

The Justice of GOD

العدل الالهي

Objectives >>>

Students should:

Lesson 1

- Understand the justice of Allah
- Understand how we can practice justice

Lesson 2

- Understand the reasons for tests and difficulties in life
- Understand the benefits and reward of tests

Lesson 3

- Explore positive and negative reactions to tests
- Discuss patience as a tool that helps us respond to tests positively

Lesson 4

- Understand the reality of 'evil'
- Understand there is 'evil' in the world

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

Lesson 1: The Justice of God

Reviewing the Pillars of Islam

These five beliefs are:

- There is one Unique God- in Arabic this is called *al-Tawhid*

● التوحيد

- God is Just- *Al-'Adl*

● العدل

- God sent us Prophets to guide us- *Nubuwwah*

● النبوة

- God sent us Imams to guide us, the Imams continue the message of the prophets- *Imamah*

● الامامة

- The Hereafter: after we die, we will be brought back to life and face the consequences of our actions – *al-Ma'ad*

● المعاد

In our previous lessons, we discussed the Unity of Allah and some of the attributes of Allah (SWT). In this lesson, we will discuss another important attribute, which is the Justice of Allah. As followers of the Ahlul Bayt, we believe that Allah (SWT) is Just. We will discuss the meaning of justice and, in particular, Allah's Justice in this unit.

THE IMPORTANCE OF JUSTICE

Justice is to give everyone and everything their due right. It is something whose goodness is innately clear to us. Therefore, Allah, who is Absolutely Just, also orders us to be just too, especially in the way we deal with people around us.

FACETS OF THE JUSTICE OF ALLAH (SWT)

As we discussed earlier, we believe that Allah (SWT) is absolutely Just. There are three major facets of His Justice:

- 1- **Justice in Creation:** We believe that Allah (SWT) has given a divine decree for everything to come into existence. With that decree, Allah (SWT) also has given it a certain measure to specify its limits, shape, form, time, place etc. In His creation, Allah (SWT) is Just, which means that He provides His creation with the ability to fulfil its purpose. Allah (SWT) decrees mountains to act as supports for the earth, decrees humans the power of free will, etc... Each decree follows the limits Allah (SWT) has set. Humans too are given different abilities and attributes, so that each can fulfil their unique purpose in this world.
- 2- **Justice in legislation:** We believe that Allah is just in His laws. Allah (SWT) has created us and therefore knows us and our limits. For instance, He has created women with different limits to men and therefore it is necessary that they have different rules to ensure they remain within the limits!
- 3- **Justice in reward and punishment:** We believe that Allah (SWT) has created the laws of cause and effect. Allah (SWT) is absolutely just when He punishes and rewards in this world and in the Hereafter. The rewards and punishments, both in this world and the Hereafter, are direct results of our actions.

The followers of Ahlul Bayt (as), unlike all other Muslims, have as one of their five pillars of faith the belief in the Justice of God. Our Imams (as) emphasised especially on this fact, in order to counter the false beliefs of others when it comes to the Justice of God.

Certain sects of Muslims believe that God determines all our actions, and therefore we are forced to do what we do. This led to such Muslims blaming God for all the problems that occurred in their lives, and not taking responsibility for their evil deeds. It also led them to the

following question: why would God send someone to Hell for doing evil when God forced him to do evil? In contrast, other sects believed that God hands over control to us and so we have complete free will. Their beliefs seemed to limit God's power with this statement.

In contrast, our Imams (as) have taught us that although some things in our lives are predetermined (like the colour of our hair or who our parents are or where we were born), many other things in our life are under our control. We have been given the gift of free will. We make decisions based on our own free will. Although God knows what choices we will make, He does not force us to choose one option over another.

