

The UNITY of GOD

التوحيد

Objectives >>>

Students should:

Lesson 1

- Understand that we have an intuitive knowledge of God
- Understand the Cosmological argument for the existence of God
- Understand the teleological argument for the existence of God

Lesson 2

- Understand that God is Infinite and Unique
- Understand that Allah is the Cherisher of the Universe

Lesson 3

- Discuss some commonly asked questions about the Unity of God
- Discuss the attributes of Allah (SWT)

Lesson 4

- Contemplate on examples of design and order in the universe in order to understand God's Attributes

Lesson 5

- Discuss the importance and benefits of gratefulness to Allah
- Understand the benefits of gratefulness to Allah
- Understand the meaning of apparent and hidden blessings

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Lesson 1: The Existence of God

INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Human beings have an intuitive knowledge of God. Deep in our mind, we have an awareness of God. Unfortunately, due to our preoccupation with material things, we become oblivious of this knowledge about God. However, in times of desperation, we find that we always turn to a Higher Being for refuge and help.

Have you experienced a desire to talk to Allah (SWT) more when faced with problems in life? This is because we are instinctively 'programmed' to turn towards Him, similar to a baby who finds rest only at the bosom of its mother.

The Holy Qur'an uses the example of people on a ship, who are stranded in the middle of the ocean and faced by huge waves. They all instinctively turn towards Allah (SWT) and beg Him to rescue them. When God saves them, a minority remain true to their promises to God, while others again become oblivious of God.

Due to our lack of connection (Ghafila) with much of our intuitive knowledge, we often need arguments to prove the existence of God to others or to ourselves. In this lesson, we will examine some rational arguments establishing the existence of God.

PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

We know through simple observations that everything in this material world of ours depends on other things for its existence. For instance, as humans we need food, water and air to survive, and the food, air and water all depends on huge, inter-connected ecosystems for their existence.

We also know that all the natural phenomena are inter-related, and depend on each other. This is why even a 1-degree Celsius rise in the average temperature on Earth leads to such great changes all across the globe: glaciers melt, sea levels rise, extreme weather events increase in frequency, rain patterns change, the oceans become warmer and more acidic, many species of plants and animals face extinction... (for more indepth understanding- read on the Chaos Theory and the Butterfly Effect)

Being in need of other things to exist means that a thing may or may not exist, depending on the conditions. In philosophy, this is called CONTINGENCY.

The first premise in the Cosmological argument is that everything in the universe, and therefore the universe itself, is CONTINGENT. Again, this means that the universe could have not come into existence, or may stop existing.

Since it is possible for the universe not to exist, then it must need a CAUSE which would have brought it into existence. This cause cannot itself be contingent for otherwise it too would need a cause to bring it into existence and this would need another cause and so on to infinity! Thus, contingent things (e.g. mother nature, or the gas particles alluded to in the Big Bang Theory) cannot be the cause of the universe.

The universe also could not have created itself, because if the universe created itself, it means it would have had to exist before it came into existence and this is logically impossible.

This means the cause for the world must be a Being who is not contingent. The opposite of a contingent being is a NECESSARY Being whose non-existence is an impossibility. This Being is 'beyond' or 'outside' of the universe. This Necessary Being is God.

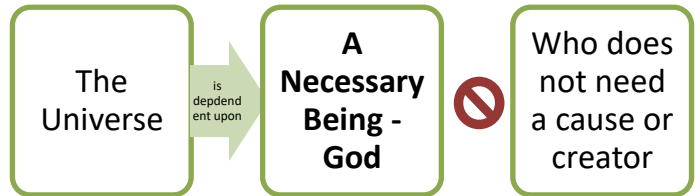
TO MEMORISE:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

“O mankind! It is you who stand in need of Allah, but Allah is al-Ghani (Free of all wants and needs), Worthy of all praise.” (35:15)

The Holy Qur’an also says:

“Were they created by nothing, or were they themselves the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Nay, but they have no firm Belief.” (52:35-36)



2. THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (DESIGN AND ORDER)

The world we live in is full of order. Consider the amazing network of neurons in our brain that controls all our bodily functions such as eating, sleeping, fighting harmful bacteria and viruses and so on. This system is so complex that it is impossible for scientists to create anything as complex as the human brain in any machine. The human brain is able to perform more functions simultaneously than any computer.

