أهل بيتي

In *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhi (Kitab al-Manāqib, Bab-u Manāqib-i Ahl-i Bayt al-Nabiy), the hadith is as follows:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إنى تارك فيكم ما إن تمسكنم به لن
تضلوا بعدى أحدهما أعظم من الآخر كتاب الله حبل ممدود من السماء إلى
الأرض وعترتى أهل بيتي ولن يترفقا حتى يردا على الحوض فانظروا كيف
تخلفونى فيهما

In *Kanz al-Ummāl*, vol. 1, p 185, no. 944, the hadith is as follows:

إنى تارك فيكم الثقلين كتاب الله وعترتى كتاب الله حبل ممدود من السماء
إلى الأرض وعترتى أهل بيتي وإن اللطيف الخبير خبرنى أنهما لن يترفقا
حتى يردا على الحوض فانظروا كيف تخلفونى

92 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

Qur'an and his household, and that as long as people hold on to them both, they will not go astray. This shows that the Qur'an and Ahl al-Bayt (a) must always be in harmony with each other, and that they never contradict each other. Otherwise, the Prophet would not have given the instruction to follow both of them. Moreover, the people would get puzzled about what to do if the household of the Prophet were to tell them to go in one direction and the Book of God says to go in another.

Thus, this hadith implies that:

- From the time of the Prophet until the end of the world the Book of God and the household of the Prophet will always be together.
- No one can say that the book of God is enough, and that we do not need the household of the Prophet, or vice versa, for the Prophet clearly said: I leave two precious things that you must grasp and if you do so you will not be misled.
- The household of the Prophet would never make mistakes and they are always truthful.

It is also interesting that according to this hadith the household of the Prophet, like the Qur'an itself, is held to be persistent until the Day of Judgement and Paradise. Thus, the household of the Prophet will never disappear, even for a short period of time.

Note: The tradition of *thaqalayn* is mentioned in both Sunni and Shi'a sources so it is a matter of agreement among all Muslims.³⁶ However, there is a version of the hadith in which the Prophet is quoted as saying 'my Sunnah' instead of 'my household.' This version can only be found in some Sunni sources. Provided that this version too can be authenticated, there is no difficulty in understanding what this tradition means.

The Prophet in many traditions narrated by all Muslims has said: "I am leaving two precious things and those are the glorious Qur'an and my household." In a few traditions narrated only by a particular group of Muslims he has said: "the glorious Qur'an and my Sunnah." Obviously the result would be that as one side of the comparison is the same, i.e. the Qur'an, the other side too must be identical. Therefore, 'my Sunnah' and 'my household' also must be identical; otherwise one has to say that there is no harmony in what the Prophet said. Thus, the very act of resorting to the teachings and advice of the household of the Prophet is the very act of resorting to the Sunnah of the Prophet. The only reliable way to reach the Sunnah of the Prophet is to refer to these people who have had the closest relationship with him

³⁶ *Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. 1, p. 186, no. 948. The original text is as follows:

إِنِّي قَدْ خَلَفْتُكُمْ فِيكُمْ مَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدَهُمَا مَا أَخَذْتُمْ بِهِمَا وَغَلَبْتُمْ بِهِمَا كِتَابُ
 اللَّهِ وَسُنَّتِي وَلَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَى الْحَوْضِ

94 LESSIONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEFS

and who knew better than anyone else what he said or did or approved.

This only goes to corroborate the fact that Imamah is a light of divine guidance, prescribed by the Prophet(s) himself to prevent the community from going astray, and to ensure that the Islam he came with remained in its purest and most dignified form through these twelve successors that he had told his community about.