Therefore, we are responsible for our actions, because it was we who chose to do them through our own free will. Imam al-Ṣādiq explains this:

“Whatever that you could blame man for, is his action; and whatever you could not blame him for, is the act of God. God blames man for drinking alcohol, committing adultery etc. Thus these are acts of man. However, God does not blame man as to why he is sick or why his skin colour is black or fair. These are the acts of God.”ⁱ

This then means that when God rewards or punishes us in the Hereafter, He is doing so in accordance with the choices we made in this world. God has promised in the Qur'ān that He rewards those who do good with blessings and bliss, and those who do evil with punishment and torture.

PRACTISING JUSTICE

Justice is the foundation of ethics in Islam. All other good ethical traits have some limitations, whereas justice is always good, without any conditions. If we want to perfect ourselves as Muslims, we must try to act in a way that is line with the attributes of God, and as justice is one of God's main attributes, we should strive to be just.

We see many example where the Qur'an commands us to be just, no matter what the situation:

TO MEMORISE

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

“ Verily, Allah enjoins justice (*Al 'Adl*) and goodness (*Al Ihsān*)...” (16:90)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا
يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۗ اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ
لِلتَّقْوَىٰ

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah and be just witnesses and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety...” (5:8)

وَإِذَا قُلْتُمْ فَاعْدِلُوا وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ ۗ وَبِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ أَوْفُوا

“And whenever you give your word, speak for justice, even if a near relative is concerned, and fulfill the Covenant of Allah” (6:152)

We can see from these āyāt that besides the general command to justice, we are also expected to be just:

- Even when dealing with our enemies or people we dislike
- Even when a conflict involves a family member or close friend

In all cases, we must give everyone their due right.

Review Questions:

Q1. Explain the three facets of Allah’s Justice

Q2. Give some examples of things which are part of the scope of human free will, and some example of things which are beyond human free will.

Q3. Which of the following is true?

- Justice is something whose goodness we need to prove
- Justice is something whose goodness we know innately in ourselves
- Justice is good, except in some special circumstances

Lesson 2: A World of Tests and Trials

In the previous lesson, we learnt about the justice of God. In this lesson, we will discuss the issues of tests and trials. Almighty God tests us in order to purify us and make us deserving of the eternal bliss of paradise.

TESTS ARE A MEANS OF PURIFICATION

As Muslims, we believe that one of the reasons Allah (SWT) has put us in this world is to test us. Allah (SWT) says in the Qur’an:

TO MEMORISE:

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ
سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا... إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا
كَفُورًا

“Verily, We have created man from a nutfah in order to try him, so We made him hearing, seeing. Verily, We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful” (72:2-3)

There are two major types of tests that humans face:ⁱⁱ

1- **Test of shari’ah-** This is the test of following the laws Allah (SWT) has decreed for us. If we exceed the limits God has set for us, we become unjust and not only do we suffer the natural effects of this, we also suffer His punishment in the hereafter.

2- **Test of difficulties:** Allah (SWT) says in the Qur’an:

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to the patient ones. Who, when afflicted with calamity, say: "Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return." 2:155-156)

Some of these difficulties come about as a result of our own wrong actions or negligence. For example, a person who trusts his wealth to a foolish person will lose it, but this is a natural consequence of his own action. Other difficulties do not come about as a direct result of our own actions but are part of the natural order of the world.

These include difficulties like natural disasters, as well as difficulties brought on by people around us.

ENDURING TESTS

We have seen that many tests we face in our life are not due to our own doing. We may think that God is not being fair by inflicting us with these tests. But, the more we suffer the higher our status in paradise and the more rewards we will receive. In addition, we have to remember that Allah (SWT) gives more tests to those He loves because He wants them to reach the highest positions in paradise and be as close to Him as possible. Imam al-Bāqir (as) said:

"One has a very high noble position near God. God will make him suffer a lot of calamities to reach that position. Lots of people will rush in to express their condolence to him and express their sympathy. If the people only knew what position God has granted him, they would have never sympathized with him, or expressed their condolence..."

