

Aqáid **(Beliefs)**

Lesson 1

Roots of Idol Worship

In Book 7 we learnt about Tawhid and the belief in one God as being a natural instinct (*fitra*) in all human beings. We also learnt a little bit about *shirk* i.e. associating partners with Allāh and why it is the greatest sin in Islām that can never be forgiven.

In this lesson we shall learn more about *shirk* and the various forms in which it exists; but before that, we need to understand how humans developed the idea of worshipping idols. The Qur'ān condemns people who make representations of God out of stone or wood or any material and then prostrate before it and make offerings to it. In fact any attempt to give Allāh a physical form is harām.

A long time ago, when a prophet would come to preach to a nation and then die, the people would want to keep the memory of that prophet alive. So they would paint his pictures to show their children and the future generation in their community. In time, some of them got more creative and began making statues of the prophets and soon everyone wanted a statue of the prophet in their home. Gradually, people forgot the message of the prophet and began venerating the prophet and teaching others that the prophet was superhuman and must be adored by everyone. They gave more importance to the prophet than the message he brought and their only concern was praying to the prophet's statue and asking for their needs to be fulfilled and their difficulties to be removed.

As time passed, people created all kinds of rituals and superstitions around the statues of these prophets and began idolizing them. Over the years and generations that passed, it didn't matter what the idol looked like. People just felt good worshipping an idol and praying to it for help and offering sacrifices in its name.

In some regions of the world when people saw floods and other natural disasters like earthquakes that destroyed their property and lives, they immediately assumed there was a 'god' who was angry with them and trying to punish them, so they would try and please this 'god' by creating an idol for it and then presenting it with gifts and respecting it. If they saw something strange that they had never experienced before like a huge waterfall or a very large tree or a strangely shaped rock or mountain, they would assume it was a god and started worshipping it.

The rich people of course encouraged idol-worshipping because they first made money from selling the statues and thereafter they would charge people a fee to offer a sacrifice to the idol or to ask for their wishes. They would also create fear in people's minds that if they didn't offer something to the gods than something terrible would happen to them.

Different tribes competed with other tribes on whose 'god' was bigger or more powerful. And if anyone's wishes came true - by coincidence after praying to an idol - their faith in the idol was renewed and that 'god' became very popular. But what this also did was create a lot of myths and fears regarding the miraculous powers of the idols.

And in time, Allāh would send another Nabi or Rasul to teach the people not to worship what they had created with their own hands. Instead, the Nabi would ask the people to liberate themselves and worship the one and only true God – Allāh - Who has no form or shape.

﴿قَالَ أَتَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ . أَفِ لَكُمْ وَلِمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

He (Nabi Ibrāhim ('a)) said, 'Do you then worship, besides Allāh that which cannot cause you any benefit or harm? Fie on you and what you worship besides Allāh! Do you not apply reason?'

- Surah al-Anbiyā, 21:66-67

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ فَاستَمِعُوا لَهُ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ﴾

O mankind! Listen to a parable that is being given: Indeed those whom you pray to besides Allāh will never create [even] a fly even if they all get together to do so! And if a fly should take away something from them (i.e. these idols), they cannot recover that from it. How weak is the seeker and the sought!

- Surah al-Hajj, 22:73

In some cultures, the survival of the people depended on a river, mountain or even animal and therefore they treated that as sacred and began worshipping it. For example in India milk was precious so the cow became a 'god' and people would worship cows and this continues even to this day. When a cow wanders on to the highway no one moves it or forces it off the road. All traffic comes to a standstill until the cow moves away on its own accord!

In ancient Egypt the people depended on the overflowing of the River Nile in order to irrigate their lands and to water their crops. In any year when the Nile ran dry, there would be a drought and many people would die. So the Egyptians used to worship the River Nile or believe their King – the Pharaoh – was a god who could control the River Nile. When the Nile ran dry they assumed their 'god' was upset

with them and was punishing them so they would look for ways to appease their gods by offering sacrifices.

Do you see how the worship of other than Allāh makes a person superstitious and weak? Do you see how humans become so fearful and greedy and bow even before an animal when they forget Allāh? The worship of idols and the belief in myths, superstitions, astrology, or anything besides Allāh are like shackles that enslave human beings. Allāh in fact tells us in the Qur'ān that He sent Rasulullāh (s) to free humans from these 'shackles':

﴿الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ ... يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ
الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ
عَلَيْهِمْ...﴾

*- those who follow the Apostle... who bids them to do what is right and forbids them from what is wrong, makes lawful to them all the good things and forbids them from all vicious things, **and relieves them of their burdens and the shackles that were upon them....'***

- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:157

Today, many people don't worship statues of stones or animals and fire but they still look up to something or someone as their 'idol' whom they think about all the time and are obsessed with. In other words, a person can carry and worship an 'idol' in the heart as well.

Allāh tells us:

﴿وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ
حُبًّا لِلَّهِ...﴾

Among the people are those who set up partners besides Allāh, loving them as they ought to love Allāh - but the faithful have an intense ardent love for Allāh...

