

Aqáid **(Beliefs)**

Lesson 1

Tawhīd vs. Atheism

The Purpose of Life

Our life on this earth has a specific purpose; it is not the result of nature's accident, nor is it a punishment for 'eating from the fruit of the forbidden tree'. We are here according to Allāh's plan. The life of this world is a test and a chance to prove ourselves as deserving of the eternal blissful life in the Hereafter. But most of all it is a place for learning, where we develop our souls to perfection whilst living within the limitations of the human body. An important realization regarding the purpose of life is to know that Allāh did not create us just for few decades of this life. That would have meant that our Creator had no purpose or aim in His creation. Instead, Allāh (s.w.t.) says in the Qur'ān:

﴿أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?'

- Surah al-Mu'minun, 23:115

And Rasullāh (s) said, 'You have not been created to perish (fanā). Rather you have been created for eternal life (baqā).'

It was to help us attain this blissful eternal life that Allāh (s.w.t.) sent us prophets, messengers and scriptures. Just as He sustains us and provides for our physical needs, so does He provide our souls their spiritual needs, which are in fact far more important.

When a person does not realize how special they are to Allāh and why they were created, they assume they have no worth. They see themselves as simply one amongst thousands of other creatures struggling to survive. The idea that human beings are simply "higher mammals" or "socio-political animals" and that all our feelings and desires are just "chemistry", is the result of this loss of belief in the human soul and a purpose to life.

And this wrong understanding has also led many to disbelieve in God and to the idea that we came about by accident and evolved from apes and other animals and now we simply exist on the basis of "survival of the fittest".

In this and the next two lessons we shall explore ideas proposed by evolutionists and atheists and disprove them.

The Big Bang Theory

Atheists usually argue that there is no God and that the universe began with a mass that exploded; and from the fragments of this explosion came all the stars, galaxies and the universe that is continuously expanding. This is called the 'Big Bang Theory'. But they don't know where that mass that exploded came from in the first place! They keep saying one day they'll find out. But the fact is, they know they will never find out because something cannot come into existence out of nothing, just as unconsciousness cannot create consciousness, and non-awareness cannot create self-awareness and intelligence.

Islam is not opposed to science. If science has proven that there was a big bang then in fact the Qur'an supports that theory with the following verse:

﴿أَوَلَمْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾

Have the faithless not regarded that the heavens and the earth were joined together and We separated them, and We made every living thing out of water? Will they not then have faith?

- Surah al-Anbiya, 21:30

It is quite amazing that the Qur'an should have said this 1400 years ago. The fact that science believes there was a big bang and that life started in water does not mean that Allāh did not cause it or that He doesn't exist.

On the contrary, if we believe that there was a big bang but no God, then many questions remained unanswered. For example: Where did the first mass come from that exploded? If the universe is constantly expanding, it must be expanding in some 'space'. Who created the space? Who created the first space in which the mass that exploded existed? How did something just come out of nothing? And so on.

Creation by Chance Theory

Another argument given by atheists is that after the Big Bang, the earth (as a fragment from that Big Bang) just happened to be orbiting the Sun in the perfect set of conditions so that, after millions of years, the earth cooled off, water and vegetation appeared and life began to sprout. It was all just an accident and by chance. This is called the 'Creation by Chance' theory.

Now we must ask: what are the chances that such a thing could ever happen?

Imagine putting the pieces of a million fine wrist watches in a big paper bag. Now shake this bag for 6 billion years. Do you think that if you do this long enough, there is a 'chance' that all the pieces in the watch will just come together and fit perfectly

and one day you'll have watches assembled and running on perfect time? Ridiculous, isn't it? Yet some 'scientists' (who are atheists) want us to believe that a far more complicated universe came into existence just by accident and chance after an unintelligent and unconscious 'Big Bang'! If you study even just DNA molecules, you will know with absolute certainty that it is impossible for creation to have come about by chance and without an Intelligent Designer behind it.

When we look at a beautiful painting on a canvas or a machine automatically manufacturing products or we read a book that inspires us and touches our hearts, we know that it is not possible that the picture came into existence without an artist or the machine just existed without an engineer or the book came into being without an author.

Supposing someone told you the painting or the machine just came into being by accident, what would you think? What if someone told you that the very scientific book in your hands or the beautiful novel was not written by anyone... some pieces of paper were flying in the wind and some ink just spilt on it in the right place and time and words got written on it and it just happened to be the most perfect, scientific or beautiful words... what would you say? What if you tried to convince others about this, what would people think of you? Common sense tells you that people will laugh at you and think you've gone mad.

Look at the heavens and the stars and the sun and moon. Look at the perfect distance of the earth from the sun to provide light and warmth to all living things. Look at the land we live on and how water from the rivers, lakes and seas are carried by clouds into inner lands and they shower on the earth and make them fertile and from them grows a variety of plants and food for all creatures. Look at the water we drink, neither salty nor too sweet; the air we breathe; the night in which we rest and the day in which we work... look at how wonderful every creature is: the variety of birds, and fish and animals.. look at how wonderful the human body is and how it functions... could it all just have happened by accident?

Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

﴿الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَانِ مِنْ تَفَاوُتٍ فَارْجِعِ
الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِنْ فُطُورٍ . ثُمَّ ارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيْنِ يَنْقَلِبْ إِلَيْكَ الْبَصَرُ خَاسِئًا وَهُوَ

حَسِيرٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

He created seven heavens in layers. You do not see any flaw in the creation of the All-Beneficent. Look again! Do you see any flaw? Look again, once more. Your look will return to you humbled and weary.

- Surah al-Mulk, 67:3-4

﴿قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ اللَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِضِيَاءٍ أَوْ لَيْلٍ تَسْمَعُونَ. قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ النَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ تَسْكُنُونَ فِيهِ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ. وَمَنْ رَحْمَتِهِ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

Say, 'Tell me, if Allāh were to make the night perpetual over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than Allāh could bring you light? Will you not then listen?' Say, 'Tell me, if Allāh were to make the day perpetual over you until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than Allāh could bring you night wherein you could rest? Will you not then see?' Out of His mercy He has made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein and that you may seek from His grace (i.e. your livelihood) and so that you may give thanks.

- Surah al-Qasas, 28:71-73

﴿أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَحْرُثُونَ. أَأَنْتُمْ تَزْرَعُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الزَّارِعُونَ. لَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَاهُ حُطَامًا فَظَلَلْتُمْ تَتَفَكَّهُونَ. إِنَّا لَمَغْرُمُونَ. بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ. أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ الْمَاءَ الَّذِي تَشْرَبُونَ. أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنزِلُونَ. لَوْ نَشَاءُ جَعَلْنَاهُ أُجَاجًا فَلَوْلَا تَشْكُرُونَ. أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ النَّارَ الَّتِي تُورُونَ. أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْشَأْتُمْ شَجَرَتَهَا أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنشِئُونَ﴾

Have you considered what you sow? Is it you who make it grow, or are We the grower? If We wish, We would surely turn it into chaff, then you would be left regretting [saying to yourselves,] 'Indeed we have suffered loss! Rather, we are deprived!' Have you considered the water that you drink? Is it you who bring it down from the rain cloud, or is it We who bring [it] down? If We wish We can make it bitter. Then why do you not give thanks? Have you considered the fire that you kindle? Was it you who caused its tree to grow, or were We the grower?

- Surah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:63-72

﴿... فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ﴾

...So blessed is Allāh, the best of creators!

- Surah al-Mu'minun, 23:14

Other examples of Chance Creation

We can also use mathematical laws to prove that it would be impossible for the world to come into existence by chance or probability. When we calculate the

probability of something happening, we calculate the chance of one thing happening against the number of other possibilities that could also happen. For example, if we take ten coins and number them 1 to 10 and put them in a bag and shake them, what are the chances that we can take out the coins without looking and they will also come out in the right order i.e. 1 first and then 2 and then 3 and so on? Mathematically, the chances that the first coin will be the "No. 1" coin is one in ten. The chance that we will take out No. 1 and then No. 2 in succession is one chance in a hundred. The chance that we will pull out No. 1, then No. 2 then No. 3 in order, is one chance in a thousand. To take all ten coins out in order from 1 to 10 is therefore one chance in 10,000,000,000 (ten billion). What this means is, that you would have to try ten billion times and *perhaps* you may succeed in getting it out in this order.

For the world to exist as it does today, a lot more than 10 conditions are necessary. A Swiss mathematician Charles Eugen Guye calculated that each living creature is made up of 5 elements. The chance that only these 5 elements would come together in just the right amounts and method, besides the hundreds of other elements, is one chance in 10^{160} . To understand this, you would have to write 160 zeros after the number 10). Then he computed that for this one cell to occur by chance, the time required would be 10^{243} years. A human body is made up of billions of cells. Each cell would have to come into being by chance! Then you would have to calculate the chance of all these cells organizing themselves to form different organs and to carry out different functions of the human body. It is in fact impossible to even calculate this chance, let alone for it to actually occur.

Then of course there are the millions of other conditions outside the human body that would need to all happen by chance. Just as an example, if the earth rotates on its axis at 1000 miles an hour, this is a perfect speed. Now if the earth was to slow down to say, 100 miles an hour, then our days and nights would be 10 times longer. Which means the sun would burn up all the vegetation during the day and everything would freeze over in the night. The sun is also a perfect distance from the earth to give us light and warmth. If it moved even a little further or gave out less radiation, we would freeze or starve to death; and if it moved even a little closer or gave out more radiation, we would burn up and the earth would be scorched and roasted. If the moon was closer, the ocean tides would be so enormous that twice a day all the continents would be submerged. If the oceans were deeper, its waters would absorb all the carbon dioxide and oxygen and no vegetation would exist.

Millions of such reasons can be listed why it is impossible for the earth to have supported life by chance.

Can any honest person believe all this harmony, order and perfection came about by chance?

Creation in Six ‘Days’

Atheists will often argue against God’s creation of the universe because the Qur’ān (and even the Bible) says that the whole universe was created in six days whereas we know that everything developed gradually over millions of years.

Here is an example of a verse from the Qur’ān:

﴿إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ...﴾

Indeed your Lord is Allāh, who created the heavens and the earth in six days...

- Surah al-A’rāf, 7:54

The cause of the misunderstanding is that in Arabic the word ‘ayyām’ can mean days (as plural of *yaum*) but it can also mean periods or stages. Each period could be millions of years.

Secondly, in every language we use the word ‘days’ to also mean more than 24 hours. For example, when we say, ‘in the days of Nabi Musa (‘a)’, we mean ‘at the time of’ or ‘in the era of’ and not literally a set of 24 hours.

Furthermore, we measure a ‘day’ based on a complete rotation of the earth on its own axis. When Allāh was creating the heavens and the earth, the sun and the earth were not immediately in place so we cannot assume that the ‘six days’ are six 24 hour periods.