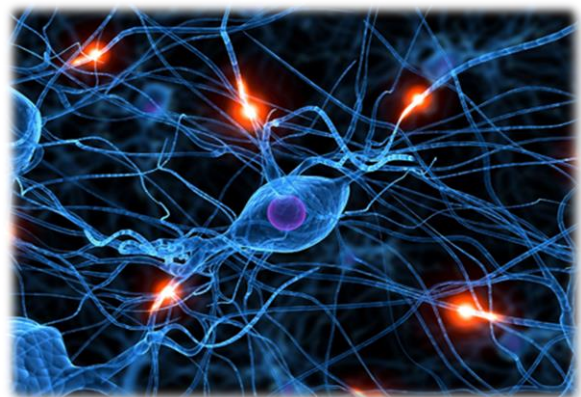


Figure 1: The circuitry of our brains!

Then consider the way the planets are aligned around the sun, and the way the Earth is positioned in relation to the sun. Consider the gradual change of day and night. At dawn, light gradually pierces the curtains of darkness, and at night, light stealthily withers away providing darkness. Can you imagine waking up at a time when the sky is totally black and then suddenly within a few seconds it becomes as bright as midday? This gradual change can only occur because of the precise rotation of the earth along its axis, in the most gentle and calculated of manners, so that we feel the least possible discomfort.



Figure 2: Night enveloping day

The examples are numerous and are beyond the scope of this lesson. The possibility of such perfect order and intelligent law coming about by chance is so minuscule that a rational being would dismiss it. The chances of an ape accidentally typing a Shakespearian masterpiece when put in front of a typewriter would be greater than this universe, with all the order witnessed therein, being created by chance. A rational being accepts that such perfect order is only possible if the one who has put it in place is Wise and Intelligent Being. This Wise and Intelligent Creator is God.

The Fine-Tuning of the Universe

The following video discusses some of the examples of 'fine-tuning' in the universe: the exact precision with which things in the universe are designed in order to support life. These are all indicators of the presence of an Intelligent Creator and Designer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE76nwimuT0&t=5s>

Contemplating Creation

In the Qurān, Allah (SWT), the Exalted, challenges us to examine and analyse His creation to see if we can find any faults or flaws. If we find them, then we may be able to attribute this world to chance or to an imperfect being. However, there are absolutely no flaws and thus we can only attribute this world to a Perfectly Wise and Perfectly Knowledgeable Creator.

“Who has created the seven heavens one above another; you see no fault in the creation of the Most Beneficent; then look again: ‘can you see any rifts’? Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you worn-out, in a state of humiliation.” (Surat Al-Mulk 67:3-4)

Review Questions

Q1. The cosmological proof for the existence of God is based on the premise that

- a) The universe is contingent (needs a cause to bring it into existence)
- b) Every effect must have a cause
- c) The cause of the universe is the universe itself

Q2. The proof of order for the existence of God is based on the principle that:

- a) If there is order, there must be a Wise Creator behind it
- b) Order can come about by chance, according to the law of probability
- c) There is no exact order in our world

Q3. How would you convince your atheist friend about the existence of God? Group into pairs and explain how you would do this to your partner.

Lesson 2: The Unity of God

In our previous lessons we have proven that God exists and that He is the cause of the universe. In this lesson we will learn that it is necessary for God to be Infinite and Unique. We will also learn about the Attributes of God and their significance in our lives.

GOD IS INFINITE

In the previous lesson, we talked about the cosmological argument for the existence of God. We see that this argument shows us that the universe must have been caused by a Necessary Being, who is beyond this universe, and that this Being is God.

The fact that God is beyond the universe means that He is not bound by space, time or shape. Space, time and shape are dimensions within this universe, and so a Being beyond this universe would not be bound by these things.

The fact that God is a Necessary Being means that He is not needy of anything (non-contingent).

The fact that God is not bound by space, time and shape, and is not needy, means that God is Infinite. He has no beginning nor end, either in space or time. He has no shape, and is not needy of anything or anyone else in His Existence.

This is the best proof for the Unity of God, because there can only be one infinite being.