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:165

The problem with idol worship is that whatever a person thinks of as his or her 'God' also becomes a representation of perfection in his or her mind; and subconsciously, he or she tries to become like that 'God'. For example, if a person idolizes wealth or another person they will never see themselves or their lives as being worth anything more than wealth or that person. On the other hand, if a person worships Allāh alone, then Allāh is infinite and limitless – therefore such a person's desire to grow will also be limitless and if anything, they will try and acquire qualities similar to the attributes of Allāh such as knowledge, kindness, generosity, mercy and so on. That is perhaps why we are told in hadith:

تَخَلَّقُوا بِأَخْلَاقِ اللَّهِ

Make your etiquette the etiquette of Allāh!

In other words, a true faithful (*mu'min*) enjoys different blessings of Allāh but he or she always loves something or someone *for the sake of Allāh only*. A *mu'min* is only obsessed with Allāh and addicted to Him. He or she does not 'idolize' anyone or anything besides Allāh. In the words of Imām Ali ('a), 'a person's faith (*imān*) is not complete until he loves those whom Allāh, the Glorious, loves and he dislikes those who Allāh, the Glorified, dislikes.'

Someone asked Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) the meaning of the following verse:

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

The day when neither wealth nor children will be of any use, except him who comes to Allāh with a sound heart,'

- Surah ash-Shu'arā, 26: 88-89

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) replied, 'The *sound heart* is the one when it meets Allāh it does not have the love of anyone but Allāh. Every heart which has *shirk* and doubt is condemned to be destroyed.'

Allāh also says in the Qur'ān:

﴿قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ وَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ وَعَشِيرَتُكُمْ وَأَمْوَالٌ
اقتَرَفْتُمُوهَا وَتِجَارَةٌ تَخْشَوْنَ كَسَادَهَا وَمَسَاكِينُ تَرْضَوْنَهَا أَحَبَّ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ
وَرَسُولِهِ وَجِهَادٍ فِي سَبِيلِهِ فَتَرَبَّصُوا حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ
الْفَاسِقِينَ﴾

Say, 'If your fathers and your sons, your brothers, your spouses, and your family, the possessions that you have acquired, the business you fear may suffer, and the homes you are fond of, are dearer to you than Allāh and His Messenger and to waging jihād in His way, then wait until Allāh issues His command, and Allāh does not guide the sinful people.

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:24

It is perhaps for this reason that Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) also said, 'By Allāh the *imān* (faith) of a person cannot be pure till he loves Allāh more than his near ones; his mother, his father, children, wife, other people and wealth.'

Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) came to this world as **Teachers of Tawhid**. In time, some people idolized them as well and began believing they were incarnates of God or able to grant them their wishes independent of Allāh. The Imāms taught us

that we can pray to Allāh and ask Him to grant our wishes *'for the sake of Muhammad and Aali Muhammad'* or even to ask Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to intercede on our behalf before Allāh. But we must know that ultimately, everyone depends on Allāh for all their needs and we must therefore prostrate before no one but Allāh. That is what Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) taught us and expect from us. Any less and they would be disappointed with us and we would be hurting them because it would be against all the sacrifices they made and what they came to teach us.

Lesson 2

Tawhīd vs. Shirk

Types of Shirk

Just as there are levels of Tawhid, so there are levels of Shirk. We will review five levels of Tawhid and Shirk:

1. Tawhid & Shirk regarding the Essence (Dhāt) of Allāh
2. Tawhid & Shirk regarding the Attributes (Sifāt) of Allāh
3. Tawhid & Shirk regarding the Actions (Af'āl) of Allāh
4. Tawhid & Shirk regarding the Obedience (Tā'ah) to Allāh
5. Tawhid & Shirk regarding the Worship ('Ibādah) of Allāh

Tawhid and Shirk regarding the Essence (Dhāt) of Allāh

Tawhid with regards to the Essence (Dhāt) of Allāh means believing that the Essence of the Lord of the Universe is One only.

As opposed to this, *Shirk* in the Essence (Dhāt) of Allāh is to believe that Allāh, in His very essence is more than one. An example of this form of *shirk* is the belief in trinity by the Christians because they say, God's Essence is made up of three: the father, the son and the holy spirit. In other words, Christians can be regarded as Ahl al-Kitāb (People of the Book) in one sense but also mushrikun in the sense of *Shirk fi Dhātillah*. Regarding trinity, Allāh says:

﴿لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ
اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا
لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ. لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَلَاثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ
وَاحِدٌ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾

They are certainly faithless who say, 'Allāh is the Messiah, son of Mary.' But the Messiah had said, 'O Children of Israel! Worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord. Indeed whoever ascribes partners to Allāh, Allāh shall forbid him [entry into] paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire, and the wrongdoers will not have any helpers.' They are certainly faithless who say, 'Allāh is the third [person] of a trinity,' while there is no god except the One God. If they do not stop what they say, there shall befall the faithless among them a painful punishment.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:72-73

Another example is the Zoroastrians who believe that the universe is controlled by two forces: the Force of Good and the Force of Evil. People with such beliefs are also called Dualists. The Hindus believe in One God but also believe in many demi-gods and therefore are polytheists. Polytheists will usually believe in a god of rain, and a god of thunder and a god of fertility and a god of death and a god of the mountains and a god of the oceans, and so on. So when they want their crops to grow, they pray to the 'god of harvest'. When they are travelling by sea, they pray to 'the god of the oceans', and so on. The Qur'ān rejects all this and says:

﴿... قُلْ كُلُّ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ فَمَالِ هَؤُلَاءِ الْقَوْمِ لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا﴾

...Say, 'All is from Allāh.' What is the matter with these people that they would not understand any matter?