And lastly, ‘six days’ to Allāh may not be the same as ‘six days’ to us as humans. For example, when Allāh talks of the Day of Judgement, He tells us:

﴿تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ﴾

The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a day whose measure is fifty thousand years.

- Surah al-Ma’ārij, 70:4

Time is therefore a dimension that binds us as creatures but not Allāh (s.w.t.) the Creator of time!

‘Pascal’s Bet’

The famous Muslim mystic and philosopher al-Ghazāli, as well as other Muslim scholars, have quoted some verses of poetry from Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a) to show why it makes sense to believe in God, regardless of whether one finds proof or not.

The verses of poetry from Imām Ali (‘a) are as follows:

قَالَ الْمُنَجِّمُ وَالطَّيِّبُ كِلَاهُمَا
 قَالَ الْمُنَجِّمُ وَالطَّيِّبُ كِلَاهُمَا
 إِنْ صَحَّ قَوْلُكُمَا فَلَسْتُ بِخَاسِرٍ
 لا تُحْشَرُ الْأَمْوَاتُ قُلْتُ: إِيكُمَا
 إِنْ صَحَّ قَوْلِي فَالْخَسَارَ عَلَيْكُمَا

The astrologer and the physician both said

'The dead will never be resurrected.' I said, 'Keep your counsel.'

'If what you say is true, then I will have lost nothing,

But if what I say is true, the both of you will be at loss!'

A thousand years later, the famous mathematician Pascal (d. 1662 CE) came up with his famous "Parido Pascal" (Pascal's Bet) by which he wished to prove the same thing to the same group of people. He stated: 'If you believe in the life-hereafter you will gain everything if it really exists; and you lose nothing if it does not exist. Therefore, it is better to bet that it does exist.'¹

Is it mere coincidence? Or did Pascal get the idea of his 'Pari' (= bet) from Islamic sources? Scholars believe that Pascal must have read it in Ghazālī's famous work, *Ihyā Uloom ad-Din*. And Ghazālī himself says this is the argument of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a).

Of course the reason why Imām Ali ('a) said this was not because there is a chance that those who believe in God or the Hereafter are wrong. After Rasulullāh (s), there was no one more certain of the existence of God than Imām Ali ('a). But the argument is just to show that even those who claim to be agnostics (i.e. unsure whether God exists or not), it does not make sense for them to become atheists. What is at stake is eternal life and it is foolish to take such a risk based on weak arguments like the evolution and chance theories.

Anthropomorphism encourages Atheism

Anthropomorphism is to believe that God has a physical body like human beings. This is a belief found amongst Christians i.e. that God made man in His 'own image'! And hence it also made them believe that God gave birth to a son (Jesus)! (we seek refuge with Allāh from such blasphemy!)

Amongst the Muslims, the Wahābbi also hold this belief that God sits on a throne up in the heavens and he resembles a man. This is because they interpret some verses of Qur'ān that mention 'the face of God' or 'the hand of God' or 'God sat on the throne' literally. These verses, according to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), are to interpreted symbolically. 'The face' or the 'The hand' of God refers to the dominion and power of the Almighty and God 'sat on the throne' means He established His authority over the whole universe.

¹ Bensees, *Pascal*, edited by Y Brunchiricy, Paris, 1912, p. 439.

The problem with believing in God as having a physical body is that it encourages idol worship and it brings God into the limited human imagination. Furthermore, it raises many questions by atheists that cannot be answered. For example, if God has a body, then how can He be everywhere at once? If He is sitting on a throne, where was He sitting or standing before He created the Throne? How did He occupy space before He created space? Is He wearing clothes or naked? If He is wearing clothes, did He create the clothes Himself? What was He wearing before He created them? And so on.

The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have rescued the concept of Tawhid and have offered the best understand of God: that He is beyond name or form. Allāh has no physical presence and cannot be perceived by the human imagination or the human eye. Allāh is everywhere and permeates everything yet nothing holds or contains Him and He does not incarnate anything. We shall learn more about the Shi'ah understand of Allāh (s.w.t.) in Book 12 but it is important to realize that many atheists argue against the existence of God because they assume everyone who believes in God believes in a physical God, which of course is not the belief of the Shi'ah Ithnā Ashari who follow Islam as taught by the Household (Ahl al-Bayt) of Rasullāh (s).

The First Cause

Muslim philosophers sometimes refer to God as the First Cause (*al-illat al-ula*). The reason is because we know that everything is the effect of a cause. When I see a building, I know it is the effect of the builder, who is its cause. But the builder himself is the effect of his parents, who are the cause of his existence. The parents themselves are the effect of their parents, and so on. If you keep going back, you will constantly find that nothing can exist unless it has a cause. However, at some point, there must have been a First Cause that was not the effect of anyone or anything, otherwise the cause-effect chain would continue for infinity.

Even the Big Bang is the effect of the mass that overheated and exploded, but the mass must have come into existence as an effect to some other intelligent cause.

Therefore in order to stop the infinite chain of cause and effect, we must accept that it must have all started with one Cause that was the First Cause. And that First Cause is Allāh, the Mighty and Glorious (*'azza wa jall*)!

Lesson 2

Tawhíd vs. Atheism (cont'd)

Evolution and Darwinism

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was a British naturalist who is now famous as the 'Father of Evolution' because of his work 'On the Origin of Species' in which he wrote that all species of life have descended over time from one common ancestry.

In time, atheists used his work to "prove" that God did not create humans but every living organism evolved from the tiniest living organisms in water called plankton, and so on. This is called the Evolution Theory.

Based on this theory, the atheists therefore believe that a fish, a parrot, a polar bear, a human being, a lion, a giraffe and a mosquito all originated from the same species.

L.M. Davies, a British Scientist, once said, 'It has been estimated that no fewer than 800 phrases in the subjunctive mood (such as '*Let us assume,*' or '*We may well suppose,*' etc.) are to be found between the covers of Darwin's 'Origin of Species' alone.

And other scientist for the Atomic Energy Commission once said, 'Scientists who go about teaching that evolution is a fact of life are great con-men, and the story they are telling may be the greatest hoax ever. In explaining evolution we do not have one iota of fact.' He called it 'a tangled mishmash of guessing games and figure juggling.'²

In other words, even the atheist who rejects God because of the lack of scientific 'proof' is actually accepting the evolution theory on a great deal of 'faith' rather than any solid proof!

Today, a lot of people are afraid of being labelled 'religious' so they hesitate to even use the word 'God'. Instead they'll use words like 'fate' and 'nature' and say, 'look at what Nature has created!' or 'the laws of Nature' and so on.

What is this 'Nature' or 'Mother Nature' anyway? It is nothing but an abstract idea formed in the human brain after careful study of the behaviour of things. It may be found within things (i.e. the 'nature' of things) but it has no independent existence. And in any case, there is no record of any conference held by the 'natures' of various things to decide how to co-ordinate their functions. Flowers never consulted with the bees to seek the bees' co-operation in their pollination, offering them, in exchange, their nectar! But we know that bees could not live a single day without flowers; and thousands of flowers would long have been extinct but for the bees.

² Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi, *God of Islam*, p. 17 (1980 Edition)

We can therefore conclude that the evolutionists recognize the need of a Planner and Designer but they stubbornly go on repeating that that designer and planner was 'Nature' (which is just an abstract idea) or 'Matter' which is an unconscious, senseless and lifeless thing at best.

Micro vs. Macro Evolution

We may believe that micro-evolution is true. This would mean small changes in creatures of the same kind. For example, a panther and a cheetah may have come from the same family, or one kind of horse from another, or one type of sparrow from another. This is because the variation is very small and could have been affected by climate change and environment. This is how we may even explain why some humans are black but others are not or why some humans have a lot of body hair and others do not. These differences are caused by generations of the same species living in different geographical regions of the earth.

Using evidence for such 'micro-evolution', the atheists and evolution theorists have tried to prove 'macro-evolution' i.e. that all species are related. The problem with macro-evolution is that it is just a theory – there is no evidence whatsoever, even though it has been well over 100 years since Darwin himself died.

Consider for example, when we ask evolutionists to explain that if life began in water only, how did the fish develop legs and lungs and how did they begin to start breathing air outside water and crawling out of the oceans?

The evolutionists say, the transition was through amphibians who could live both in water and on land. And then with a great stretch of imagination, they desperately argue that the fish kept coming to the surface of the water to try and breathe and to the shores of the oceans, until gradually, over millions of years, they developed lungs and the legs to walk out.

The greatest evidence for such lies is that to this day, **there is no fossil evidence for the evolution theory**. What we mean by this is that all the fossils that are found of skeletons thousands or even millions of years ago are of creatures known to us, such as apes or dinosaurs. But no one has ever found any fossil that is half fish and half amphibian or half amphibian and half bird, and so on. Which proves, that this is only a fancy hypothesis (unproven theory) and nothing else. The idea of micro evolution is being used to create doubt in people's minds that there is a Creator for all species.

Allāh tells us in the Qur'ān:

﴿ذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَّا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَأَنَّا تُؤَفَّكُونَ﴾

That is Allāh, your Lord, the creator of all things, there is no god except Him. Then where do you stray?

- Surah Ghāfir, 40:62

Humans are not from Apes

One of the arguments offered by evolutionists is that human beings evolved from apes that learnt to walk on two feet instead of four legs. A lot of times drawings are shown of 'ape-like' humans around caves. Scientists who believe this theory also love to compare humans to apes and show how similar we look in our skeleton and even how we use our arms and legs, and so on.

The question asked is: if humans did not evolve from apes, why do they look so similar?

The answer to this is that it was apes actually who "devolved" from humans. Both the Bible and the Qur'ān talk of communities that were punished by Allāh because of their excessive sins and they were disfigured to look animal-like and hence ape-like. Look at the following verses of Qur'ān, for example:

﴿فَلَمَّا عَتَوْا عَنْ مَا نُهُوا عَنْهُ قُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ﴾

When they defied [the command pertaining to] what they were forbidden from, We said to them, 'Become you despised apes!'

- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:166

Another question to ask is this: if apes evolved into humans, why don't the apes today continue evolving into humans?

Rather it is Allāh who created the first human being – Nabi Adam ('a) – and gave him the honour of being His representative:

﴿إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ. فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي﴾

﴿فَقَعُّوا لَهٗ سَاجِدِينَ﴾

When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am about to create a human being out of clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.'

- Surah Sād, 38:71-72

Often our innermost beliefs show us that what is said by the mouth is not what people really believe. Scientists for example, are constantly concerned about human extinction due to a plague or even being hit by a meteorite from outer space. And often scientists will talk about finding another planet where humans can inhabit so that we do not become extinct.

The question is: If humans came into existence by accident and are bound to become extinct one day, why are we so concerned about trying to survive and preventing our extinction? If there is no life after death, why the concern?