- Imagine infinity, now try to imagine something outside or beyond that infinity. As you can see, it is impossible
- If there were two infinite gods, how would we be able to distinguish between them? The only way we could distinguish between them is one or both of them were limited in some way so that they lacked something the other one had. This would make them limited and not infinite, and therefore not a god.
- As soon as you split an infinite, it stops being infinite! Therefore the impossibility of more than one infinite being!



Figure 3: Every element of an ecosystem whether large or small, alive or inanimate, fulfils its God-given potential to ensure balance and order are preserved

GOD IS NECESSARILY ONE AND UNIQUE:

Once we understand that God is infinite, we can understand that God cannot be limited by anything including space, time and shape. Hence God is Unique; He has no partner or equal and there is nothing like Him. Whatever our minds imagine is not God because He has no form or shape and is infinite. Our senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell cannot perceive Him, and even our imagination and intellect fall short of perceiving His Essence.

TO MEMORISE

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ ۚ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ ۚ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

“Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Ever living, the One who sustains and protects all that exists. Neither slumber nor sleep overtake Him. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth.” (Surat al-Baqarah, 2:255)

ALLAH, THE CHERISHER

One of the names of Allah is the Cherisher. A cherisher not only creates something, but looks after all its affairs. Allah (SWT) did not just create the universe, but He also looks after it, to the most minute of details. The simple analogy is that of the light coming out of a light bulb, if there is no electricity (God’s grace), there is no light (existence)! Anything that Has God’s ‘attention’ exists!

Certain faiths believe that while God created the world, He left some of the affairs of the world to be run by other beings.

- The Meccans at the time of the Prophet believed that the idols of wood and stone had power to affect the world and so they prayed to them
- Hindus believe that god has three forms, and comes down to Earth in the form of avatars. They pay homage to idols as part of this belief
- Christians believe that Jesus is the son of God, from the same substance of God, and that He has the power to affect the universe independently.

In Islam, all these beliefs are strongly rejected. Islam teaches that Allah (SWT) created the world without any partner or delegate, and that He looks after it without any partner or delegate.

Allah (SWT) created this world, and knows all its details. He is All-Knowing about this universe because it was He who created and fashioned it. He is also All-Powerful in the universe, and can do anything He wills within the universe, because it is His creation.

All other beings which people might take as 'gods' (such as idols or 'nature' or a certain human) are creatures within this world. This means that if they have any knowledge at all, this knowledge would be very limited, and if they have any power at all, this power is very limited. How can a creature existing within the universe have any power over the universe?

The only being that can have real power over the universe is the Being who is beyond the universe, and who is the cause of the universe. This is another consequence of the Cosmological argument.

Remember that the Cosmological argument showed us that the universe *is* contingent. Note *is* and not *was*. The universe did not just need a cause at the time of its creation, but is always in need of a cause. From moment to moment, the universe is a constant state of contingency and so is dependent on the Necessary Being, who is beyond the universe, for its existence.

The other important point is that the world we live is full of connections and systems. It was created in such a way that each part depends on the other. For example, something as simple as the oxygen we need to breathe and survive, depends on a system that includes the sea,

the heat from the sun, the mountains, the rivers, the tree and even the soil on the ground. If it is God who created this world with these connections and systems, then automatically it is He who is looking after its day to day needs, because He created these connections. It does not make sense for certain creatures to look after certain parts of the world independently, because all the parts are connected.

HOMEWORK

Q1. Explain how the cosmological proof not only proves the Existence of God, but also the Unity of God.

Q2. Explain how the cosmological proof not only proves God is the Creator of the world, but that He is also the one and only Cherisher of the world.

Lesson 3: Further discussion on Tawḥīd

We learnt in the previous lesson that Allah (SWT), the Exalted is the One and Unique Creator and Cherisher of this world. In this lesson, we will discuss some other aspects of our belief in Allah (SWT).

THE QUESTION OF "WHO CREATED GOD?"

The question of who created God is a very common one asked by both theists and atheists alike. To be able to answer it, we have to understand the nature of all created things. Everything that has been **created** possesses the following properties:

1. They are all **limited**. A table for example only occupies a certain area of a room. We discussed this issue in our last lesson.
2. They are all **subject to change**. The table will over time begin to deteriorate, break down and eventually cease to exist as we know it.
3. They are in **need**. The table is in need of the wood it was made from; the wood in turn comes from trees which depend on sun and water.