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:78

Tawhid and Shirk regarding the Attributes (Sifāt) of Allāh

Tawhid with regards to the Attributes (Sifāt) of Allāh means believing that Allāh's Attributes (Sifāt) are not separate from His Essence (Dhāt). In other words, when we say one of Allāh's attributes is that He is All-Knowing or All-Powerful, we do not mean that His Knowledge or Power is separate from Who He is.

To understand this better, think of any of these attributes in humans. When we say a person has knowledge, we immediately know that he did not have that knowledge at birth. We also know that the knowledge was acquired from someone and it is also possible that as the person grows old their knowledge may change or reduce. However in the case of Allāh, when we say Allāh knows everything, we don't mean what He knows is separate from Him or that it can change, increase or decrease. We mean nothing can exist, change or even move or breathe without His permission and knowing it. Similarly, Allāh is All-Powerful but not in the sense of someone having a lot of strength or ability. Rather we mean He is the source of all power itself. Anything and anyone that has any power is only drawing from Allāh's Power and manifesting a little bit of Allāh's attribute of Power.

The opposite of this – *Shirk* in the Attributes (Sifāt) of Allāh - is to believe in Sifāt az-Zāid i.e. that the attributes of Allāh are independent of Him. A person who commits *shirk* in the attributes of Allāh will assume that his own attributes are also independent and not from Allāh. When such a person says, 'my knowledge, my love, my strength, my beauty' and so on, they imagine that they possess these attributes by their own selves. On the other hand, Tawhid in the Sifāt of Allāh teaches us that actually all goodness and all positive attributes belong to Allāh only. Even the qualities of knowledge, power, and so on that are shown by Prophets and Messengers and Imāms are a grace and blessing of Allāh.

When Allāh loves a person, He increases the amount of His attributes in a person. That is why a person who understands Tawhid in the Sifāt of Allāh is always humble.

He or she does not think of any good coming from themselves. If they, for example, give something in charity, they do not feel proud but instead they thank Allāh for choosing them to do that good when He could have done that act of love and kindness through any other of His creatures; and they beg Allāh to continue using them to manifest His attributes to His creation.

That is also why Allāh tells us not to boast and praise ourselves, because without Him, we would have no goodness in ourselves. He tells us:

﴿... هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِذْ أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَإِذْ أَنْتُمْ أَجِنَّةٌ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ فَلَا تُرْكُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ اتَّقَى﴾

... He knows you best since [the time] He produced you from the earth, and since you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. So do not pretend yourselves to be pure: He knows best those who are Godwary.

- Surah an-Najm, 53:32

﴿... وَكَوَلَّا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ مَا زَكَ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ أَبَدًا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَنْ يَشَاءُ...﴾

Were it not for Allāh's grace and His mercy upon you, not one of you would ever be pure. But Allāh purifies whomever He wishes...

- Surah an-Nur, 24:21

The munājāt (whispered prayer) of Imām Ali ('a) that we recite in the month of Ramadān is a good way to realize that all good attributes (sifāt) come from Allāh. In this du'a, we say to Allāh, 'You are the Master, I am the slave; You are the Generous One, I am the miser; You are the Living One, I am the lifeless; You are the Kind One, I am mean; You are All-Knowing, I am ignorant; You are All-Powerful, I am weak; You are Truly Needless, I am in need of You,' and so on.

It is also for this reason, that a true faithful (mu'min) is never pleased when others praise him or her. Imām Ali ('a) describes the faithful as follows:

"When any one of them is spoken of highly, he says: 'I know myself better than others, and my Lord knows me better than I know myself. O Allāh do not deal with me according to what they say, and make me better than what they think of me and forgive me (those shortcomings) which they do not know.'

- Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 193¹

One can therefore say that *Shirk* in the Sifāt of Allāh is both, to believe that Allāh's attributes are separate from His Essence (Dhāt), as well as to associate others in the

¹ The sermon to Hamām on the qualities of the Godwary (*muttaqun*).

attributes of Allāh, as if they have earned those attributes themselves, independent of Allāh. And Tawhid in the Sifāt of Allāh is to believe that the attributes of Allāh are one and the same as His Essence and also that all good attributes belong to Him alone. The many Names (asmā) of Allāh are also His attributes and Allāh (s.w.t.) says:

﴿قُلْ اَدْعُوا اللّٰهَ اَوْ اَدْعُوا الرَّحْمٰنَ اَيّٰمًا تَدْعُوۡا فَلَهُۥ الۡاَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنٰى...﴾

Say, 'Call "Allāh" or call "the All-beneficent" (ar-Rahmān). Whichever [of His Names] you may call out, to Him belong the most beautiful Names'...