It is therefore very easy to be stubborn like an atheist and say, 'I only believe in what I can see, touch, hear, taste or smell'. But for life to be meaningful and for us to have a sense of purpose and to be courageous when we face difficulties in life, we need to realize that there is a God and that physical death is not the end of life. Allāh created Nabi Adam ('a) to be His representative and we are all the descendants of Nabi Adam ('a) and Sayyida Hawwa ('a).

Allāh is also the Creator of the entire universe and all that we see around us – the sun, the moon, the stars, the oceans, the mountains, the vegetation, the animals, etc. are all created as signs of Allāh and have been made subservient to us (i.e. we have been given the ability to control them) provided we ourselves learn to surrender to Allāh and do as He wills.

﴿وَالْأَنْعَامَ خَلَقَهَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا دِفْءٌ وَمَنَافِعُ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ... وَتَحْمِلُ أَثْقَالَكُمْ إِلَىٰ بَلَدٍ لَّمْ تَكُونُوا بِالْغَيْهِ إِلَّا بِشِقِّ الْأَنْفُسِ... وَالْخَيْلَ وَالْبِغَالَ وَالْحَمِيرَ لِتَرْكَبُوهَا... هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لَكُمْ مِنْهُ شَرَابٌ وَمِنْهُ شَجَرٌ فِيهِ تُسِيمُونَ. يُنْبِتُ لَكُمْ بِهِ الزَّرْعَ وَالزَّيْتُونَ وَالنَّخِيلَ وَالْأَعْنَابَ وَمِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ... وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ... وَمَا ذَرَأَ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ... وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا مِنْهُ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ مَوَاحِرَ فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ... وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَأَنْهَارًا وَسُبُلًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ . وَعَلَامَاتٍ وَبِالنَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ. أَفَمَنْ يَخْلُقُ كَمَنْ لَا يَخْلُقُ... وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾

He created the cattle, in which there is warmth³ for you and [other] uses and some of them you eat.... and they bear your burdens to towns which you could not reach except by straining yourselves.... and horses, mules and donkeys, for you to ride them... It is He who sends down water from the sky: from it you get your drink and from it are [sustained] the plants wherein you pasture your herds. With it He makes the crops grow for you and olives, date palms, vines, and fruits of all kinds... He made the night and the day for you, and the sun, the moon and the stars serve you by His command.... And whatever He has created for you in the earth of diverse colours... It is He who made subservient the sea [for your benefit] that you may eat from it fresh meat, and obtain from it ornaments, which you wear - and you see the ships plowing through it - and that you may seek of His grace (i.e. earn your living), and that you may give thanks. He placed in the earth firm mountains lest it should shake with you,

³ That is, in the garments made from wool and leather.

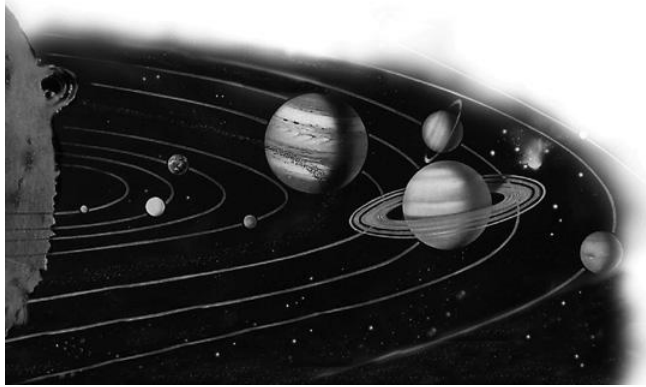
and [made] streams and ways, so that you may be guided - and the landmarks [as well], and by the stars they [i.e. people] are guided. Is He who creates like one who does not create? ... If you count Allāh's blessings, you will not be able to do so. Indeed Allāh is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

- Surah an-Nahl, 16:5-18

It is perhaps for this reason that in Surah ar-Rahmān (chapter 55 of the Qur'ān), Allāh keeps mentioning the wonders of His creation and then repeatedly asks, 'then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?' [see Surah ar-Rahmān]

Intelligent Design and One Architect

The more we study how the universe functions and how different creatures live their lives and how even our own body and mind works, the more we see perfection in the design of all creation.



We can also see that the manner of design in all things is very similar, which means the Architect, Artist or Author is one and the same. For example, the way an atom works (electrons rotating around the centre of the atom) is exactly the same as how the solar system works

and how the rest of the universe works!

Lesson 3

Tawhīd vs. Atheism (cont'd)

Humans During Ease vs. Trials

When humans lead materialistic lives and have all their physical needs met, they feel very secure and happy with themselves as if they will never die and they are in control of their lives. This false sense of security and control leads them to sin and to doubt in God or to associate others with Him:

﴿كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَيْطَغَىٰ أَنْ رَأَاهُ اسْتَغْنَىٰ﴾

Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers himself without need.

- Surah al-Alaq, 96:6-7

But the same human being, when he is in trouble and his false sense of security and control is shattered, all his illusions of being independent or doubting in God go away and he begins to pray earnestly and desperately to God to save him. The Qur'ān gives several of such examples. For example:

﴿هُوَ الَّذِي يُسَيِّرُكُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلِكِ وَجَرِينِ بِهِمْ بِرِيحٍ طَيِّبَةٍ وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا جَاءَتْهَا رِيحٌ عَاصِفٌ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْمَوْجُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ لَئِنْ أَنْجَيْتَنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ فَلَمَّا أَنْجَاهُمْ إِذَا هُمْ يَبْغُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا بَغْيُكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ مَتَاعَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَنُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

It is He who carries you across land and sea. When you are in the ships, and they sail with them with a pleasant breeze, rejoicing in it, there comes upon them a storm wind and waves surrounded them from every side, and they think that they are doomed, they pray to Allāh putting exclusive faith in Him, 'If You save us from this, we will surely be among the grateful.' But when He saves them, behold, they commit rebellion on the earth unjustly! O mankind! Your rebellion is only to your own harm. [These are] the temporary enjoyments of the life of this world; then to Us will be your return, when We will inform you concerning what you used to do.

- Surah Yunus, 10:22-23

﴿إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا. إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا. وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا﴾

Indeed man has been created restless: when a misfortune befalls him he is filled with self-pity and when good comes his way, he becomes selfish [to others].

- Surah al-Ma'ārij, 70:19-21

This shows that when we stop the constant chatter of the mind and we put aside all our so-called 'scientific theories', deep down we all know that the existence of a Creator and Sustainer is a self-evident truth i.e. a truth that requires no proof.

When Instinct in Allāh is Strongest

Even if a person suppresses or ignores the 'voice' inside and refuses to have faith in Allāh, there are two occasions when such a person will have faith in Allāh because the mind's thoughts are suspended and the God-given instinct to believe in Him is very strong:

1. In Difficulties: We have just discussed this but in summary, every human being will face hardship and suffering on various occasions in life. It may be the loss of a loved one or the loss of something material like wealth or their home or business or they may fall severely ill or get injured. The doctor may tell them they are dying of an illness that has no cure or they may even face sudden danger and think they may not live through it. At all such occasions, a person feels desperate and calls out to Allāh. He may 'promise' Allāh that if he survives he will never deny Him again or disobey Him but as soon as he thinks he is 'safe', he goes back to his old thinking. Even those who deny Allāh because He didn't 'help' them, they first hope in Allāh's help and then out of anger or pride deny Him. For those who are humble, they realize their constant need for Allāh and their faith in Allāh increases during misfortunes. Suffering is therefore a blessing at times. If human beings never experienced hardship then most of them would probably turn away from Allāh.
2. At the Time of Death: Even if a person denies God all his or her life, at the time of death he or she will realize with shock and extreme regret that in fact they were wrong and that God does exist and there is life after death. Now they will have to account for all the things they did in life. In other words, at the time of death, a person 'wakes up' to the truth but it is of course too late to repent when one is dying.

Fir'aun (the Pharaoh) at the time of Nabi Musa ('a) realized he was not God and tried to repent when he was about to drown but it was of no use to him:

﴿وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتْبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ وَجُنُودُهُ بَغْيًا وَعَدُوًّا حَتَّى إِذَا
أَدْرَكَهُ الْغَرَقُ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذِي آمَنْتُ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ وَأَنَا مِنَ
الْمُسْلِمِينَ. أَلَا آنَ وَقَدْ عَصَيْتَ قَبْلُ وَكُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ﴾

We carried the Children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh and his troops pursued them out of defiance and aggression. When overtaken by drowning, he called out, 'I believe that there is no god except Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am one of those who submit [to Him]!' [He was told,] 'What! Now? When you have been disobedient all the while before and were among the mischief-makers?!

- Surah Yunus, 10:90-91

The Qur'ān and hadith therefore encourage us to ponder about death and how it will feel when we are about to die. We are also encouraged to be with people who are dying and to attend funerals and cemeteries. These are all opportunities for us to wake up and let our God-given instinct (*fitra*) guide us. For example, the Qur'ān tells us:

﴿فَلَوْلَا إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْحُلُقُومَ. وَأَنْتُمْ حِينِيذٍ تَنْظُرُونَ. وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا
تُبْصِرُونَ. فَلَوْلَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ غَيْرَ مَدِينِينَ. تَرْجِعُونَهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

So when it (i.e. the soul) reaches the throat [of the dying person], and at that moment you are looking on [at his bedside]- and We are nearer to him (i.e. the dying person) than you are, though you do not see- then why do you not send it [i.e. the soul] back [into the body], if you are not bound, should you be truthful?

- Surah al-Wāqi'ah, 56:83-87

Why is It Important to Know Whether God Exists or Not?

There are various reasons:

The Search for Truth: All humans have a natural curiosity to know how they came to be. As humans grow in knowledge and experience, they see a purpose in everything including what they create themselves. Questions like 'Who am I? Why am I here? What is the purpose of life? Why live if there is no purpose to life?' and so on cannot be suppressed nor do they go away by being ignored.

To Thank the Benefactor: Good etiquette demands that we show gratitude to those who favour us. Consider a person who is a guest at someone's home. When he arrives, he finds arrangements have been made for all his needs. He has a room ready to rest in, food on the table, someone to wash, dry and iron his clothes, someone to guide him and take him around, and so on. Would he not want to thank his host? Even if the host was not in town and the servants were looking after him, it

would be ill mannered not to call the host or contact him by any means possible to thank him. From the time we were in the wombs of our mothers and throughout our lives, we enjoy innumerable blessings. From the wonderful body to a beautiful earth, trees, fruits, flowers, animals and countless blessings all working for our use and benefit. Surely we need to ask, 'Is there Someone who is providing these blessings to me?' It would be most ungracious if there was a Sustainer and Provider and we did not bother to find out who He is and thank Him.

Outlook to Life: How we live our lives is tremendously affected by whether we believe in a God or not. A person who does not believe in God will base his life around material and worldly benefits only. He has no reason to do good deeds just for the sake of it or even to tolerate any pain or suffering because if he does not believe in God then he also does not believe in life after death or a Hereafter. The outlook of such a person would be completely different from one who believes in God and consequently believes in the Last Day. We therefore need to find out if God exists because it will determine our outlook to life.