Resurrection

According to the Qur'an, the belief in God as the only Creator of the world and the belief in resurrection are the main beliefs of every divinely revealed religion. In the Qur'an, belief in resurrection (or the last day) is juxtaposed next to belief in God in many places. For example, the Qur'an says:

يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ

They believe in God and in the Last Day (3:114; cf. 4:162; 9:44; 58:22)

This shows that belief in God and belief in resurrection go hand in hand. These two along with the belief in divine prophethood are seen as the basic principles in any type of divine religion. Therefore, in principle we do not find any difference in each of the prophets' teachings about resurrection, although we find that the Qur'an is unique in terms of the emphasis it places on resurrection and the lengthy descriptions of it that stand out therein. It is replete with references of rewards and chastisements, descriptions of the last day, the questioning, the grave, remembrance of death, heaven and hell and the angels in charge of them.

96 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEF

While all divine religions probably started out giving as much importance to it, it is still very much a main part of the Islamic belief system.

Other religions which do not seem to have any obvious links to the prophets with revealed books, or are not among the Abrahamic religions, and which may not have the same concept of resurrection, still have some idea of a life after death, such as the belief in reincarnation. This means that they believe fundamentally that humans survive death and will somehow face consequences to their deeds in this life and in the life to come. However, because they do not have the clear picture of resurrection that we get from the revealed sources, they may limit those consequences to yet another life in this world, in a different physical form, based on their deeds. Deep in their mind, they find it necessary to believe that the creation cannot be indifferent to man's deeds and there must be some kind of consequences to people's actions in their life. Since these consequences are not normally materialised in this life, they believe that there must be another life, in which people of good character and deeds would enjoy and the people of bad character would suffer.

In any case, according to Islam, man will go on to the Hereafter. Man will be held accountable for his beliefs, morals and practices. Based on what he has achieved, he will be rewarded or punished. This life is but a passageway into

the next and, indeed, the only opportunity that one has to define the quality of his life after death. There is no way of coming back into this world and starting everything from the beginning.³⁷ Although the main reward and punishment take place in the Hereafter, it can be understood from the Qur'an and hadiths that the current world is very sensitive to our deeds, and that we may start to witness the outcomes and consequences of our deeds even during our worldly lifetime. Good-doers may well start to experience the bliss of their actions in this world, just as evil-doers may start suffering as a result of their misdeeds soon after they commit them. However, the main and final judgment will be made on the Day of Resurrection based on the sum total of man's beliefs, qualities of the soul and deeds.

The Day of Judgment is referred to in many different terms in the Qur'an and hadiths, such as the following, which are

³⁷ Of course, the Qur'an confirms that there have been cases, in which certain people were revived e.g. by Jesus (a) or other Qur'anic examples where God caused this to happen as a proof for the possibility of resurrection to the people. It should also be noted that based on the Qur'anic verses and hadiths, the Shi'a also believe in the doctrine of the Return which requires the return of very good believers throughout the history to this world to see the victory of the Truth and enjoy and very bad people in the history of mankind to see the defeat of the evil and suffer, before they start suffering in the hell. However, this does not change the fact that generally speaking we do not believe in people coming back to this world to live another lifetime, in which they can change their pattern of life.

all terms for the same reality: the Day of Resurrection,³⁸ the Day of Recompense,³⁹ the Day of Reckoning,⁴⁰ the Day of Regret,⁴¹ the Day of Loss.⁴²

Death

So what is the reality of death from the Qur'anic perspective? The Qur'an mentions that some people have a problem of believing in resurrection because of their flawed understanding of life and death. They believe man's reality to be his physical body, and as it dies and perishes, they cannot conceive of how and why there should be a resurrection. For example, we read in the Qur'an:

وَقَالُوا إِذَا ضَلَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَإِنَّا لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ، بَلْ هُمْ بِلِقَاءِ
رَبِّهِمْ كَافِرُونَ. قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ
رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ

They say, 'When we have been lost in the dust, shall we then be created anew?' Rather they disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord. Say, 'You will be taken away by the angel of death who has been charged with

³⁸ The Arabic term is (يَوْمُ الْقِيَامَةِ)

³⁹ The Arabic term is (يَوْمُ الْجَزَاءِ)

⁴⁰ The Arabic term is (يَوْمُ الْحِسَابِ)