- Surah al-Isra, 17:110

Allāh also reminds us:

﴿يٰۤاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اَنْتُمْ الْفُقَرَاءُ اِلَى اللّٰهِ وَاللّٰهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيْدُ﴾

O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allāh, and Allāh - He is the All-sufficient, the All-praiseworthy.

- Surah al-Fātir, 35:15

This is also the secret of why it is so recommended to praise and glorify Allāh.

For example, as we recite *Subhān Allāh!* (*Glory be to Allāh*) repeatedly, we also realize that in fact all the glory belongs to Allāh Alone and no one else besides Him! And just as He has no partners in His Essence, no one shares His attributes either and there are no partners in Sifāt of Allāh, the Mighty and Glorious.

A true *muwahhid* (monotheist) should therefore never praise himself or herself and say, 'I have such-and-such good qualities', 'I have the power and knowledge to do this', and so on.

A man once knocked the door of Rasulullāh (s)'s house and when Rasulullāh (s) asked, 'who is it?', the man replied, 'I' (as if with pride). Rasulullāh (s) got angry when he heard this and he came out saying, 'who dares to say "I"? Let it be known that no one has the right to say "I" (with pride) except Allāh, who declares: "I am the Almighty (al-Jabbār) and I am the Subduer (al-Qahhār)!"'

During the time of Nabi Musa ('a), there lived a rich man named Qārūn who was very arrogant and used to love showing off his wealth and boasting, 'I have got this wealth by my own knowledge!'

﴿قَالَ اِنَّمَا اُوْتِيْتُهُ عَلٰى عِلْمٍ عِنْدِي...﴾

He said, 'I have indeed been given [all] this because of the knowledge that I have.'...

- Surah al-Qasas, 28:78

Allāh caused the earth to open up and swallow him along with all his wealth and then Allāh reminds us:

﴿... أَوْلَمْ يَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَهْلَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مَنْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُ قُوَّةً وَأَكْثَرَ

﴿جَمَعًا...﴾

...Did he (Qārūn) not know that Allāh had already destroyed before him some of the generations who were more powerful than him and greater in amassing [wealth]?...

- Surah al-Qasas 28:78

﴿فَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلْنَاهُ نِعْمَةً مِنَّا قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيْتُهَا عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ بَلْ

﴿هِيَ فِتْنَةٌ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

When distress befalls man, he prays to Us. Then, when We grant him a blessing from Us, he says, 'I was given it by virtue of [my] knowledge.' Rather, it is a test, but most of them do not know.

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:49

Tawhid and Shirk in the Actions (Af'āl) of Allāh

Tawhid in the Actions (Af'āl) of Allāh means to believe firmly that Allāh not only created everything and brought them into existence, but He remains in control of them and He sustains the entire universe. Allāh says in the Qur'ān:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمْسِكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِن زَالَتَا إِنْ أُمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنْ

﴿بَعْدِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا﴾

Indeed Allāh holds the heavens and the earth from falling apart, and if they were to fall apart there is none who can stop them (for falling apart) except Him. Indeed He is All-forbearing, All-forgiving.

- Surah al-Fātir, 35:41

Other verses of the Qur'ān that show that Allāh is in command of everything in the universe, are for example:

﴿اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ

﴿اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا﴾

It is Allāh who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them, that you may know that Allāh has power over all things, and that Allāh encompasses all things in knowledge.

- Surah at-Talāq, 65:12

﴿وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ
لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ﴾

He made the night and the day for you, and the sun, the moon and the stars are in service by His command. There are indeed signs in that for a people who apply reason.

- Surah an-Nahl 16:12

One of the most common attributes of Allāh is that of **ar-Rabb**. Ar-Rabb means the Sustainer or Provider. A Sustainer is one who keeps something alive and maintains it so that it does not perish. *Shirk* in the Actions (Af'āl) of Allāh is to believe that there is anyone or anything else that sustains us or gives us our needs independent of Allāh. Tawhid in the Actions (Af'āl) of Allāh is to believe that even when we get things from others (such as our halāl wages from an employer), it is actually Allāh giving us but through someone else and when we are sick and a doctor cures us, it is actually Allāh curing us through the doctor and the medicine, and so on. That is why Nabi Ibrāhim ('a) said about Allāh (s.w.t.):

﴿وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ . وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ﴾

And it is He who provides me with food and drink, and when I get sick, it is He who cures me.

- Surah ash-Shu'arā, 26:79-80

Sometimes we claim that Allāh is our Provider (Rabb) but if we hoard a lot of money because we are afraid that no one will look after us when we grow old, then it is a sign of *shirk* in the Af'āl of Allāh. Similarly, if we commit harām only to keep our jobs because we are afraid of becoming poor, then it shows that we don't really believe that Allāh is in control of our lives and sustenance. Instead it would show that we believe that someone else has the power to control our sustenance besides Allāh. Allāh has promised that as long as we go out and seek our sustenance He will feed us:

﴿وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا...﴾

There is no animal on the earth, but that its sustenance lies with Allāh...