When God tests us, if we remain patient, we will gain the rewards of being close to Him, as well as the other rewards of paradise. In the following narration, Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) explains how a person who suffered poverty in this world is rewarded in the next world, as long as that person remains patient. Allah (SWT) will say to His servant, who was poor in this world:

"I swear by My Honour that I did not make you poor to humiliate you. Now push the curtain aside and see what I have given you instead. When the curtain is pushed aside and he sees what God has rewarded him with instead of this world, he says: "O' God! There was no harm for me due to what You took away from me (in the world) considering what you have given me instead (now in the Hereafter)."ⁱⁱⁱ

What we can learn from these two narrations is that we have to patiently endure any difficulties that come our way.

- 1- We should not lose hope in the Mercy of Allah (SWT).
- 2- We should understand that each difficulty elevates our status and gives us more reward.
- 3- We should always be thankful, even for difficulties in life, not only the good things.
- 4- We should avoid complaining and whining about things that we cannot control.

Review Questions

Q1. Why does Allah (SWT) test us?

Q2. What are some of the rewards of those who are patient when they are tested?

Lesson 3: Living through the Tests and Trials

We have learnt that the world we live in is full of tests and trials. In this lesson, we will further discuss how we can deal with tests and emerge from them successfully.

REACTIONS TO DIFFICULTIES

NEGATIVE REACTIONS

Whenever a person faces a test, they may react in a number of ways. Often, the lower the level of knowledge, faith and understanding the more negative a person's reaction is^{iv}.

In the infinite Wisdom and Mercy of Allah, He has advised that if we want to live healthy and happy lives, we have to try our best to avoid negative reactions to difficulties. Some negative reactions (e.g. denial) are not sinful, while others (e.g. giving up hope in God) are sins which lead to greater and greater sins, eventually leading to suicide! On the other side, Allah, the Compassionate, has made it such that not only do we have the capacity to remove the negative reactions to difficulties, but also to surpass them and in fact use them as a stepping stone to reach our perfection and be rewarded handsomely in this world and the Hereafter. Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

"Verily if you are patient, the trials of destiny will befall you and you will be rewarded for them, whilst if you are anxious, not only will the trials of destiny still befall you, but you will be sinful"^v

POSITIVE REACTIONS

As much as there are different levels of negative reactions, there are different levels of positive reactions to difficulties as well. As the knowledge, faith and understanding of a human being increases, it becomes easier to face these tests and grow because of them.

The highest forms of these reactions were practiced by our Imams and Prophets, and their examples still shine.

TACKLING DIFFICULTY THROUGH PATIENCE

Patience in the Qur'an and ḥadīth is defined as:

- The resistance shown by man on the road towards perfection, against mischief, corruption and degradation^{vi}. Take the example of a mountain climber who is trying to reach the top of a mountain. He has to overcome numerous internal (will power, fear, despair etc...) and external (gravity, rocks, thorns, animals etc.) obstacles to reach his goal. Having the resistance to overcome these obstacles is called patience.
- Not getting angry, flustered or upset about the difficulties we face, instead remaining calm and composed throughout these tests.

The following narration gives us a definition of patience as well as presenting a great example of patience:

I heard Abu 'Abd Allah (A) say, "A free human being is free in all circumstances. Should a misfortune befall him he bears it with patience (ṣabr). If calamities strike him, they don't shatter him. If taken captive and subdued; he turns hardship into ease, as was the case of Joseph, the truthful and trustworthy. His freedom saved him from harm, although he was enslaved, subdued, and imprisoned. The darkness of the pit, the dread and whatever befell him did him no harm, until God favoured him and made the insolent tyrant, who had been his master, his slave. Then God made him His apostle and through him was merciful to a people. In this way patience is followed by good. So be patient and reconcile yourself to patience in order to be rewarded."^{vii}

Patience has been described by our Imams as being like the 'head' in relation to the 'body' of faith. One cannot have a functioning body without a head, and so one cannot have true useful faith if one does not have patience. Here, we will look at a few quick tips on developing patience:

- Maintaining our firm belief in Allah (SWT), and that He has sent us this test for a reason and will come to our rescue when we need Him. Imam Ali (as) has said:

"The origin of patience is to have strong conviction in Allah"^{viii}

- Remembering the greater tests others face. When a companion complained to the Prophet about losing his wealth, the Prophet (saw) said:

"Your predecessors (earlier Muslims) sometimes were slaughtered by an iron saw cutting their skin, veins and flesh to the bone, but they remained committed to their faith, and never complained, even when in some cases they were cut into two pieces!"^{ix}

- Converting difficulty into ease by looking at the positives of any situation we are in. Happiness truly comes from within, and even though it is influenced by factors outside ourselves, we can influence how we feel about these factors by looking at the positives. When Imam Musa al-Kāḍim (as) was imprisoned for a long time, he used to in fact thank Allah for giving him the time to devote himself to the worship of God.

We must remember that in the Holy Qur'an Allah (SWT) promises that He is *with* those who are patient, and that he loves them.

TO MEMORISE

وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ

"...And Allah loves the patient ones" (3:146)

Review Questions:

Q1. In your own words, explain patience and what it means to be patient in the face of tests and difficulties.

Q2. What are some ways of developing patience?

Lesson 4: A Discussion on 'Evil'

In previous lessons, we have learnt about the fundamentals of the Justice of Allah, and why, as the followers of the Ahlul Bayt (as), we pay special importance to this belief. We believe that Allah, the Most Merciful, is Just in every affair. We believe that Allah tests each creature to its ability and that each test is unique. It is as if Allah, the Wise, gives each person an individualized examination based on the person's abilities and that God only gives to each person a burden that he can handle, not more.

One of the main questions we need to answer within this topic is the following: 'why do evil things happen?' When evil things happen, we often question God's justice and ask why such things occur. In this lesson, we will try to analyse this question and see whether evil actually does exist.

EVIL IS RELATIVE- IT IS NOTHING BUT THE ABSENCE OF GOOD

This philosophical premise is best explained by an incident that happened in a regular university class in a conversation between a student and his professor.

An atheist professor of philosophy speaks to his class on the problem science has with God, The Almighty.

He asks one of his new students to stand and asks...

Prof: So you believe in God? **Student:** Absolutely, sir.

Prof: Is God good? **Student:** Sure.

Prof: Is God all-powerful? **Student:** Yes.

Prof: My brother died of cancer even though he prayed to God to heal him. Most of us would attempt to help others who are ill. But God didn't. How is this God good then? Hmm? (Student is silent.)

Prof: You can't answer, can you? Let's start again, young fellow. Is God good? **Student:** Yes.

Prof: Is Satan good? **Student:** No.

Prof: Where does Satan come from? **Student:** From...God...

Prof: That's right. Tell me son, is there evil in this world? **Student:** Yes.

Prof: Evil is everywhere, isn't it? And God did make everything. Correct? **Student:** Yes.

Prof: So who created evil? (Student does not answer).

Prof: Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things exist in the world, don't they? **Student:** Yes, sir.

Prof: So, who created them? (Student has no answer.)

Student: Professor, is there such a thing as heat? **Prof:** Yes.

Student: And is there such a thing as cold? **Prof:** Yes.

Student: No sir. There isn't.

Student: Sir, you can have lots of heat, even more heat, superheat, mega heat, white heat, a little heat or no heat. But we don't have anything called cold. We can hit 458 degrees below zero which is no heat, but we can't go any further after that. There is no such thing as cold. Cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat is energy. Cold is not the opposite of heat, sir, just the absence of it.

Student: What about darkness, Professor? Is there such a thing as darkness?

Prof: Yes. What is night if there isn't darkness?

Student: You're wrong again, sir. Darkness is the absence of something. You can have low light, normal light, bright light, flashing light...But if you have no light constantly, you have nothing and it's called darkness, isn't it? In reality, darkness isn't. If it were you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn't you?

Prof: So what is the point you are making, young man?

Student: Sir, my point is your argument is flawed.