⁴¹ The Arabic term is (يَوْمُ الْحَسْرَةِ)

⁴² The Arabic term is (يَوْمُ التَّعَانِينِ)

you. Then you will be brought back to your Lord.'
(32: 10 & 11)

Their understanding, based on the question they ask, is that man, once dead and buried in the folds of the earth, decomposed and scattered in the elements throughout the ages, could never be created anew. They may also hold that even if the possibility of God creating them again as He did in the first place is accepted, this would then be a new creation not a resurrection, since man's very identity is obliterated with his death. This is a misconception in itself, because we do not believe man's body to be his identity or to be his reality. Since the human spirit is man's reality, we believe that this never dies, even after departing the body which hosts it. It is the continuity of the spirit that ensures the resurrection of the same person, not his physical body.

To correct their misconception and provide them with the alternative, in the above verse God says that the angel of death takes away and receives man's soul completely and brings it back to Him. There is no mention of annihilation or obliteration. Man's whole reality is simply taken away (*tawaffi*) and preserved until an appointed time.⁴³ This concept of death, expressed as *tawaffi*, or 'being taken away'

⁴³ It should be noted that after death our soul is placed in a new semi-abstract body (*badan-e mithali*) which looks like the physical body, but has no physical mass.

is very important in the Qur'an and is mentioned in different forms fourteen times therein.

Another verse is about death and sleep. Both death and sleep are very mysterious and closely related to each other. The way we go to sleep and then dream, especially true dreams or premonitions in dreams, and then wake again after it deserves great attention. The Qur'an says:

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَازِلِهَا، فِيمَسِكُ
الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى، إِنَّ
فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

God takes the souls at the time of their death, and those who have not died in their sleep. Then He retains those for whom He has ordained death and releases the others until a specified time. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect. (39:42)

In this verse, sleep is compared to death, as it is an expression of the weakening of the relationship between the soul and the body for a specific amount of time. When we die, there is a cutting of this relation between body and soul. If a person's ordained time of death has come while he sleeps, his soul is retained by God. Therefore, our souls go or pass through certain spiritual realms when we sleep, where they may witness true facts, unbound by the space and time constraints of the material world, which is why people may witness true dreams or premonitions in their

sleep. Death is therefore like a very deep sleep where our souls are received and retained. It is certainly not obliteration.

In yet another verse in the Qur'an, God says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ ظَالِمِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا فِيمَ كُنْتُمْ، قَالُوا
كُنَّا مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ. قَالُوا أَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَاسِعَةً
فَتُهَاجِرُوا فِيهَا...

Indeed, those whom the angels take away while they are wronging themselves, they ask, 'What state were you in?' They reply, 'We were abased in the land.' They say, 'Was not Allah's earth vast enough so that you might migrate in it?' (4:97)

As soon as we die, conversation with the angels begins, as opposed to the idle dead state some assume themselves to be in once we die.

Thus, according to the Qur'an, death is not destruction or annihilation, and death is not to disappear and finish. Death is simply a transition to the other world, wherein human understanding will increase, and wherein we will be in a better position than in the material world, in that we will be able to communicate with the angels, and comprehend realities far beyond our capabilities during our lives. The life of our soul will be a stronger reality, though whether or not

we will enjoy that life in transit depends on our deeds and beliefs.

Barzakh

In the transitory period between life in this world and the resurrection, human spirits stay in *barzakh*. This idea is rooted in the Qur'an itself. Indeed, the term *barzakh* (meaning interval, barrier or border between two things) occurs several times in the Qur'an, and in one verse it is used to denote this place of transit between the two worlds:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ
صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ. كَلَّا إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ
إِلَى يَوْمٍ يُبْعَثُونَ

When death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord! Send me back that I may act righteously in what I have left behind.' 'By no means. These are mere words that he says.' And ahead of them is a barrier until the day they will be resurrected. (23:99 & 100)