- Surah Hud, 11:6

﴿إِنِّي تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ مَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا...﴾

Indeed I have put my trust in Allāh, my Lord and your Lord. There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock...

- Surah Hud, 11:56

And Allāh also tells us that it is Shaytān who frightens us with poverty:

﴿الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُمْ مَغْفِرَةً مِنْهُ وَفَضْلًا وَاللَّهُ
وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

Shaytān frightens you of poverty and prompts you to [commit] indecent acts. But Allāh promises you His forgiveness and grace, and Allāh is all-bounteous, all-knowing.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:268

﴿إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُونِي إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

That is only Satan frightening his followers! So fear them not, and fear Me, should you be faithful.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:175

Other examples: A person may fear an army or a tyrant or travelling on an airplane or the strength of another human being, or a nation that calls itself a 'superpower' and so on. These are also all because of *shirk* in the Af'āl of Allāh. A person who is convinced that no one can overcome the Will and Power of Allāh, only places his or her trust in Allāh and thereafter, they fear no one because they know that everything is under Allāh's control and dominion. In the words of Allāh (s.w.t.):

﴿إِنْ كُلُّ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّا آتِي الرَّحْمَانَ عَبْدًا﴾

There is none in the heavens and the earth but he comes to the All-beneficent as a servant.

- Surah Maryam, 19:93

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ...﴾

No soul can (even) die except by Allāh's permission...

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:145

A farmer who plants seeds and then worries about his crops also displays *shirk* in the actions of Allāh because he believes that other factors can influence the outcome of his crops and can have an independent action over Allāh's Will. A farmer who is a true *muwahhid* sleeps at ease knowing every raindrop falls only by Allāh's Will and nothing can escape His Knowledge or Permission. And so he surrenders to what Allāh wishes to do.

A person who is ill and has sought all the medical attention and help he or she can find, must then place his or her trust in Allāh and surrender to His Will. To worry

about the outcome of the surgery or if one will die, etc. is also a form for *shirk* if one believes that someone (like the doctor) or something can influence when and how one dies. A true muwahhid is always conscious that even the number of breathes he or she will take in life is in Allāh's hands and by His Will alone.

In summary, Tawhid in the Af'āl of Allāh is shown by having fear of no one and nothing by Allāh and *Shirk* in the Af'āl of Allāh is the opposite – to fear something or someone other than Allāh.

Allāh reminds us:

﴿وَإِنْ يَمْسَسْكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ
يُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

Should Allāh visit you with some distress, there is no one to remove it except Him; and should He desire any good for you, none can stand in the way of His grace: He grants it to whomever He wishes of His servants, and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.

- Surah Yunus, 10:107

Elsewhere the Quran says:

﴿وَمَا بِكُمْ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فَإِلَيْهِ تَجْأَرُونَ . ثُمَّ إِذَا كُشِفَ
الضُّرُّ عَنْكُمْ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِنْكُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ﴾

Whatever blessing you have is from Allāh, then when a distress befalls you, you make pleas to Him. Then when He removes the distress from you, behold, a part of them ascribe partners to their Lord.

- Surah an-Nahl 16:53-54

One of the most important ways in which we show that we truly believe that all good actions come from Allāh is to always thank Allāh and also to thank Him *first* before thanking others who are just the means and the agent of that good that we receive.

Most people thank others without acknowledging Allāh, as if they could have gotten that good, had it not been for Allāh's Will and Action. And this is perhaps the meaning of the verse of Qur'ān:

﴿وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ﴾

And most of them do not believe in Allāh without ascribing partners to Him.

- Surah Yusuf, 12:106

To praise a creature while ignoring the Creator is therefore a form of *shirk* in the actions (af'āl) of Allāh. In explaining the verse of Qur'ān above, Imām Ja'far as-

Sādiq ('a) said that one form of *shirk* is when a person says, 'if so-and-so had not been there, I would have been destroyed'. Or 'if so-and-so had been there, I would have got that thing.' Or 'if so-and-so had not been there to help me, my children would have perished!'

Instead, Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) continued to explain, a person should say, 'if Allāh had not helped me through so-and-so, I would have been destroyed' and so on.

How often do we hear ourselves saying, 'if so-and-so had not been there, I don't know what I would have done!?' Or 'if so-and-so had been there, this would not have happened to me!?' It doesn't mean we cannot say this. But what Imām as-Sādiq ('a) meant is that even when we say this, we should be aware that we would only be helped by so-and-so through Allāh. The problem is when we forget Allāh and truly believe that someone can help us by his or her own imagined power, wealth, influence, and so on.

Can you see how differently our realization of Allāh's blessings would be if every time we thanked someone we said, 'All thanks be to Allāh who helped me through you' or 'May Allāh bless you for His help to me through you' and so on?