We humans also have the same properties in terms of being limited. For instance, it is impossible for a person to be physically present in two places at the same time. We are also subject to change i.e. from birth to youth and then to old age and eventually death. Man is also in need of sunshine for warmth, air to breath and rain for water.

As we learnt in the previous lessons, all this means that everything in this universe, and the universe itself, is contingent. The universe needs a cause because it is contingent.

We also learnt that there must be a being who caused the universe to exist. This being must be beyond these limitations and hence be needless of anything, not undergo any deterioration and not be limited by anything. This is God, the Necessary Being.

In part of his response to a question posed by a man about how God came to being, Imam 'Ali (as) said:

“.....He exists without coming into being; He is before 'before' itself, before any limits. Limits do not apply to Him for He is the ultimate limit of all limits”ⁱ

Since God is a Necessary Being, and is not limited and not needy towards anyone or anything, He is not in need of any cause. Therefore, the very question 'who created God' does not make sense.

HOW CAN WE KNOW ALLAH (SWT)?

Allah (SWT) out of His infinite mercy has provided us with certain tools that we can use to know Him and get closer to Him. He has sent us prophets and the Holy Qur'ān as the greatest tools to achieve this. They introduce Allah (SWT) to us through His Attributes. In addition to this, pondering over all His signs in the universe and within our own selves are means of knowing Him.

All these signs of God allow us to know His Attributes. However, His Essence remains inaccessible to us. We can only know Him from the effects of his presence or his attributes (*As-Sifāt*). This is because it is impossible for us who are finite and limited beings to be able to grasp an Infinite and limitless entity. In this regard, Imam Riḍa (as) says:

“He is too exalted for sight to be able to perceive Him, for imagination to be able to fathom Him and for the intellect to be able to grasp Him”ⁱⁱ

HOW DO WE DESCRIBE GOD?

We will never be able to comprehend the Essence of God because we are limited and cannot perceive something infinite or limitless. Therefore, we cannot describe His Essence. However, the best way to describe God is the way in which God has described Himself. As mentioned in previous lessons, God has introduced Himself with different names or attributes. The most unique amongst all these names is the name Allah (SWT).

Although Allah (SWT) has many attributes, it does not mean that there are many different parts to Allah (SWT) because God does not have parts. Allah (SWT)'s attributes cannot be separated from His Essence. An example to help us understand is that sweetness is an attribute of sugar, but it is inherent to sugar (not a part of it that can be removed or isolated) and makes its essence. The attributes of Allah are just a way for us to think about Allah from different aspects, so that we can get a limited understanding of our Lord and Creator.

UNITY OF ALLAH (SWT)'S ATTRIBUTES:

Each of Allah's (SWT) attributes is infinite in the way that Allah (SWT) is infinite. So when Allah (SWT) says that He is al-Mālik, it means that He is the only Real Owner of everything. The only reason we think we own a bike, a house or a pen is because Allah (SWT) has in a way lent it to us to give us temporary 'ownership' of it. But, He can take it away from us at any time.

Allah (SWT) (SWT) is also al-Qadīr. This means that He is the only Real Powerful Being and is the only source of power. The only reason we have strength to do things is because Allah (SWT) has enabled us and given us the strength to do so.

WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW THESE ATTRIBUTES?

We have been created with an instinct to love perfection and hence each person strives towards the perfection that they perceive. Allah (SWT), being Infinite and Needless, is absolute perfection. He has introduced His attributes to us so that we can know what perfection is. In that way, we can try to reflect them in order to reach our level of perfection. For example, Allah (SWT) is al-Ghafūr (The Forgiving).

In order for us to reach our level of perfection in this aspect, we need to try our best to forgive others. Allah (SWT) is also al-Ṣabūr (The Patient One). We need to strive to be patient throughout life in order to reach our level of perfection in this aspect.