Barzakh is a state of limbo without the connotations of idleness attached therewith. It is not something that will take place in the future or which is bound by the same laws of space and time as our world. Rather, it is a parallel dimension to ours with laws of its own. It is linked to our world in that people therein will be treated according to how they lived in this world. The consequences of our deeds in the form of bliss or suffering will be experienced by us to

some extent immediately after our death. This is why it has been mentioned in a well-known hadith that “the grave [referring to the life after death or *barzakh*] is either a garden from among the gardens of heaven or a hole from amongst the holes of hell.”⁴⁴

There are about fifteen verses in the Qur'an that refer to this transitory life. For example, in some of the verses, God says, good-doers will be welcomed by the angels and given salutations of peace:

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ يَقُولُونَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ادْخُلُوا
الْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

*Those whom the angels take away while they are pure.
They say [to them], 'Peace be upon you! Enter
paradise because of what you used to do.'* (16:32)

Immediately after death, the pure and pious people are invited to heaven. Salutation of peace will be given by the angels before they enter heaven. This is not the eternal heaven after the Day of Judgment, but the bliss that awaits the believers straight after death.

Another verse in the Qur'an regards the pious believer from the family of Pharaoh (*mu'min-e āl-i fir'awn*) who urged his

⁴⁴*Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 6, p. 218. The original text is as follows:

الْقَبْرِ رَوْضَةً مِنْ رِيَاضِ الْجَنَّةِ أَوْ حُفْرَةً مِنْ حُفْرِ النَّارِ

people to believe and do good deeds and describes how he was told to enter paradise as soon as he died:

قِيلَ ادْخُلِ الْجَنَّةَ قَالَ يَا لَيْتَ قَوْمِي يَعْلَمُونَ بِمَا غَفَرَ لِي رَبِّي وَ
جَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ

He was told, 'Enter paradise!' He said, 'Alas! Had my people only known for what my Lord forgave me and made me one of the honoured ones!' (36:26 & 27)

And similarly the Qur'an speaks about people who experience the consequences of their evil actions as soon as they die, but which is a mere taste of what is to come later after the Day of Judgment:

وَ حَاقَ بِآلِ فِرْعَوْنَ سُوءُ الْعَذَابِ، النَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا
وَعَشِيًّا وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ الْعَذَابِ

A terrible punishment besieged Pharaoh's clan: the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening. And on the Day when the Hour sets in, Pharaoh's clan will enter the severest punishment. (40:45)

Imam Sadiq (a) explained the verse, saying that the beginning refers to the punishment in the *barẓakh*, since exposure to the Fire in the morning and evening implies a dimension with time, and we know that *barẓakh* does have time, albeit, with its own laws of time, proportionate to the dimension it is in. However, the Day of Judgment is

timeless, so the second part of the punishment refers to the eternal punishment in hell.⁴⁵

Questioning in the grave

Based on verses of the Qur'an and *hadiths*, we can conclude that there will be some form of questioning and accountability which will take place immediately after death. We know, however, that the questions in the grave will be limited and pertain to very fundamental issues, such as matters of faith and conviction, whether or not we believed, what we believed in, etc. The questioning related to details of our worship and accounting for our deeds will be reserved for the Day of Judgement.

The Day of Resurrection

When God decides to put an end to this world the trumpet will be blown, everyone will die, and humans and non-

⁴⁵ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 6, p. 284; *Al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 4, p. 762; *Tafsīr al-Sāfi*, vol. 4, p. 344; *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 8, p. 818. The *hadith* is as follows:

قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع): ذَلِكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لِأَنَّ نَارَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا تَكُونُ
غُدُوءًا وَعَشِيًّا ثُمَّ قَالَ إِنْ كَانُوا إِثْمًا يُعَذَّبُونَ غُدُوءًا وَعَشِيًّا فَيَمَيَّا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ هُمْ
مِنَ السَّعْدَاءِ وَلَكِنْ هَذَا فِي نَارِ الْبَرْزَخِ قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ أَلَمْ تَسْمَعْ قَوْلَهُ عَزَّ وَ
جَلَّ وَ يَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ أَدْخِلُوا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ أَشَدَّ الْعَذَابِ.