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) and the Beggar

A man named Masma b. Abd al-Malik relates that Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was at Mina (just outside Makkah) when a beggar approached him. Imām as-Sādiq ('a) ordered that a bunch of grapes be given to him. The beggar said, 'I do not need these, if possible give me money.' The Imām ('a) did not give him anything but said, 'May Allāh make you self-sufficient.'

After this another beggar approached. Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) picked up three grapes from the bunch and offered them to him. The beggar picked them up and said, 'All Praise is for Allāh who has given me sustenance.' Imām as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'Wait!', and he placed as many grapes as his hands could hold. Twice again he gave him the same quantity. The beggar thanked Allāh again.

Imām as-Sādiq ('a) again stopped him and asked his servant how much money they had. The servant replied, 'Twenty dirhams.' The Imām ('a) ordered him to give these to the beggar. The beggar took the money and said, 'All praise is for Allāh alone. O Allāh You are the Sustainer, You are One, there is no partner for You.' Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) again stopped him. Then the Imām ('a) removed his outer shirt and gave it to the beggar and said, 'Wear it.' The beggar put the shirt on and thanked Allāh who had bestowed him with the dress and made him happy. At this stage the beggar turned towards the Imām ('a) and said, 'O slave of Allāh, may Allāh reward you for this!' After this he went his way. The narrator (Masma) says that if the beggar had not addressed the Imām ('a) like this, 'I felt the Imām would have continued to give him gifts for his thankfulness to Allāh.'

In conclusion then, one who believes in Tawhid should accept all the actions of Allāh with humility and surrender, even if he or she is tested with illness, poverty, or death of loved ones. He or she should not question Allāh's actions and ask, 'why did this happen?', 'why is so hot?', 'why did it not rain?', 'why hasn't Allāh given me wealth or children?', 'why did this young child die?' and so on.

To question Allāh's actions or believe that our opinion should also play a role in Allāh's actions and Will is a form of *shirk* in Allāh's actions, even if we outwardly claim to believe in Tawhid and we pray and fast.

Lesson 3

Tawhīd vs. Shīrk (Cont'd)

Tawhid and Shirk in the Obedience (Tā'ah) of Allāh

Tawhid in the Obedience (Tā'ah) of Allāh means not to associate any partners to Allāh by obeying anyone against Allāh's orders. A true *muwahhid* (believer in Tawhid) does not regard anyone else fit for obedience except Allāh. Even when he or she obeys his or her parents, for example, it is because Allāh has ordered it and therefore it is actually an obedience to Allāh. Unless of course the parents ask them to do something against Allāh's commands.

As an example from the Qur'ān of whom Allāh wants us to obey, Allāh says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ...﴾

O you who have faith! Obey Allāh and obey the Messenger and those vested with authority (Ulil Amr) among you...

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:59

Ulil Amr are the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) who have been given authority by Allāh to represent Rasulullāh (s) after him. Since this command to obey them is from Allāh, it means obeying Rasulullāh (s) and the Ulil Amr is part of Tawhid in the Obedience (Tā'ah) of Allāh.

It is also for this reason that Allāh says:

﴿مَنْ يُطِعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ...﴾

Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allāh...

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:80

﴿...وَمَا آتَاكُمْ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا...﴾

...And whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, then keep away (from it)...

- Surah al-Hashr, 59:7

In other words, because Allāh Himself is ordering us to obey His Messenger, therefore obeying Rasulullāh (s) is not a form of *shirk*. It is the same as obeying Allāh and it is, in fact, necessary for us to say we practice Tawhid in the Obedience (Tā'ah) of Allāh.

At the same time, to follow or obey anyone else as the Ulil Amr, Imām, Khalifa, spiritual leader, etc. whom Allāh has not commanded to follow - or even forbidden us to follow - is a form of *shirk* in the Obedience of Allāh.

Similarly, committing sins is a form of *shirk* in the obedience to Allāh. Why? Because a person who obeys his or her desires or the whispers of Shaytān or even a friend who tells him or her to do something wrong, is associating a partner to Allāh in his or her obedience and is obeying two masters: Allāh and Shaytān, or Allāh and his or her desires, or Allāh and another sinful person.

To show that sinful desires are like a 'god' and obeying them is a form of *shirk*, Allāh tells us in the Qur'ān:

﴿أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ...﴾

Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god...

- Surah al-Jāthiya, 45:23

Tawhid and Shirk in the Worship ('Ibādah) of Allāh

Tawhid in the worship ('ibādah) of Allāh is that firstly, a person should not worship or prostrate before anyone or anything besides Allāh.

Sometimes however, a person worships Allāh outwardly only but in his or her heart, he or she worships something besides Allāh such as wealth or a career or job or a friend or games, and so on. This only becomes apparent when a person has to choose between Allāh and the other 'god'. For example, if a person is watching their favourite show or talking to a friend and it is time for salāh, who do they choose? If they ignore salāh – which is like talking to Allāh, meeting with Him and spending time with Him privately – then it shows that they idolize and 'worship' the show or friend more than Allāh. Similarly if a person worships wealth, they will give up salāh because of their business or job.