The most perfect human ever was Prophet Muhammad (saw) followed by the other 13 infallibles, because they were the most perfect human manifestations of these attributes. Allah (SWT) describes the Holy Prophet (saw) in the Qurān as *Ra-ūf* (compassionate) and *Raḥīm* (merciful). The Prophet (saw) manifested both of these attributes in their highest possible perfection that a limited human could achieve. Furthermore, the Holy Prophet said:

تَخَلَّقُوا بِأَخْلَاقِ اللَّهِ

“Adopt the characters of Allah (SWT)” iii

This means that we need to try to reach our perfection by developing attributes such as being forgiving, merciful, truthful etc. This will help us in our journey towards perfection.

TO MEMORISE

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا

“And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allah, so call on Him by them” (A’raf: 180)

THE ATTRIBUTES OF ALLAH (SWT) IN THE HOLY QURĀN:

In the Holy Qur’ān, the attributes of Allah (SWT) are often paired. This helps us understand more about these attributes. For example, the attributes of ‘Forgiving’ and ‘Forbearing’ are paired in the Qur’ān, showing that Allah, the Exalted, gives people time and respite and then forgives them.

The following are some of the āyāt of the Qur’ān in which Allah (SWT) describes Himself:

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ
الرَّحِيمُ

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ
الْمُهَيَّبُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ
هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي
السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

He is Allah (SWT) besides Whom there is no god; the Knower of the unseen and the seen; He is the Beneficent, the Merciful,

He is Allah (SWT), besides Whom there is no god; the King, the Holy, the Giver of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness, Glory be to Allah (SWT) from what they associate (with Him).

He is Allah (SWT) the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most excellent names; whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares His glory; and He is the Mighty, the Wise.

(22-24)

Homework

Q1. When we want to know Allah (SWT), we can know:

- His actual Essence
- His Attributes
- We cannot know His Essence or His Attributes

Q2. It is good for us to remember God’s Attributes because:

- It will help us adopt the characteristics of God
- It will help us come to love God
- A & B

Q3. How does the cosmological argument for the existence of God show us that God Himself does not need a cause?

Q4. Choose one of the attributes of Allah (SWT), such as ‘The Forgiving’. Do some research to see how many times it is mentioned in the Qur’an. In what context is it usually mentioned? Is it paired with another attribute of Allah (SWT)?

Lesson 4: The Signs of Allah in Creation

In this lesson, we will watch some videos which explain some of the amazing examples of design in the universe. Contemplating on these examples of design lead us to know that there is an Wise Being who created and who manages this world.

Imam Sadiq (a.s.) said: “*The best of worship is continuously contemplating about Allah (SWT) and His power.*” The Imams have also indicated that contemplating for an hour is better than worshipping for a year^{iv}. This is because it leads to one of the higher forms of worship which is continuous remembrance of Allah (SWT). Allah (SWT) states in the Holy Qurān:

TO MEMORISE

وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ

“...and certainly the remembrance of Allah (SWT) is the greatest...” (29: 45)

Wondering about Allah’s creation is one of the ways of remembering Him and discovering His attributes ourselves. When we see the amazing beauty and precision in nature, it speaks to us of God’s Wisdom, Beauty, Mercy, Knowledge and Power. This brings us closer to Him and increases our faith in Him. This is why in this lesson, we will watch a video that shows some of the miracles within Allah’s creation.

The creatures shown in these videos display certain unique types of intelligence or ability.

How do these abilities help these animals survive?

What do these abilities tell us about the creators of these creatures?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEYCjJqr21A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBVgbxTkEuo>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWIDa7CA_5w

Lesson 5: Gratefulness towards Allah

The universe and particularly this earth, was created in a desirable state in which man is able to live and grow. Everything that man needs for his life is provided, and everything that Allah (SWT), the Merciful, has created is essentially good and for the benefit of mankind.

Having acknowledged this, one naturally becomes grateful towards Allah (SWT), the Creator, for having granted us all these bounties and favours. Being grateful is to express gratitude either verbally or through action and to appreciate the favour done by the one to whom we are grateful. Allah (SWT) asks repeatedly in Sura Ar Raḥmān:

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

“Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?” (55:13)

THE BLESSINGS OF ALLAH (SWT) ARE COUNTLESS

Gratefulness to Allah (SWT) is one of the most emphasised concepts in the Qurān. In almost seventy verses, the importance of showing gratefulness to Allah (SWT) is mentioned, the examples of those who are grateful and ungrateful are provided and the consequences that each group face are described. The reason why so much importance is given to this concept is because it is an indication of one’s faith and an affirmation of the unity of Allah (SWT). It is human nature to thank the one who has favoured you. Therefore by being ungrateful, one is merely going against their own nature, whose natural consequence is suffering which is a form of punishment from Allah (SWT).