See also *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 17, p. 335 where 'Allmah Tabataba'i argues for the reference to *barẓakh* by making a distinction between being exposed to the Fire which takes place in *barẓakh* and being put or thrown into the Fire which happens on the Day of Judgement.

humans will cease to exist in their current material form. People will be resurrected and there will be an eternal life after resurrection. The Qur'an says:

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا
مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنْظُرُونَ

And the Trumpet will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens will swoon and whoever is on the earth, except whomever God wishes. Then it will be blown a second time, behold, they will rise up, looking on! (39:68)

Resurrection will happen for everyone simultaneously and only once, unlike death and *barzakh*. Our life after resurrection is very much based on our life in this world. There will be no matter of ethnicity, gender, wealth, children and luck. It is only our actions, morals and beliefs that will count:

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

the day when neither wealth nor children will avail except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart. (26:88-89)

There is an incident quoted in *Bibār al-Anwār*, where a man named Tawus al-Yamani narrates an encounter he had with Imam Sajjad (a). He says that he was following the Imam (a) and watching him at night while he prayed and circumambulated the Ka'ba all night, in order to witness

how the Imam (a) worshipped and prayed. As it started to get later into the night, and people began to leave the mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*) until there were only a few people left therein, he heard the Imam (a) saying, ‘O Allah, this is the time when the people have gone to their beds, and this is the time when your doors are open for those who ask you.’ Then Imam (a) continued his prayers and went into prostration. Tawus went to him, and lifted Imam’s head onto his lap, and himself started crying, such that his tears fell on Imam Sajjad (a). Imam (a) asked, ‘Who is this who has distracted me from my worship?’ Tawus identified himself, and asked him, ‘Why do you cry so much? It is we sinful people who must cry. Your father is Husayn (a), your mother is Lady Fatimah al-Zahra (a), and your grandfather is the Prophet (s). Why do you cry?’ Then Imam (a) looked at him, and replied:

Far from it! If only it were like that! Do not talk to me about who my father or mother was. God has created heaven for whoever obeys Him, even if it be a slave, and He has created hell for those who disobey Him, even if it be a Qurayshi. Have you not heard Allah’s verse in the Qur’an: ‘and when the Trumpet is blown, there will be no family ties between them on that day, nor will they ask [about] each other’ (23:101)? By Allah nothing will avail you tomorrow except your righteous acts that you send in advance.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *Riyad al-Abrar*, vol. 2, p. 43

Thus, the Imam (a) drew attention to the fact that association with the Prophet (s) comes through righteousness, belief and character, whereby a person who is unrelated to him may be associated with him on the Day of Judgment, and where, in the case of Noah's son, for example, being a prophet's son was to no avail when good deeds did not accompany him. For Imam Sajjad (a) to say this and be so concerned about this matter should remind us to be even more concerned for ourselves. If our life in this world is one of obedience and piety, then there is great hope of a blissful life in the hereafter, but if not, then we have cause for great worry.

Proper practice, proper conviction and faith, and especially proper quality of the hearts and what they have acquired are very important. The Qur'an says:

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

God shall not take you to task for what is frivolous in your oaths, but He shall take you to task for what your hearts have incurred, and God is all-forgiving all-forbearing. (2:225)

Prophet Muhammad (s) has put this idea in a very clear analogy, saying, "This world is the farm in which you grow

for the Hereafter.⁴⁷ We cannot harvest except what we have planted and grown.