Avoid Possible Harm: Whenever we are warned of a possible harm, we immediately take heed and find out if the danger is possible. For example, if health experts warn that a disease might spread and many will die, people immediately consider vaccinations and try and find out ways to protect themselves. Even if there is a scare that computers will be affected by a virus, anyone with a computer will ensure his or her antivirus software is updated and that he or she is protected from its harms. Many prophets and messengers arose amongst people in different regions of the earth, speaking different languages, in different eras and they all warned people of punishment after death for those who deny God. It is therefore sensible that we must take these warnings seriously and find out more about them. We must at least not risk eternal punishment until we have studied the possibility that God does indeed exist and that these warnings are to be taken seriously. It would be foolish to ignore the warnings and take a chance that may cause severe harm to us.

There are two ways to find out if God exists: an outer way and an inner way. The outer way is through observing nature and what surrounds us and by exploring all the signs that Allāh has placed for humans to discover. The inner way is from within a human being himself, through our natural instinct and intellect, such as reflecting deeply on how the human body functions and pondering over the verses of the Qur'ān and the ahādith of Rasūlullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Allāh (s.w.t.) hints at these two ways in the Qur'ān:

﴿سُرِّيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ...﴾

*Soon We shall show them Our signs **in the horizons and in their own souls** until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real...*

- Surah al-Fussilat, 41:53

And Allāh (s.w.t.) also praises those who reflect on the outer signs of Allāh and then reflect on their inwardly and pray humbly to their Lord:

﴿الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ﴾

Those who remember Allāh standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [and say], 'Our Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You! Save us from the punishment of the Fire.

- Surah Aal-i Imrān, 3:191

Homework Suggestion:

Read what Imām Ali ('a) says about the Peacock (Nahj al-Balāgha, sermon 163) and the Bat (Nahj al-Balāgha, sermon 153). Alternatively, have you been to an animal zoo, marine park or aviary? Write a short essay on any one creature you were most impressed by (how it lives and the wonderful things you have discovered about it on the internet, etc.).

Lesson 4

Shi'ah Understanding of Adālah

In Islam, the primary Usul ad-Din are Tawhid, Nubuwwah and Ma'ād (Qiyāmah). The followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) also teach 'Adālah and Imāmah as parts of Usul ad-Din even though 'Adālah is actually a part of Tawhid and Imāmah branches from Nubuwwah. The reason for distinguishing these two additional parts is because the rest of the Muslims have a very different understanding of 'Adālah and Imāmah from the teachings of the Household (Ahl al-Bayt) of Rasullullah (s).

We have already discussed the necessity of Imāmah in Book 6 and studied proofs of Imāmah in Qur'ān and Hadith in Book 8. In this lesson we wish to study 'Adālah and see why the Shi'ah have a unique understanding of the matter from the rest of the Muslims.

The Meaning of 'Adālah

'Adālah in Usul ad-Din refers to 'the Justice of Allāh'. Some people incorrectly say, 'the Sunni do not believe in the Justice of Allāh but the Shi'ah do'. This is of course not exactly true because no one will ever believe that God can be unjust. The actual difference is as follows:

The Shi'ah believe that Allāh is just and fair in the same sense that humans generally understand justice and fairness vs. injustice and unfairness. So for example, if Allāh (s.w.t.) has promised to deal with everyone with justice on the Day of Judgement then we can be sure that He will act with fairness to all just like we may consider someone to be fair to others in this world.

The Sunni Muslims on the other hand have a different understanding of what it means for Allāh to be just. A long time back, the Sunnis believed that Allāh is just in the sense that He *must* reward the good and punish the evil and He cannot do otherwise. Those who go to Hell will never be forgiven and no one can intercede (do shafā'ah) for them either. This was called the Mu'tazilite view.

Then around the time of the Caliph Mutawakkil, the Sunni view on 'adālah changed to the complete opposite. And this new view is called the Ash'arite view and is what is believed by the majority of the Sunni Muslims today. In the Ash'arite view, Allāh is not bound by any rules of justice because He is the Creator and Owner of everything. The Sunni scholars therefore say that the rules of justice apply to human beings only but for Allāh, whatever He does is just even if it is considered unjust by human beings.

The Sunni Ash'arites also say that people must obey Allāh without questioning and they must follow the rules of justice amongst themselves as He commands but these

very same rules of justice do not apply to Allāh. They go as far as saying that if Allāh throws all the good into Hellfire on the Day of Judgement and He admits all the evil into Paradise, then that would still be just and fair. The reason they believe this is because they say if you believe Allāh *has to* reward the good and *has to* punish the evil (which was the Mu'tazilite view) then you are limiting Allāh's power to do as He pleases.

The Shi'ah Muslims, based on the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have disagreed with this view by saying, there is a vast difference between what Allāh *can* do and what Allāh *will* do. It is true that Allāh has the power and freedom to do as He pleases, but it does not mean He will act in a manner that humans consider unfair just because He can do it. So neither the Mu'tazilites are correct (in saying Allāh *has to* reward the good and *has to* punish the evil) nor the Ash'arites are correct (in saying whatever Allāh does is justice even if humans think it is unfair).

If Allāh's promise cannot be relied upon, then why would anyone do good or keep away from sin? People obey Allāh mostly because they are hopeful of His promise to forgive them and to admit them to Paradise. And Allāh Himself says in the Qur'an:

﴿وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ
خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ حَقًّا وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ اللَّهِ قِيلًا﴾

But those who have faith and do righteous deeds, We will admit them into gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them forever—a true promise of Allāh, and who is truer in speech than Allāh?

- Surah al-Nisā, 4:122

﴿وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَا يُخْلِفُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

A promise of Allāh: Allāh does not break His promise, but most people do not know.

- Surah al-Rūm, 30:6

So 'adālah is to believe that if Allāh has promised that He will act justly with everyone, then it will be according to what humans accept as justice so that no one will feel they were treated unfairly. It is for this reason that Allāh says He will have an accounting and weighing of deeds on the Day of Judgement and He will judge between people. Allāh already knows the outcome of who deserves Paradise and who should go to Hellfire but He will hold the accounting and Day of Judgment because that is how humans deal with justice and He does not want anyone to think that Allāh has been unfair to him or her.

﴿يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ فَمَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُوْتِكَ يَتْرَعُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا﴾

The day We shall call every group of people with their leader (Imām), then whoever is given his book in his right hand—they will read it, and they will not be wronged so much as a single date-thread.

- Surah al-Isrā, 17:71

﴿وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَا لِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا﴾

The Book will be set up. Then you will see the guilty afraid of what is in it. They will say, 'Woe to us! What a book is this! It omits nothing, big or small, without recording it.' They will find present whatever they had done, and your Lord does not wrong anyone.

- Surah al-Kahf, 18:49

'Adālah in this World

So far we have discussed the justice of Allāh in the Hereafter. But there are other issues related to this world as well that are concerned with 'adālah.

Consider that fact that some people are born rich while others are born poor. Some are born handicapped while others are born healthy. Some die young and some live a long life. Some are always happy while others are always suffering. If Allāh is kind and just, how do we explain this?

In the past, when some religions could not explain this, they created the idea of 'two gods' - a god of good and a god of evil. When people experienced a suffering, they thought they had displeased the 'god of wrath' or evil and they would offer sacrifices to appease this god.

When the Sunni Muslims use to follow the Mu'tazilite view, they used to believe that that people are completely free and Allāh does not interfere in their actions. In other words they believed that after Allāh created humans He left them in a world of cause and effect and everything that happens is because of something we do or something that someone does to us.

But now the Sunni Muslims follow the Ash'arite view and they believe the complete opposite: that people are completely bound by Allāh's decree. Everything is predestined and we are just puppets. Everything that happens to us and everything

we do – good or evil – is caused by Allāh and we have no choice but to act according to Allāh’s Will.

The Shi’ah again disagree with both groups. The Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) taught another understanding that is called ‘al-amr baynal amrayn’ (i.e. “the matter is between the two matters”). What this means is that the real truth is between the understanding of the Mu’tazilites and the Ash’arites. Humans are neither completely free nor completely forced in their actions. There are certain matters that are predestined for us, such as how long we will live, where we are born, how much we will earn and eat in life, where we will die and so on. But in matter of actions, we have a choice. For example, when we are tempted to sin, we have a free choice to act or to stop out of fear of Allāh.

Someone asked Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) to explain the concept of *al-amr baynal amrayn* and how we can be partly free but partly bound by Allāh at the same time. The Imām (‘a) told the man to stand on one foot and then told him to raise the other foot. The man could not and Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) told him he could raise one foot because he had been given freewill to do so but he could not raise the other without falling because he was bound by the laws of Allāh (such as gravity).



The Concept of *al-Amr Baynal Amrayn*

If Allāh had wished He could have bound us completely so that we could not raise even one leg; and if He wished, He could have given us the freewill to raise both feet and float in the air!

There are many, many reasons why people may be born with a disadvantage or they may suffer in this world without any apparent reason. It could be a test from Allāh, for example. We have already discussed why evil exists in the world and why people suffer, in Book 6 (Aqāid Lesson 2).

Imām Musa al-Kādhim (‘a) and Abu Hanifa

One day, Abu Hanifa – the founder of the Sunni Hanafi School (madhhab) – came to see Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a). While he was waiting outside to be admitted, he saw Imām Musa al-Kādhim (‘a) outdoors. Imām al-Kādhim (‘a) was only 5 years old.

Abu Hanifa, just to pass some time, asked the young boy, 'Tell me, are we responsible for what we do or does Allāh makes us do everything?'

The young Imām replied Abu Hanifa:

There are only three possibilities. Either Allāh forces us to act. Or we and Allāh are both responsible for our actions. Or we are free to act ourselves.

If we say Allāh forces us to do everything, then it does not make sense why Allāh should judge us on the Day of Judgement for actions that He had committed Himself.

And if we say Allāh and humans are partners in committing sins then it is not fair that the stronger partner should punish the weaker partner on the Day of Judgement.

So the only possibility is that we are free to act and we are responsible for our actions. That is why Allāh can judge us and reward or punish us!

This reply of Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a) is very logical and powerful. It is enough to convince anyone that there is no predestination in our actions and Allāh does not force us to act on our good or evil deeds.

Bahlul and Abu Hanifa

Bahlul was a famous companion of Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) and Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a). To save himself from the cruelties of the Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashid, he used to pretend to be a madman but his actions were full of wisdom.

One day, Bahlul heard Abu Hanifa (the Sunni Imām) saying to his students that Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) [who was also Abu Hanifa's teacher] was wrong to say that humans are free in their actions. Abu Hanifa believed that Allāh does everything, good or evil.

Bahlul therefore threw a brick at Abu Hanifa and injured him. When Abu Hanifa complained to the Muslim Judge, Bahlul defended himself by saying, 'according to the belief of Abu Hanifa, it was Allāh who made me do it. So he should complain against Allāh, and not me because Allāh hit him!'