Part of being grateful is to acknowledge that we can never be sufficiently grateful to Allah (SWT), the Exalted. This is because His blessings surround us and we are dependent on them for everything. This idea is expressed by Imam Sajjad (as) in his Saḥifa Sajjadiya says:

“So how can I achieve thanksgiving? For my thanking You requires thanksgiving. Whenever I say, 'To You belongs praise!' it becomes thereby incumbent upon me to say, 'To You belongs praise!'”

This shows that our entire existence depends on Allah (SWT) and that even our breath is a favour from Him, and that even for our acts of gratitude we are dependent upon Him and the ability He has given us. Therefore thanking Him sufficiently can never be possible.

Allah (SWT) states in the Qurān:

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“And if you would count the graces of Allah, never could you be able to count them. Truly! Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful” (16:18)

This ayah reiterates the point made above by clearly stating that we can never count or realise the blessings of Allah (SWT), and that our only hope is that His Forgiveness and Grace will encompass us so that even if we have not been sufficiently grateful, He will still accept whatever little gratefulness we have shown. It emphasises that no matter how much we express our gratefulness, we always need to do more because it is never enough.

ALLAH (SWT) IS THE TRUE AND ONLY BENEFACITOR OF ALL BLESSINGS

The world around us and the world within ourselves is full of marvellous things. The sun and moon, the plants and trees, the mines and minerals hidden deep in the heart of the earth; all of them are of great benefit to mankind.

Within ourselves, we have the digestive system, the respiratory apparatus, the heart and other organs of the body; as well as the greatest blessing of all, the intellectual ability through which we can overcome so many great difficulties. Allah (SWT) says in the Qurān:

سُورِهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ
أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

“We will show them Our Signs in the universe, and in their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth. Is it not sufficient in regard to your Lord that He is a Witness over all things?” (41:53)

These are all signs of Allah (SWT)’s infinite Mercy and Compassion towards His creatures, one and all.

It is therefore our duty to appreciate and acknowledge this and thus be eligible for continued blessings and

favours. If we fail to show our gratitude, the blessings will eventually be taken away from us.

TYPES OF BLESSING

Of all the numerous blessings that Allah (SWT) has provided us with, we can divide them into two main categories. These are:

- Apparent Blessings
- Hidden Blessing

APPARENT BLESSINGS

These are things that are mostly physical blessings. Examples include our bodies and the various systems within our bodies, such as the digestive system, respiratory systems, and our five senses etc.

HIDDEN BLESSINGS

These are the more important blessings which are perhaps less obvious to us. They include our mental and intellectual abilities, our emotions, and other values that we can appreciate. Within this category we also have the power of freewill which enables us to achieve a status higher than that of angels if used correctly.

However, if we misuse these blessings and show ungratefulness by doing so, we will end up worse than even animals.

Another type of hidden blessing is those things which at first seem like hardships and problems. This may include difficult situations in our personal, academic or social life. For example, sitting an exam is very stressful and difficult at times, however, the results and consequences of it are that it makes you much more confident in what you know, and through your exams you learn to apply your knowledge. Furthermore, with good results you progress in life and become stronger.

The most important blessing however is the blessing of guidance in the form of religion. This includes the divine books and prophets sent to mankind. Muslims, in accepting the Quran and Prophethood of Muḥammad (saw) use more of this crucial blessing than others. The Sh’iah, in accepting the station of the Imams of the AhlulBayt (a) use even more of this blessing than other Muslims. Hence, the Shi’ah should express the more gratitude due to the blessings that Allah has given them.

HOW TO BE GRATEFUL TO ALLAH

(SWT)

True gratitude to God is only possible by using the blessings He has provided in the way He has prescribed and to be content with what He has given us.

Each blessing has a purpose and a function and it is our responsibility to use them responsibly. Only then can we derive the full pleasure and achieve the maximum benefits of that blessing. We can only do this by following the instructions that Allah (SWT) has sent to us through the Qurān and the Ahlul Bayt.