Another danger and form of *shirk* in the worship ('ibādah) of Allāh is when a person worships Allāh but their intention (niyyah) is not to worship Allāh alone. For example, they may pray to Allāh but they also desire to show off to others who are around them. Or they may fast in the month of Ramadān for the pleasure of Allāh but also to lose some weight and go on a diet. Or they may go for Hajj but also to do some business. All such acts of worship are *shirk* in the Worship ('Ibādah) of Allāh.

Allāh refuses to accept any worship that is not done purely and 100% for Him alone. Even if we worship Allāh 99.99% and include someone or something else as only 0.01%, it is rejected by Allāh.

To worship Allāh but also with the intention to impress others is a sin and is called “riyā”. We have studied about the sin of riyā in Book 5 (under Akhlāq) but here we will mention just some examples from Qur’ān and hadith:

Allāh condemns those who pray only to be seen by others:

﴿فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ . الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ . الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ﴾

Woe to them who pray, - those who are heedless of their prayers, those who show off.

- Surah al-Mā’un, 107:4-6

﴿إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كُسَالَى يُرَاءُونَ النَّاسَ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا﴾

The hypocrites indeed seek to deceive Allāh, but it is He who outwits them. When they stand up for prayer, they stand up lazily, showing off to the people and not remembering Allāh except a little.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:142

In other words, a person might be a Muslim and *muwahhid* (monotheist) in his or her belief but a mushrik (polytheist) and munāfiq (hypocrite) in his or her ‘ibādah.

Rasulullāh (s) once said, ‘what I fear for you most is the *minor shirk*.’ So someone asked him, ‘O Rasulullāh, what does *minor shirk* mean?’ and he replied, ‘it is riyā. On the Day of Judgement, when Allāh will reward His creatures for their deeds, He will say to those who did riyā, ‘go to those whom you wanted to impress with your good deeds and ask them to reward you!’²

Often when Allāh mentions His worship, He also mentions that it should be done sincerely for Him alone.

﴿وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ...﴾

Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allāh, sincere in their faith to Him only...

- Surah al-Bayyinah, 98:5

﴿قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ﴾

² Allama Dastghayb, *Dhunub al-Kabirah*, chapter on shirk. It is perhaps called minor shirk because it is committed by a Muslim and therefore does not make him a mushrik from a fiqh point-of-view. Riyā is also called “hidden shirk” (shirk al-khafiyy).

Say, 'Indeed I have been commanded to worship Allāh with exclusive faith in Him,
- Surah az-Zumar, 39:11

﴿قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَقِيمُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ عِندَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ
الدِّينَ كَمَا بَدَأَكُمْ تَعُودُونَ﴾

Say, 'My Lord has commanded justice,' and [He has commanded,] 'Set your heart [on Him] at every occasion of prayer, and call out to Him, putting your exclusive faith in Him..'

- Surah al-A'rāf, 7:29

A person who worships Allāh but also associates others in the worship will have the most regret on the Day of Judgement because he or she loses this world as well as the Hereafter. He or she struggles hard to worship Allāh but it is all useless because it is not for Allāh only and therefore there is nothing for him or her in the Hereafter.

Thus Allāh commands us:

﴿...فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا﴾

...So whoever hopes to meet his Lord - let him act righteously, and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord.

- Surah al-Kahf 18:110

In fact, some people will end up in Hellfire because of their *shirk* in the 'ibādah of Allāh. Abu Basir was a companion of Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) and he narrates that he heard Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) saying that on the Day of Judgement some people who prayed salāh all their lives will be brought before Allāh and told, 'you worshipped only to show off to others' and then they will be sent to Hellfire. Others will be reciters of Qur'ān and will be told, 'your intention was only to impress people with your voice when reciting Qur'ān' and they too will be sent to Hellfire. Others will have given a lot of charity but always to have their name mentioned and they will be sent to Hellfire because they worshipped Allāh but also so that people would praise them for being generous. And some people will have died in jihād but they will be told, 'you fought only to show off your fighting skills and for people to see how brave and courageous you were' and they too will be sent to Hell even though they died in jihād.

We see therefore that the most important thing in any 'ibādah is the intention (niyyah). Whatever we do we must do it for Allāh only and once we have done it, we should hide our good deeds and in fact forget about them so that we don't mention them to others even many years later.

Lesson 4

The Qur'ān & Its Terminologies

In order to understand the Qur'ān better and to equip ourselves with the right skills to undertake a deeper study of the Qur'ān, it is necessary that we are aware of the various terminologies that are used by experts of Qur'ān to classify and categorize different verses (āyāt) of the Qur'ān. In this lesson and the next, we shall review some of the most common terminologies and give examples of them.

Surah and Juz

A surah of Qur'ān means a 'chapter' of the Qur'ān. The plural of Surah is Suwar. In total, Allāh revealed 114 suwar. The order in which the suwar of Qur'ān are arranged today is not the order in which they were revealed. For example, the first surah in our copies of the Qur'ān is Surah al-Fātiha but we know the first verses (āyāt) of Qur'ān to be revealed were the first five verses of Surah al-'Alaq (96).