What Bahlul taught us is that if we believe in predestination of all actions then it does not make sense to have a court of law or any police officers. Every murderer, thief and criminal will say 'Allāh predestined for me to act this way.' And every sinner will use this as an excuse on the Day of Judgement to claim innocence.



Some people even argue that since Allāh knows what is going to happen tomorrow and what I am going to do next, therefore I don't have a choice and I have to act according to what He knows.

But is this true? Does knowledge mean the one who knows is causing the action? Scientists know in advance when the next sun or moon eclipse will occur. Does it mean they are causing it? A teacher knows who will definitely pass the exam and who will definitely fail. Is the teacher forcing the students to pass or fail? A doctor knows if a patient will live or die. Is the doctor giving life or death to the patient?

Therefore Allāh’s knowledge of the future is because He is not bound by time. He sees the future just as He sees the present or the past. There is no past, present and future for Allāh. But it doesn’t mean His knowledge of what will happen is forcing us to act in a particular manner.

Why Doesn’t Allāh Give Everyone Equally

Allāh’s justice (‘adālah) does not mean giving everyone equally. Rather Allāh’s justice means to give everyone what is best for them and what they ‘need’, not what they ‘desire’. The Shi’ah ‘ulama therefore define ‘adālah as “placing everything where it rightly belongs.”

An example would be a mother who has several children, some very young and some much older and of different genders. If she treats them all exactly the same then she is actually being unfair to them. The children deserve to be treated differently depending on their age and gender even if they all belong to the same mother. Similarly, ‘adālah is that Allāh should treat people differently depending on their circumstances and abilities and what is best for them to succeed in the next world (that is permanent) rather than just giving them whatever they want for their temporary needs in this world.

We have already looked at this difference between “equality vs. equity” in Book 4 and why Allāh does not give everyone the same. You may want to review the anecdotes in that Book. We also studied in Book 6 about the wisdom behind suffering and how every action of Allāh is based on wisdom.

Conclusion

We can therefore summarize our belief in ‘adālah as part of our Usul ad-Din as follows:

1. Allāh is just to all His creation.
2. Allāh never does anything evil or wrong. It is not proper to say that because He is the Owner He does as He pleases even if humans feel it is unjust. Humans have been programmed by Allāh to believe all His Beautiful Names (Asmā al-Husna) are good and their opposite is evil. So if Allāh is al-‘Aadil (The Just), and humans regard justice as good, and Allāh takes pride in being just, then we must believe He will never do to His creation what they would consider as unjust.
3. Allāh never fails to do anything that is necessary for justice to be upheld.
4. There is no injustice in any decision of Allāh.
5. When Allāh tests us or commands us to do something, it is never beyond our ability and what we can do.

6. Allāh will always reward those who obey Him and do good even though He is not forced to do so (because He has promised and He never breaks His promise).
7. It is for Allāh to decide if He wishes to punish the wrong or not.
8. If Allāh punishes a person, the punishment is never beyond what the person deserves.
9. Allāh never forces a person to sin or commit injustice and thereafter punish him or her for it.

Imām Ali ('a) has said, '**Tawhid** means that you should never bring Allāh to your imagination (*an lā tatawahhamu*) and '**adālah** means you should never accuse Allāh of anything (*an lā tattahimu*).'

In other words, to believe in the 'adālah of Allāh means never to accuse Allāh of being unfair or of favouritism even in thoughts or feelings.

Lesson 5

Ashāb al-A'rāf

Al-A'rāf literally means "the Heights" or "the Elevations". It refers to a mountain-like place or an elevated bridge that is between al-Jannah (Paradise) and an-Nār (Hellfire) and separates them. This elevated place is mentioned in the seventh surah of the Qur'ān. The surah is in fact named Surah al-A'rāf because of the verses in it that describe it. The verses are as follows:

﴿... وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلًّا بِسِيمَاهُمْ وَنَادَوْا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَمْ يَدْخُلُوهَا وَهُمْ يَطْمَعُونَ﴾

... And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark. They will call out to the inhabitants of paradise, 'Peace be to you!' They (i.e. the People of Paradise) will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so.
- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:46

﴿وَإِذَا صُرِفَتْ أَبْصَارُهُمْ تِلْقَاءَ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

And when their (i.e. the People of Paradise's) look is turned toward the inmates of the Fire, they will say, 'Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!'
- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:47

﴿وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالًا يَعْرِفُونَهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ قَالُوا مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْكُمْ جَمْعُكُمْ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ﴾

And the People of the Elevations (Ashāb al-A'rāf) will call out to certain (evil) men whom they recognize by their marks, 'Your amassing (of wealth, etc.) did not help you, nor what you used to be proud of.'
- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:48

﴿أَهْوَلَاءِ الَّذِينَ أَقْسَمْتُمْ لَا يَنَالُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ إِذْ خُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ تَحْزَنُونَ﴾

Are these (i.e. the people about to enter Paradise) the ones about whom you swore that Allāh will never cover them with mercy?' 'Enter paradise! (they will say to the people of Paradise) You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve.'
- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:49

In this lesson we wish to study more concerning the Ashāb al-A'rāf (the People of the Elevations) and understand who are these People on the Elevations that the Qur'ān is talking of.

The Sunni and Shi'ah Mufasirrun (commentators or exegetes) of the Qur'ān have given various opinions on who the Ashāb al-A'rāf will be and why this place exists. These opinions include:

- That the Ashāb al-A'rāf are those who will neither deserve Paradise nor Hellfire so they will live in this in-between place.
- That the Ashāb al-A'rāf are those whose actions cannot be judged as good or bad. These are, for example, those who died in infancy or were mentally-handicapped or those who died without every knowing about Islam.
- That the Ashāb al-A'rāf are special people with authority from Allāh (s.w.t.) and they are able to intercede (i.e. do shafā'ah) for others.

Who are the Ashāb al-A'rāf (the People of the Elevations)?

According to the ahādith of the Aimmah ('a), the Ashāb al-A'rāf are actually the Anbiyā (Prophets) ('a) and their Awsiyā (Successors) and in particular Rasulullāh (s) and the Imāms from his the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) who will intercede (i.e. do shafā'ah) for everyone of the good. And it is they who will be standing on the elevation (A'rāf).

The reason why some people assume the Ashāb al-A'rāf are those about whom a decision has not been made and they are neither going to Paradise nor to Hellfire is because they assume the words *"They will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so"* (verse 46) is concerning the Ashāb al-A'rāf. Actually these words are said by the People of Paradise. Similarly, the people who have misunderstood who the Ashāb al-A'rāf are, also assume that the words *"Our Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!"* (verse 47) is said by the Ashāb al-A'rāf. But in fact these words are all concerning the People of Paradise just before they are admitted into Paradise.

So the true fact is that after all judgement has been passed and the People of Paradise and the People of Hellfire have been separated, they will be waiting to enter their final abode. Between them will be an Elevation (mountain or bridge) on which the Ashāb al-A'rāf will be standing. The People of Paradise will be waiting at the Gates of Paradise and the Ashāb al-A'rāf will congratulate them saying, *'Peace be to you!'* (verse 46) and when the Gates of Paradise open for them, the Ashāb al-A'rāf will say to them, *'Enter paradise! You shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve.'* (verse 49).

The People of Paradise, while *"they will not have entered it, though they would be eager to do so"* (verse 46) will be looking at the people of Hellfire with some anxiety and fear. *"And when their look is turned towards the inmates of the Fire, they will say, 'O Lord, do not put us among the wrongdoing lot!'"* (verse 47).

Similarly, the Ashāb al-A'rāf will scold the people of Hellfire. They will call out to them and say, “*your amassing did not help you...*” (verse 48) and they will mock them and say, “*are these (the people of Paradise) the ones about whom you swore that Allāh will never cover them with mercy?*” (verse 49).

Proof that Ashāb al-A'rāf are the Aimmah ('a)

If we look at the four āyāt of Qur'ān on al-A'rāf closely, we can see that the Ashāb al-A'rāf have a lot of authority on the Day of Judgement. They are able to recognize everyone (good or evil) by their mark (verses 46 and 48) and they can also call out to the People of Paradise and to the People of Hellfire and speak to them as they please. Therefore we know immediately that the Ashāb al-A'rāf are not ordinary beings.

It is also interesting to know that the word A'rāf comes from the word “*arafa*”, which means “*to recognize*” and therefore suggest a place of recognition or a people who have deep recognition of others. It is not a ‘holding’ place for people who will go neither to Paradise or Hellfire.

The following are some ahādith concerning the Ashāb al-A'rāf.

It is reported from Salmān al-Fārisi who said, ‘I swear by Allāh that I heard Rasulullāh (s) saying to (Imām) Ali ('a), ‘you and your successors are the (Ashāb of) A'rāf. Allāh is not recognized except by way of recognizing you. None will enter Paradise unless they recognize you and you recognize them and none will enter Hellfire except those who deny you and whom you deny.’⁴

Asbagh b. Nubāta reports that a man once asked Amir al-Muminin Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) about verse 46 of surah al-A'rāf and what it meant. Imām Ali ('a) said, ‘...we are the (Ashāb of) A'rāf who will stand on the Day of Judgement between Paradise and Hellfire. So none will enter Paradise except one whom we recognize and who recognizes us (i.e. our rights) and none will enter Hellfire except one who denies us and we deny him....’⁵

A man asked Imām Abu Ja'far, Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) about verse 46 of surah al-A'rāf and the words “*..on the Elevations will be certain men...*” in it. Imām al-Bāqir ('a) replied, the “men” are the Imāms from Aali Muhammad (s). And the man then asked, ‘what about the “Elevations”?’ And the Imām ('a) said, ‘It is a bridge between Paradise and Hellfire. So whoever amongst the sinful believers that the Imāms from us intercedes for, will be saved. And whoever is not interceded for will be doomed.’⁶

⁴ *Basāir ad-Darajāt*, v. 10, c. 16, p. 497, hadith 7. *Aalam mā ba'd al-mawt*, p. 225.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

Lesson 6

Al-Jannah & an-Nār

In Book 7 (Aqāid), we learnt all about the events that will take place on the Day of Resurrection (*yaum al-qiyāmah*) until the time when people will be sent to their final homes i.e. to Paradise (al-Jannah) or Hellfire (an-Nār).

In this lesson and the next we will learn about these final homes or abodes; what their names are in the Qur'ān and the kinds of punishments in Hellfire and rewards in Paradise that are recorded in the Qur'ān and hadith.

We will first begin with the description of Hellfire. Keep in mind that the next World is very different from this world and it is impossible for us to understand what quite happens in the next world with our limited five senses and experiences in this world. Trying to understand the punishments or pleasures of the Hereafter is like a baby in the womb of its mother trying to understand this world before it comes to see for itself and live in it! But Allāh nonetheless tries to give us an idea with many examples in the Qur'ān.