Prof: Flawed? Can you explain how?

Student: Sir, you are working on the premise that good and evil both have real true existence. However, things

that we call evil do not in fact exist, they are nothing but the absence of good in a certain situation.

WHAT IS THE REALITY OF EVIL?^x

In order to fully understand and grasp this problem, it is important to think deeper about what we mean when we refer to things as ‘evil’ or ‘bad’.

- 1- **‘Evil’ can be the absence of a quality:** the situations of things we often describe as ‘evil’ are those in which there is the absence of a certain positive attribute. For example, illness is evil, because it is the absence of health, poverty is evil, because it is the absence of sufficient livelihood. This is important to note because it means that God did not create these evil things. Rather, he created the positive attribute, and in places where this is absent, evil comes about.
- 2- **Evil can be relative-** Some things we refer to as evil do however definitely have an existence. Things like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc. These things are evil if they lead to death and destruction. However, in themselves they are not evil. A volcanic eruption or an earthquake are necessary for the Earth’s survival and if they didn’t happen worse disasters may occur.
- 3- **Evil disappears in bird’s eye view^{xi}:** When we look at the world as a whole, or even some situations as a whole, we see that things that we thought were evil when we first considered them are in fact good. These seemingly evil things are part of what makes our life and our world a perfect place. Imam Ali (as) says:

“Behold! This world could not be established unless in the way that God has made it with all its **blessings and calamities** and rewards in hereafter, and whatever He may wish that you do not know. Thus, should any part of it confuse you blame but your ignorance.^{xiii}”

Therefore, for instance, if there was no death, there would be no life. For example, in a food chain, if the

carnivores did not eat the animals below them in the food chain, those animals would grow to great numbers and disturb the entire ecosystem. **Evil – a platform to perfection:** We have discussed in previous lessons that the reason for our creation is so that we attain perfection. It is not for apparent material pleasure! Those things that appear to be evil are actually blessings (hidden blessings) that are sent our way so that we can reach our true purpose of perfecting ourselves and getting closer to God. Allah (SWT) says in the Qur’ān:

TO MEMORISE

وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“...and it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know” (2:216)

‘EVIL’ AND TESTS IN LIFE

In previous lessons we spoke about the importance tests in our life. It is through tests that we are able to improve and perfect ourselves and earn our place in paradise and in proximity to God. Allah (SWT) created a world where there was potential for seemingly evil things in order to test us. If there was no disease, poverty and death in the world, there would be no tests, and no potential for us to attain our perfection.

Allah (SWT) is All-Wise, All-Merciful and All-Powerful. Therefore, the way He created and fashioned this world, including the tests and difficulties that lie within it, is the most perfect way it could have been created.

Review Questions:

Q1. How would you answer the question: ‘did God create evil’?

Q2. Could God have created a world without ‘evil’? Why might He have chosen not to create such a world?

ⁱ Biharul anwār Vol. 5 Pg 58

ⁱⁱ Section extracted from the book “Justice Of God” by Sayyid Sa’eed Akhter Rizvi http://www.al-islam.org/adl_ilahi/

ⁱⁱⁱ Mishkāt Al-Anwār Pg 712 hadith 1697

^{iv} Stages of grief adapted from the Kubler-Ross model of grief- Kubler-Ross, E. (2005) *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*, Simon & Schuster Ltd, Information can be found summarized on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model

^v Mizan-ul-Hikmah tradition 3454

^{vi} Discourse on patience, Sayyid Khamenai.

^{vii} Al-Kafi, quoted in Forty Hadith of Imam Khomeini, chapter on Patience

^{viii} Mizan-ul-hikmah, tradition 3459

^{ix} Discourses on patience- Sayyid Khamenai

^x From eHawza Semester 2 course 1 lesson 22

^{xi} Lessons about Allah, Prophet, Justice, leadership and resurrection – Ayatollah Makarim Shirazi.

^{xii} Nahjul Balagha Sermon 7