Embodiment of our actions

It can be understood from the Qur'an that our acts will be embodied and manifested for us to see. Not only will we see their consequences but also a materialisation of the acts themselves. There are several verses in the Qur'an that allude to this:

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

*So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it,
and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.
(99:7-8)*

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُّخَضَّرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ
سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَمِثْلَهُ لَمَدًا بَعِيدًا

*The day when every soul will find present whatever
good it has done, and as to whatever evil it has done, it
will wish there were a far distance between it and
itself. (3:30)*

وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا

They will find present whatever they had done. (18:49)

⁴⁷ Both Sunni and Shi'a have narrated this hadith:

الدنيا مزرعه الآخرة

For example, see *Tanbih al-Khawātir* by Warram Ibn Abi Faras, vol. 1, p. 183 and *ʿAwālī al-Lʿālī*, vol. 1, p. 267.

Our actions will speak for themselves and there will be no escape from their reality. Even the internal qualities and hidden things will be made manifest: “*On the day when hidden things shall be made manifest.* (86:9)” No amount of justification or reasoning will avail in front of the manifest truth of our deeds.

Good deeds of the faithless

A common question asked is what will happen to those people who do good deeds but do not have faith. This is a long discussion deserving space of its own, but very briefly we can say that God, in His divine justice, will take into account every good deed, depending on people’s good intention. Some people may have the intention of getting closer to God. There might also be people whose intention may not be to get closer to God, but may have been to help someone or be generous, out of the goodness of their hearts or consciences. This is also appreciated and God will, of course, treat them differently from people who not only did not believe but acted wrongly or were criminals.

إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا

Indeed We do not waste the reward of those who are good in deeds. (18:30)

Also, there are different types of reward in the Hereafter. Eternal heaven is not the only reward. *Barzakh* has its own rewards and punishments. At times the reward can come in

the form of honour and happiness in this life, or protection from pain and suffering in this world or at the time of death, or protection from the hellfire. There are many different possibilities. Whether or not God will send them to heaven, there remains a possibility: as long as they believe in God and the resurrection and have sincerity in their actions, they may go to heaven. The Qur'an says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ
 بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا
 خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Indeed the faithful, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabeans - those of them who have faith in God and the Last Day and act righteously - they shall have their reward with their Lord, and they will have no fear and nor will they grieve. (2:62)

So going to heaven is very much a matter of sincerity in the heart, and basic belief in God and resurrection.

There is an account narrated of a discussion that took place between Imam Muhammad Baqir (a) and one of his close companions Zurarah. Zurarah was a staunch supporter and follower of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a) and was of the belief that unless someone believed in all the tenets of Islam, and followed the *Ahl al-Bayt*, there was no hope for him to enter paradise. Within the heated discussion, the Imam (a) allowed him to retort and ask all his questions until he reached

112 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEF

conviction about the opposite. Imam (a) proved to him that the matter was not black and white as he believed but that there were in fact three categories of people: the believers, the deniers or rejecters of the truth (*kāfirs*), and those who had simply missed the truth, or been led astray, or were ignorant, but had never intended to disobey God. Imam (a) proved to Zurarah through verses of the Qur'an that there is hope for such people in our creed.⁴⁸

There is also a narration from Imam al-Kazim (a) that explains this beautifully. He says, Imam Ali (a) is a gate from among the gates of guidance. Whoever enters through this gate is a believer (*mu'min*). Whoever exits from this gate is a disbeliever (*kāfir*). And whoever neither enters it nor exits it is considered among those who can still hope for God's final judgment (*al-murjawn li amrillah*).⁴⁹

Another *hadith* from Imam al-Sadiq (a) says, 'If the servants of God, when they do not know something [to be true] do not deny it but just stop in the face of it, they are not considered as having disbelieved.'⁵⁰ Therefore, disbelief is to deny or reject the truth. The important distinguishing factor here is submission to the truth, or a willingness to seek and accept the truth, if one were to recognise it, as opposed to a denial or rejection of it. Also, entrance into heaven is not up to us to promise or to make a judgment about, nor is it

⁴⁸ *Usul al-Kafi*, vol. 2, pp. 402 & 403

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 388

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

something to be bartered as an acquisition. Rather it is the pleasure of the Lord of heaven that is to be sought and the truth by which one may lead one's life for the sake of His good pleasure.

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116 LESSONS ON ISLAMIC BELIEF

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