The Forms of Punishment in Hellfire

The Fire of Hell is a place of disgrace and punishment. It is reserved for people who are absolutely evil and there is no goodness in them, like for example those who murdered the prophets of Allāh and their descendants and those who oppressed others without any compassion or kindness in their hearts. The people of Hellfire will not be allowed to die or to escape from the Fire even though they will try. Neither will they get any rest nor any relief from the thirst, hunger and heat in Hell. We shall learn more about this through verses of the Qur'ān and ahādith.

The Food and Drinks

The people of Hellfire will always be hungry and thirsty. When they wish to quench their thirst, they will only have boiling water to drink that will burn them and make them even thirstier or they will be made to drink pus.

As for food, they will eat from a tree called Zaqqum, whose fruits (called dari'i) are thorny and resemble the head of Shaytān and are extremely bitter and putrid. These are mentioned in the many āyāt of the Qur'ān such as:

﴿إِنَّ شَجْرَةَ الزُّقُومِ طَعَامُ الْأَثِيمِ كَالْمُهْلِ يَغْلِي فِي الْبُطُونِ كَغَلِي الْحَمِيمِ. خُدُوهُ فَاعْتَلُوهُ إِلَى سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ. ثُمَّ صَبُّوا فَوْقَ رَأْسِهِ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْحَمِيمِ. ذُوقْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْكَرِيمُ. إِنَّ هَذَا مَا كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تَمْتَرُونَ﴾

Indeed the tree of Zaqqum will be the food of the sinful. Like molten copper it will boil in the bellies, boiling like boiling water. 'Seize him and drag him to the middle of hell, then pour over his head the punishment of boiling water.' 'Taste! Indeed you are the [self-styled] mighty and noble! This is indeed what you used to doubt!'

- Surah ad-Dukhān, 44:43-50

﴿أَذَلِكْ خَيْرٌ نَزْلًا أَمْ شَجْرَةُ الزُّقُومِ. إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهَا فِتْنَةً لِلظَّالِمِينَ. إِنَّهَا شَجْرَةٌ تَخْرُجُ فِي أَصْلِ الْجَحِيمِ طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّهُ رُءُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ. فَإِنَّهُمْ لَأَكَلُونَ مِنْهَا فَمَا لَيْتُوا مِنْهَا الْبُطُونَ. ثُمَّ إِنَّ لَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا لَشَوْبًا مِنْ حَمِيمٍ. ثُمَّ إِنَّ مَرْجِعَهُمْ لَإِلَى الْجَحِيمِ﴾

Is this (Paradise) a better hospitality, or the Zaqqum tree? Indeed We have made it a punishment for the wrongdoers. Indeed it is a tree that emerges from the depths of hell. Its produce is as if they were devils' heads. Indeed they will eat from it and devour with it their bellies. Indeed, on top of that they will take a solution of burning water. Then indeed their retreat will be toward hell.

- Surah as-Saffāt, 37:62-68

﴿... وَإِنَّ لِلطَّاغِينَ لَشَرَّ مَأْبٍ. جَهَنَّمَ يَصَلُّونَهَا فَيَنْسَوْنَ الْمِهَادُ. هَذَا فَلْيَذُوقُوهُ حَمِيمٌ وَغَسَّاقٌ﴾

*...and as for the rebellious there will surely be a bad destination - hell, which they shall enter, an evil resting place. This; let them taste it: **burning water and pus...***

- Surah Sād, 38:55-57

﴿ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ أَيُّهَا الضَّالُّونَ الْمُكَذِّبُونَ. لَأَكَلُونَ مِنْ شَجَرٍ مِنْ زُقُومٍ فَمَا لَيْتُوا مِنْهَا الْبُطُونَ فَشَارِبُونَ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْحَمِيمِ. فَشَارِبُونَ شُرْبَ الْهَيْمِ﴾

*Then indeed, you, astray deniers, will surely eat from the Zaqqum tree and stuff your bellies with it, and drink boiling water on top of it, **drinking like thirsty camels.***

- Surah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:51-55

The Company of Devils, Darkness and Smoke

The people of Hellfire will live in total darkness where they will experience extreme heat and fire and in other places extreme cold that burns. Their faces will be darkened and they will always look wretched. Besides that, they are chained to the devil (shaytān) whom they used to obey in this world. Even though they will hate the sight of the devils and it will constantly haunt them, they will not be able to separate themselves from the devils.

﴿الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِالْكِتَابِ وَبِمَا أَرْسَلْنَا بِهِ رُسُلَنَا فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ. إِذِ الْأَغْلَالُ فِي
أَعْنَاقِهِمْ وَالسَّلَاسِلُ يُسْحَبُونَ. فِي الْحَمِيمِ ثُمَّ فِي النَّارِ يُسْجَرُونَ﴾

Those who deny the Book and what we have sent with Our messengers. Soon they will know when, [with] iron collars around their necks and chains, they are dragged into burning waters and then set aflame in the Fire.

- Surah al-Ghāfir, 40:70-76

﴿وَأَصْحَابُ الشِّمَالِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الشِّمَالِ فِي سَمُومٍ وَحَمِيمٍ وَظِلٍّ مِنْ يَحْمُومٍ
لَا بَارِدٍ وَلَا كَرِيمٍ . إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَلِكَ مُتْرَفِينَ. وَكَانُوا يُصِرُّونَ عَلَى الْحِنثِ
الْعَظِيمِ. وَكَانُوا يَقُولُونَ أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ. أَوْ آبَاؤُنَا
الْأَوَّلُونَ﴾

And the People of the Left Hand - what are the People of the Left Hand? Amid infernal heat and boiling water and the shadow of a dense black smoke, neither cool nor beneficial. Indeed they had been well-off before this, and they used to persist in the great sin (i.e. shirk). And they used to say, 'What! When we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we be resurrected? And our forefathers too?'

- Surah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:41-48

﴿خُذُوهُ فَغُلُّوهُ. ثُمَّ الْجَحِيمَ صَلُّوهُ. ثُمَّ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ ذَرْعُهَا سَبْعُونَ ذِرَاعًا فَاسْلُكُوهُ﴾

The angels will be told: 'Seize him, and fetter him! Then put him into hell. Then, in a chain whose length is seventy cubits, bind him.

- Surah al-Hāqqah, 69:30-32

The Clothes of the People of Hellfire

As clothes, the people of Hellfire will wear hot tar on their bodies that is called "sarābil al-qatirān". Qatirān can mean 'pitch' as in any dark, sticky and oil substance like coal tar or it can also mean 'molten copper'.

﴿وَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّقَرَّنِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ سُرَابِلُهُمْ مِنْ قَطِرَانٍ وَتَغْشَى
وُجُوهُهُمُ النَّارُ﴾

*On that day you will see the guilty bound together in chains, **their garments made of pitch (qatirān)**, and the Fire covering their faces.*

- Surah Ibrāhim, 14:49-50

In a du'a we recite daily in the month of Ramadān, we ask Allāh to protect us from this:

وَإِذَا جَمَعْتَ الْأُولِينَ وَالْآخِرِينَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَارْحَمْنَا ، وَبِرَاءةٍ مِنْ النَّارِ فَارْحَمْنَا ،
وَفِي جَهَنَّمَ فَلَا تَجْعَلْنَا ، وَفِي عَذَابِكَ وَهَوَانِكَ فَلَا تَبْتَلْنَا ، وَمِنْ الرُّقُومِ وَالضَّرِيعِ فَلَا
تُطْعِمْنَا ، وَمَعَ الشَّيَاطِينِ فَلَا تَجْمَعْنَا ، وَفِي النَّارِ عَلَيَّ وَجُوهِنَا فَلَا تَكُبَّنَا ، وَمِنْ ثِيَابِ
النَّارِ وَسُرَابِيلِ الْقَطِرَانِ فَلَا تُلْبِسْنَا

And when You gather all the people of the earlier and the later periods on the Day of Judgement, then have mercy on us. Write for us a protection from the Fire. Do not confine us to Hell and do not try us with Your punishment and disgrace.

Feed us not from the bitter tree (of Zaqqum) nor the thorny fruit (Dari'i). Do not place us with the devils, nor throw us face downwards in Hell. And do not clothe us with the clothes of flames and tar (qatirān) of Hell.

Other Punishments of Hellfire

From ahādith we have a lot of graphic descriptions of Hellfire that are extremely frightening. People who do evil in this world and do not repent will see their evil deeds come alive to them on the Day of Judgement as beasts and harmful creatures that will constantly torment them. Their deeds may come in the form of wild dogs, serpents, scorpions, and so forth.

It is also important to keep in mind that Paradise and Hellfire are living creatures. The Fire of Hell, for example, when it grabs hold of a person, it knows and is aware of this and it consciously burns the person. That is why we are told in hadith that the fire of this world is seventy times cooler than Hellfire. Similarly, Paradise also speaks and is aware of those living in it.

Allāh has also created angels in Hellfire who are not affected by the heat but who constantly punish the evil. These angels are called Zabāniya. Every time the inmates of Hell try to crawl out of the pits of Hellfire or escape, the angels will hit them with maces of fire and send them back. These angels are also mentioned in the Qur'ān:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاطٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ﴾

O you who have faith! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [assigned] angels, severe and mighty, who do not disobey whatever Allāh has commanded them, and carry out what they are commanded.

- Surah at-Tahrim, 66:6

The people of Hellfire will be screaming and shouting constantly. They will have no friends or company in Hellfire and even when they see those whom they were friends with in this world, they will be cursing each other and blaming each other for misleading and tempting them.

It is reported from Rasullāh (s) that he said, 'if there were a hundred thousand people in this masjid or even more and a person from Hellfire took a breathe and that breathe was exposed here, it would annihilate the masjid and everyone in it!'⁷

Allāh says in the Qur'ān that the people of Paradise will look down into Hellfire and ask the people of Hellfire, 'what made you end up in Hell?' Let us read and understand their answers so that we make sure we are not one of them inshā Allāh:

﴿إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ وَلَمْ نَكُ نُطْعِمِ الْمَسْكِينِ وَكُنَّا نَحُوضُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ وَكُنَّا نُكَذِّبُ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ حَتَّى أَتَانَا الْيَقِينُ﴾

...except the People of the Right Hand. [They will be] in gardens, asking about the guilty: 'What brought you into Hell (Saqar)?' They will answer, 'We were not among those who prayed. Nor did we feed the poor. We used to gossip along with the gossipers, and we used to deny the Day of Judgement, until death came to us.'

- Surah al-Mudaththir, 74:39-47

Gates of Hellfire

Hellfire has seven worlds for different classes of people and each place has its own Gate. The Qur'ān confirms this:

﴿لَهَا سَبْعَةُ أَبْوَابٍ لِكُلِّ بَابٍ مِنْهُمْ جُزْءٌ مَقْسُومٌ﴾

It has seven gates, and to each gate belongs a separate portion of them.'