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said: “Being grateful for God's blessings is not committing divinely forbidden acts.”^v

It would not be right for us to misuse a blessing and then offer thanks – that defeats the sense of gratitude and is in fact a sign of ungratefulness. For example, if your parents out of love buy you an Mp3 player to facilitate memorising the Qurān, and you use it to listen to haram music, your parents will not be pleased with you because you are misusing the gift they gave you.

Besides the above form of gratitude, which is the best one, there are other ways in which we can express our gratitude to Allah (SWT) for His abundant blessings:

- ✓ To thank Him verbally by saying ‘*Alḥamdulillah*’
 - ✓ To go into prostration and utter verbally thanks for the blessing you have realized even if it is in your own words, and;
 - ✓ To realise in our hearts that God is showering us with blessings that we have done nothing to deserve
- Imam Ṣadiq (a.s) said: “One who whole-heartedly realizes a God-given blessing has expressed the due thanks.”

Whole-hearted realization can only come when we spend some time and thought in acknowledging the blessings and goodness we have all around us and within us, from the very basic to things that one would count as bonuses which many other people have been deprived of.

A STORY TO REMIND US...

A young man was getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he admired a beautiful sports car in a

dealer’s showroom, and knowing his father could well afford it, he told him that was all he wanted. As Graduation Day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car.

On the morning of his graduation his father called him into his private study. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son, and told him how much he loved him. He handed his son a beautiful wrapped gift box.

Curious, but somewhat disappointed the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather-bound Holy Qurān. Angrily, he raised his voice at his father and said, “With all your money you give me a holy book?” and stormed out of the house, leaving the holy book.

He did not contact his father for long time. Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful home and wonderful family, but realized his father was very old, and thought perhaps he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day.

Before he could make arrangements, he received a telegram telling him his father had passed away, and willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately and take care of things. When he arrived at his father’s house, sudden sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search his father’s important papers and saw the still new Holy Qur’ān, just as he had left it years ago. With tears, he opened the Holy Qur’ān and began to turn the pages. As he read those words, a car key dropped from an envelope taped behind the Holy Qur’ān. It had a tag with the dealer’s name, the same dealer who had the sports car he had desired. On the tag was the date of his graduation, and the words PAID IN FULL.

How many times do we miss God’s blessings because they are not packaged as we expected? Also, this shows that we should be grateful for whatever we receive, though it may not at first look like all that we would want, there may be something more in it than meets the eye – therefore never judge a blessing just by its cover – there may be more good hidden in it than what can be seen at first sight.

CONSEQUENCES OF BEING UNGRATEFUL

Imam Ṣadiq (a.s) said:

“God the Almighty granted a group of people some blessings, but they did not give thanks, and it became a burden for them. God brought a calamity upon some people and they persevered. Then they got blessings from their perseverance.”

One who does not give thanks is like one who does not acknowledge the giver. The one who does not acknowledge the giver is like he has disbelieved in the existence of the giver.

Memorisation Activity

Allah (SWT), the Exalted, says in the Qurān

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ

“And when declared your Lord: 'If you are grateful [to Me], I shall most certainly increase (My favours) unto you; but if you are ungrateful, verily, My chastisement will be severe indeed!'” (14:7)

In the Qur'ān, the opposite of being grateful is defined by the term (كَفَرٌ), which literally means to 'cover'. This term is used for those who do not acknowledge God's blessings, and are ungrateful towards Him. This indicates that ungratefulness is a character of disbelievers

Review Questions:

Q1. Which of the following is the best form of showing gratefulness to Allah (SWT)?

- Saying 'alḥamdulillah'
- Prostrating and thanking Allah
- Using the blessings God gave us in the way He wanted us to use them

Q2. Explain the meaning of hidden blessings.

Q3. What are some of the consequences of being ungrateful towards Allah (SWT)

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ⁱ Mizānul Himah, pg. 716, no. 4126

ⁱⁱ Mizānul Hikmah pg 711, no. 4102

ⁱⁱⁱ Behārul-Anwār 61:129

^{iv} Mizānul Himah, no. 1521

^v Mishkatul Anwr fi Ghuraril Akhbar