- Surah al-Hijr, 15:44

⁷ Mulla Fayd Kāshāni, *Aalam ma ba'd al-Mawt*, p. 265-6

The Qur'ān also mentions different names for Hellfire and from ahādith we know that these names are the names of the Gates and areas in Hell. The ahādith also give us a brief description of each place:

1. **Jaheem:** This is a place where the evil will be made to stand on a burning stone that will make their brains boil as a cooking-pot boils. In some hadith we are also told the least punishment in Hellfire will be sandals of fire that will make the head of the person who wears it to boil.

﴿فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَى. يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى وَبُرَزَتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَنْ يَرَى. فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى. وَآثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا. فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى﴾

*When the Greatest Catastrophe befalls, the day when man will remember his endeavours, and hell (**Jaheem**) is brought into view for one who sees, as for him who was rebellious and preferred the life of this world, his refuge will indeed be **Jaheem**.*

- Surah an-Nāzi'āt, 79:34-39

2. **Ladhā:** This will be the place for those who turned away from Allāh and were busy amassing wealth without paying the dues of Allāh and His creatures. The fire will catch them by their hands, feet and forehead and suck them inside.

﴿كَلَّا إِنَّهَا لَظَى. نَزَّاعَةً لِّلشَّوَى. تَدْعُوا مَنْ أَدْبَرَ وَتَوَلَّى. وَجَمَعَ فَأَوْعَى﴾

*Never! Indeed it is a blazing fire (**Ladhā**), which strips away the scalp. It invites him who has turned back [from the truth] and forsaken [it], amassing [wealth] and hoarding [it].*

- Surah al Ma'ārij, 70:15-18

3. **Saqar:** The description of Saqar is given by the Qur'ān itself (in the following verses). And we also saw its mention earlier when the People of Paradise ask the People of Hell, 'what brought you into Saqar?'

﴿سَأُصْلِحُ سَقْرًا. وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سَقْرٌ. لَا تُبْقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ. لَوْاحَةٌ لِّلْبَشَرِ. عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ﴾

*Soon I shall cast him into **Saqar**. And what will make you know what is **Saqar**? It neither spares, nor leaves [anything]. It scorches the mortal [human]. There are nineteen [keepers] over it.*

- Surah al-Muddathir, 74:26-30

In a hadith from Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), he said, 'Saqar is actually a valley within Jahannam. It gets so hot that at times it complains to Allāh about its

own heat and asks Allāh for a chance to breathe. So when it is permitted, and it breathes, it engulfs the whole of Jahannam with fire!⁸ (We seek refuge with Allāh from such a fire that is tormented by its own heat!)

4. **Hutamah:** The word ‘hutamah’ literally means, ‘that which crushes to pieces’. It will crush everyone who is flung inside it and grind him to powder, and then they will be made whole, again and again. Hutamah is also like a sealed vault where the people burning in it are sealed off from above and all sides. It is sealed and fortified with outstretched columns to prevent anyone escaping.

﴿وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ. كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ. وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ. نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُبْقَدَةُ. الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ. إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّوَصَّدَةٌ. فِي عَمَدٍ مُّمَدَّدَةٍ﴾

Woe to every scandal-monger and slanderer, who amasses wealth and counts it over. He supposes his wealth will make him immortal! No indeed! He will surely be cast into the Crusher (Hutamah). And what will show you what is the Crusher (Hutamah)? [It is] the fire of Allāh, set ablaze, which will overspread the hearts. Indeed it will close in upon them in outstretched columns.

- Surah al-Humazah, 104:1-9

5. **Hāwiyah:** This is a dark pit of fire that has no end.

﴿وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ. فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ. وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا هِيَّةُ. نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ﴾

But as for him whose deeds weigh light in the scales, his home will be the Abyss (Hāwiyah). And what will show you what it is? It is a scorching fire!

- Surah al-Qāri’ah, 101:8-11

6. **Sa’eer:** It means “Blazing Fire”. There are in it three hundred curtains of Fire; behind every curtain are three hundred forts of Fire; in every fort are three hundred abodes of Fire; and in every abode are three hundred types of punishments.

﴿إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ سَلَاسِلًا وَأَغْلَالًا وَسَعِيرًا﴾

Indeed We have prepared for the faithless chains, iron collars, and Sa’eer.

- Surah al-Insān, 76:4

⁸ Mulla Fayd Kāshāni, *Aalam ma ba’d al-Mawt*, p. 265

7. **Jahannam:** This is the most well known name for Hellfire and it is the place that is most feared because its punishments are the most severe of all seven places of Hell. Jahannam has been mentioned many times in the Qur'ān. In it are Falaq, Sa'ud and Atham. Falaq is a well inside Jahannam. When it is opened it makes the Fire blaze even more fiercely. Sa'ud is a brass mountain of fire in the centre of Jahannam and it is also mentioned in the Qur'ān (74:17). And Atham is a valley of molten brass around Sa'ud.

﴿وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ إِذَا أُلْقُوا فِيهَا سَمِعُوا لَهَا
شَهيقًا وَهِيَ تَفُورٌ تَكَادُ تَمَيِّزُ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ...﴾

For those who defy their Lord is the punishment of hell (Jahannam), and it is an evil destination. When they are thrown in it, they hear it blaring, as it seethes, almost exploding with rage...

- Surah al-Mulk, 67:6-8

Lesson 7

Al-Jannah & an-Nār (cont'd)

The Pleasures & Rewards of Paradise

Paradise is a place of eternity and peace. In Paradise there is neither death nor old age, neither sickness nor disease. There is no handicap, sorrow, worry, need or poverty. It is a place of plenty and bliss, permanence and honour. The people of Paradise will never get bored or tired. They will have whatever they desire and even beyond their imagination, in the company of those they love, forever and ever. Life in Paradise is physical and not just spiritual.

It is Allāh's wish that most people should live in Paradise and benefit from His Mercy and Grace. Anyone who believes in Allāh and does not associate partners with Him and believes in His messengers and prophets and the Books He revealed and he or she respects, loves and follows Rasullāh (s) and his Household (Ahl al-Bayt ('a)) is assured of Allāh's forgiveness and Paradise provided they have done their best in this world to obey Allāh in all that is wājib and to keep away from what He has forbidden and made harām.

Both al-Jannah (Paradise) and an-Nār (Hellfire) have been created and exist even today. Rasullāh (s) saw them both when he went for mi'rāj and Allāh also says in the Qur'ān:

﴿كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ. لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ. ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ﴾

No indeed! Were you to know with certain knowledge, you would surely see hell.

Again, you will surely see it with the eye of certainty.

- Surah at-Takāthur, 102:5-7

Al-Jannah and an-Nār are like two opposite sides of a coin. Or to use an analogy, there are like the two opposite sides of an air conditioning unit that gives out pleasant, cool air on the inside and hot, unpleasant air on the outside. Allāh (s.w.t.) in fact describes Paradise and Hell in this manner with mercy on the inside and punishment on the outside:

﴿...فَضْرَبَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِسُورٍ لَهُ بَابٌ بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ وَظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ الْعَذَابُ﴾

...then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior.

- Surah al-Hadid, 57:13

The Gates of Paradise

The Gates of Paradise are said to be eight. Various names of Paradise are given in the Qur'ān that are quite likely the names of different worlds or levels in Paradise and besides these names, various names for the Gates through which people will enter Paradise are also mentioned in ahādith.

For example, we are told in Qur'ān and hadith that some of the Gardens of Paradise are called Jannat al-Ma'wa, Jannat al-'Adn, Jannat al-Khuld, Jannat al-Firdaws and Jannat al-Na'im. Other names of Paradise are also Dār as-Salām (the Abode of Peace) and Dār al-Muqāmah (the Abode of Permanent Stay).

In a hadith from Rasullullāh (s) it is related that Jannah itself is made of bricks of gold and silver and sapphire cemented together with fragrant musk. As for its gates, there is the Gate of Mercy (Bāb ar-Rahmah) that is made of red ruby; and there is the Gate of Patience (Bāb as-Sabr) through which the patient will enter. There is also the Gate of Thanksgiving (Bāb ash-Shukr) for those who constantly thanked Allāh (s.w.t.) for His blessings, and it is made of white sapphire; it constantly cries out to Allāh, even now, with a yearning and longing, 'O Allāh! Bring me my inhabitants!'

There is also the Gate of Trials (Bāb al-Balā) that is the place from where those who suffered in this world with faith and courage will enter. It is made of yellow sapphire. Those, however, who are honoured to enter through it will be few in comparison.

Then there is the Great Gate (Bāb al-'Adham) through which all the righteous and the ascetics will enter. They will be the ones who preferred Allāh over the temporary and weak pleasures of this world. When they enter Paradise through this gate, they will be received by angels who will take them to a river of pure water and there they will board ships of rubies whose oars are made of pearls. Angels of light who are dressed in garments that are intensely green like emerald, will row the ships and sail them down the river to their homes in Paradise. Jannat al-'Adn is in the middle of Paradise. Even its pebbles and gravel are pearls.⁹

The Extent of Paradise

Paradise is limitless in this size and there are endless worlds to explore without any restrictions. In some ahādith we are told that the person with the least reward will have a place that is seventy times larger than this whole world.

Allāh mentions in the Qur'ān only about the width of Paradise without telling us its length:

⁹ Mulla Fayd Kāshāni, *Aalam ma ba'd al-Mawt*, p. 243-4

﴿وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

And hasten towards your Lord's forgiveness and a paradise whose width is (as vast) as the heavens and the earth.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:133

And Allāh also tells us that the people of Paradise of a higher rank will roam about Paradise wherever they please:

﴿وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَتَبَوَّأُ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ فَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ﴾

They will say, 'All praise belongs to Allāh, who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish!' How excellent is the reward of the workers [of righteousness]!

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:74

The Palaces and Homes

The palaces of the faithful (mu'mineen) in Jannah are beyond imagination in beauty. To give us an idea, we are told in hadith that they are made of gold and silver and rubies and pearls with beautiful, vast gardens covered with lush trees beneath which run rivers of pure and brilliant water, milk, honey and wine that does not intoxicate.

The faithful sometimes enjoy themselves in their palaces and sometimes stroll in the gardens with their loved ones or sail in the rivers. At other times they recline on their thrones and meet with other people of Jannah and socialize with them. They are able to fly or ride or walk wherever they please in Paradise. The earth of Paradise is made of musk and its pebbles and gravel are made of pearls. Wherever one looks, there will be unimaginable beauty. Everything in Paradise has colours and beauty never imagined before, sounds never heard before and the food and drinks will have a taste never experienced before.

﴿وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وُلْدَانٌ مُّخَلَّدُونَ إِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤًا مَّثُورًا. وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمَمْلَكًا كَبِيرًا. عَلَيْهِمْ ثِيَابٌ سُنْدُسٍ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَحُلُّوَا أَسَاوِرَ مِن فِضَّةٍ وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا. إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيِكُمْ مَشْكُورًا﴾

They will be waited upon by immortal youths, whom, when you see them, you will suppose them to be scattered pearls. As you look, you will see there bliss and a great kingdom. Upon them will be cloaks of green silk and brocade and they will be

adorned with bracelets of silver. Their Lord will give them to drink a pure drink. [They will be told]: 'This is indeed your reward, and your endeavour has been well-appreciated.'

- Surah al-Insān, 76:19-22

Fruits and Rivers of Drinks

Amongst the rivers of Paradise are Kawthar, Salsabil and Tasneem. The fruits may resemble those of this world except that their taste will be unique and far greater than anything that ever existed in this world. It is as if the pleasures of this world are a very poor version of the real thing that is only given to us here to help us imagine that which cannot be imagined!

﴿مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ لَبَنٍ لَمْ يَتَغَيَّرْ طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ خَمْرٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ عَسَلٍ مُصَفًّى وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ...﴾

A description of the paradise promised to the Godfearers: therein are **streams of unstaling water**, and **streams of milk** unchanging in flavour, and **streams of wine** delicious to the drinkers, and **streams of purified honey**; there will be for them every kind of fruit in it, and forgiveness from their Lord.

- Surah Muhammad, 47:15

﴿وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأُتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ﴾

And give good news to those who have faith and do righteous deeds, that for them shall be gardens with streams running in them: whenever they are provided with their fruit for nourishment, they will say, 'This is what we were provided before,' and they were (only) given something resembling it. In it there will be chaste mates for them, and they will remain in it [forever].

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:25

﴿وَجَزَاءُهم بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةٌ وَحَرِيرًا. مُتَّكِنِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرْئِكِ لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمْهَرِيرًا. وَذَانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلَالُهَا وَذُلَّتْ قُطُوفُهَا تَذَلِيلًا. وَيُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآنِيَةٍ مِنْ

فِضَّةً وَأَكْوَابٍ كَانَتْ قَوَارِيرَ. قَوَارِيرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ قَدَّرُوهَا تَقْدِيرًا. وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا
كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنْجَبِيلًا. عَيْنًا فِيهَا تُسَمَّى سَلْسَبِيلًا ﴿١٢﴾

*And He rewarded them for their patience with a garden and [garments of] silk, reclining therein on couches. They will find in it neither any [scorching] sun, nor any [biting] cold. Its shades will be close over them and its clusters [of fruits] will be hanging low. They will be served around with vessels of silver and goblets of crystal - crystal of [transparent] silver - [from] which they dispense in a precise measure. They will be served therein with a cup of a drink seasoned with Zanjabil (lit. 'ginger'), a spring in it, named **Salsabil**.*

- Surah al-Insān, 76:12-18

﴿١٣﴾ إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ. عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ. تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ. يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ. خِتَامُهُ مِسْكٌ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ. وَمِزَاجُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

Indeed the pious shall be amid bliss, observing, [as they recline] on couches. You will perceive in their faces the freshness of bliss as they are served with a sealed wine, whose seal is musk - for such let the aspirers aspire - and whose seasoning is from Tasneem, a spring where those brought near [to Allāh] drink.

- Surah al-Mutaffifin, 83:22-28

The Clothes of the People of Paradise

﴿٢٣﴾ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

Indeed Allāh will admit those who have faith and do righteous deeds into gardens with streams running in them, adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearl, and their dress therein will be silk.

- Surah al-Hajj, 22:23

﴿٢٥﴾ إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي مَقَامٍ أَمِينٍ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ يَلْبَسُونَ مِنْ سُندُسٍ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Indeed the Godway will be in a secure place, amid gardens and springs, dressed in fine silk and brocade, sitting face to face...

- Surah ad-Dukhān, 44:51-53

The Angels of Paradise

Allāh (s.w.t.) has created the most beautiful angels, both in appearance and character, to be companions and friends with the People of Paradise. Every faithful man and woman will have numerous angels to serve him or her and keep them company. Every time the faithful (mu'mineen) enter their palace or leave it, there will be angels at every one of their thousands of doors to greet them and wish them.

﴿جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ
يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ﴾

The Gardens of Eden, which they (the faithful) will enter along with whoever is righteous from among their ancestors, their spouses, and their descendants, and the angels will call on them from every door: 'Peace be to you, for your patience.' How excellent is the reward of the [ultimate] abode!

- Surah ar-Ra'd, 13:23-24

The Company of Family and Friends

As opposed to the People of Hellfire who will always be lonely, sad and depressed and always cursing or being cursed by those around them, the People of Paradise will have the company of their righteous family members (see verse above and the next one below). Any feelings of hatred will be removed from their hearts. Similarly, the People of Paradise will also be married to the most beautiful spouses in Paradise created especially for them. These spouses are called *Hoor al-Ayn*.

﴿رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتِ عَدْنِ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ
وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾

Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You have promised them, along with whoever is righteous among their ancestors, their spouses and their descendants. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise.

- Surah Ghāfir, 40:8

﴿إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ. ادْخُلُوهَا بِسَلَامٍ آمِنِينَ. وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ
غِلٍّ إِخْوَانًا عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ. لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَمَا هُمْ مِنْهَا بِمُخْرَجِينَ﴾

Indeed the Godwary will be amid gardens and springs. 'Enter it in peace and safety!' (they will be greeted and told). We will remove whatever ill-feelings there is in their chests; [close like] brothers, [they will be reclining] on couches, facing one another. Therein neither weariness shall touch them, nor will they [ever] be expelled from it.

- Surah al-Hijr, 15:45-48

﴿كَذَلِكَ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُمْ بِحُورٍ عِينٍ. يَدْعُونَ فِيهَا بِكُلِّ فَاكِهَةٍ آمِنِينَ. لَا يَذُقُونَ فِيهَا
 الْمَوْتَ إِلَّا الْمَوْتَةَ الْأُولَىٰ وَوَقَاهُمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ. فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكَ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ
 الْعَظِيمُ﴾

So shall it be, and We shall wed them to houris with beautiful eyes. There they will call for every fruit, in safety. There they will not taste death except the first death, and He will save them from the punishment of hell - a grace from your Lord. That is the great success.

- Surah ad-Dukhān, 44:54-57

The Tree of Tuba

Tuba means 'Blessed'. In Paradise Tuba is a huge tree whose roots are in the house of Rasulullāh (s). Its branches extend to every faithful's palace in Paradise. Whenever a faithful wishes for anything, the branch will make his or her wish come true. The Tree of Tuba is so massive that if a horse rider galloped for a hundred years, it would not come out of its shade and if a bird flew from its roots upwards, its life would end but it would not reach the top of the tree.¹⁰

The Shi'ah of Aal Muhammad ('a)

The first Nabi or Rasul to enter Paradise will be Rasulullāh (s) and he will not enter without his family (the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)) who will not enter without their true and sincere followers (i.e. Shi'ah). They will all be the first to enter and to be ushered and welcomed into Paradise. Thereafter the other nations (umam) will enter.

In a hadith from Amir al-Mu'mineen ('a), even the non-Shi'ah Muslims who were faithful to Islam will enter Paradise as long as they don't have even a grain of hatred for the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) of Rasulullāh (s). But such Muslims as well as those who loved the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) but did not follow them will have a lesser rank than those who were loyal and true followers (Shi'ah) of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and supported their cause.

The Greatest Reward

One of the greatest pleasures and rewards of Paradise will be the peace and tranquillity of knowing that one will now never ever suffer or feel pain again. That one will never die or fall sick or grow old or be asked to leave Paradise. The feeling of knowing that one has finally made it to Paradise and that all the patience and suffering in this world was definitely worth it, cannot be described. And those who

¹⁰ Mulla Fayd Kāshāni, *Aalam ma ba'd al-Mawt*, p. 251

make it to Paradise will be forever grateful to Allāh for saving them from the influence of bad friends and from the temptation of Shaytān.

﴿الَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ. أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ رِزْقٌ مَعْلُومٌ. فَوَاكِهُ وَهُمْ مُكْرَمُونَ. فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ. عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ. يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِكَأْسٍ مِنْ مَعِينٍ. بَيْضَاءَ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ. لَا فِيهَا غَوْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ عَنْهَا يُنْزَفُونَ. وَعِنْدَهُمْ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ عِينٌ. كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيْضٌ مَكْنُونٌ. فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ. قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي كَانَ لِي قَرِينٌ. يَقُولُ أَأِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُصَدِّقِينَ. أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَأَنْتَا لَمَدِينُونَ. قَالَ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُطَّلِعُونَ. فَاطَّلَعَ فَرَآهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ. قَالَ تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كِدْتَ لَتُرْدِينِي. وَلَوْلَا نِعْمَةُ رَبِّي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِينَ. أَفَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَيِّتِينَ. إِلَّا مَوْتَتَنَا الْأُولَى وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ. إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ. لِمِثْلِ هَذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ﴾

...except Allāh's exclusive servants. For such there is a known provision – fruits - and they will be held in honour, in the gardens of bliss, [reclining] on couches, facing one another, served around with a cup from a clear fountain, snow-white, delicious to the drinkers, wherein there will be neither headache nor will it cause them intoxication, and with them will be maidens of restrained glances with big [beautiful] eyes, as if they were protected [delicate] eggs. Some of them (in Paradise) will turn to others, questioning each other. One of them will say, 'Indeed I had a close companion who used to say, "Are you really among those who believe [that] when we are dead and have become dust and bones, we shall indeed be brought to judgement?"' He will say, 'Will you have a look?' Then he will take a look and see him (the close companion) in the middle of hell. He will say, 'By Allāh, you had almost ruined me! Had it not been for my Lord's blessing, I too would have been among those brought [into torment]!' 'Is it [true, what you used to say in the world] that we shall not die [anymore], aside from our first death, and that we shall not be punished?' This (Paradise) is indeed the great success! So let all the workers work for the like of this!

- Surah as-Saffāt, 37:40-61

Then there are rewards and pleasures that are too great for the human mind to understand in this limited world. So Allāh only hints at them but they cannot be imaged:

﴿فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُمْ مِنْ قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

No one knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort, as a reward for what they used to do.

- Surah as-Sajdah, 32:17

But by far, the greatest reward of all will be knowing that Allāh (s.w.t.) Himself is pleased with us. *Ridwānullah* (The Pleasure of Allāh) is the greatest reward of all. It is the ultimate pleasure because one will get individual attention from the Creator Himself when He speaks to us one-on-one with love and mercy. This is enough to make a creature swoon with pleasure and delight and it has no comparison to any other pleasure by far.

﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا
وَمَسَاكِينَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ وِرْضًا مِنْ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾

*Allāh has promised the faithful, men and women, gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them [forever], and good dwellings in the everlasting Gardens. **Yet Allāh's pleasure is greater [than all these]; that is the great success.***

- Surah al-Tawbah, 9:72