Sometimes Allāh would reveal a complete surah to Rasullāh (s) and sometimes He would reveal to him only some āyāt. Rasullāh (s) had scribes whom he would instruct to write down the āyāt and he would tell them where to place them i.e. in which surah.

Much later on, the Muslims wanted to find a way to recite the whole Qur'ān in one month, such as in the month of Ramadān. So they divided the Qur'ān in 30 parts (one for each day). Each part is called a Juz and the plural of Juz is Ajzā.

The number of Suwar in a Juz can vary. For example, the first Juz only has Surah al-Fātiha and Surah al-Baqarah and Surah al-Baqarah is not even complete in this Juz and it continues on in the 2nd Juz. But as opposed to this, the last Juz (called Juz 'Ammā) has 37 suwar from Surah an-Nabā (78) to Surah an-Nās (114). This is because all the Makki suwar, which are shorter, have been placed at the end of the Qur'ān; and as we recite the Qur'ān from the start to the end, the suwar get shorter.

The longest surah in the Qur'ān is Surah al-Baqarah (2), which has 286 āyāt. And the shortest surah in the Qur'ān is Surah al-Kawthar (108), which has only 3 āyāt.

Every surah of the Qur'ān begins with "Bismillahir Rahmānir Rahim" (*In the Name of Allāh, the Most Kind, the Most Merciful*)³ except for Surah at-Tawbah (9) which talks a lot about the punishment and wrath of Allāh against the evildoers and therefore it does not begin with the Mercy (Rahmah) of Allāh. However the Basmalah occurs in the middle of Surah an-Naml (27) and therefore Surah an-Naml has the Basmalah twice and the entire Qur'ān still has 114 Basmalahs.

³ And this is known as the "Basmalah".

Makki and Madani

Rasulullāh (s) preached in Makkah for 12 years before migrating to Madina and preaching there for 11 years. The Qur'ān was therefore revealed to Rasulullāh (s) over a period of 23 years. Those suwar of Qur'ān that were revealed in Makkah are called Makki Suwar and those that were revealed in Madina are called Madani.

Makki suwar are typical short in length and they discuss matters of aqāid (usul ad-din) such as Allāh being only One, about the Day of Judgement, Paradise and Hellfire. This is because in the early days of Islām, the people to whom Rasulullāh (s) preached were mostly idol worshippers and did not believe in life after death. Most of the suwar in the last part of the Qur'ān (Juz 'Amma) are Makki suwar.

A Madani surah is usually long and it discusses matters of furu' such as the laws of Islām regarding salāh, sawm, marriage, divorce, inheritance, matters related to social etiquette, political affairs, the Muslim community, and so on. This is because Madani suwar were revealed after the establishment of an Islāmic State in Madina and in the midst of those who were mostly Muslims. Madani suwar also discuss the history of past prophets and relationships with the Jews and Christians whom the Muslims interacted with in Madina and its neighbouring areas.

Most copies of the Qur'ān will mention whether a surah is Makki or Madani. Some copies of the Qur'ān even have an index at the back to show a list of all the suwar and where they were revealed.

Knowing where a surah was revealed is extremely important. Sometimes we call tell if a hadith is forged because the hadith will mention an āyah of Qur'ān and whom it was revealed for or an incident related to the āyah. But if the surah was, for example, Makki and the incident took place later on in Madina, then we know the hadith explaining that āyah is not true and was forged.

Nāsikh and Mansukh

When the Qur'ān was being revealed, Allāh placed some laws (shari'ah) for the Muslims and then changed or lifted those laws later. Sometimes He placed laws that were easier and then the laws were made stricter. This was to make the Muslims realize certain things or out of kindness to them because many of them were idol worshippers and it took time to change the whole community. This is different from now when a non-Muslim can easily integrate into Islām without needing to adjust slowly.

In other words, sometimes an āyah of Qur'ān would be revealed and then later on, another āyah would be revealed to cancel the first one or modify it. Both verses however would still remain as part of the Qur'ān. The original āyah that got cancelled is called the Mansukh (Abrogated) verse. And the new āyah that cancels the old one is called the Nāsikh (Abrogating) verse.

Here are some examples:

The Ayah of Najwa

There was a time when the Muslims in Madina were constantly asking Rasulullāh (s) questions to an extent of bothering him with unnecessary questions, just for the sake of asking. To test the Muslims and see if they really were so interested in gaining knowledge from Rasulullāh (s), Allāh revealed a verse to say that anyone who wanted to ask a question had to give some money to the poor first:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نَاجَيْتُمُ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ نَجْوَاكُمْ صَدَقَةً ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَأَطْهَرُ فَإِن لَّمْ تَجِدُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾

O you who have faith! When you talk secretly to the Apostle, offer a charity before your secret talk. That is better for you and purer. But if you cannot afford [to make the offering], then Allāh is indeed all-forgiving, all-merciful.

- Surah al-Mujādilah, 58:12

This law was for the rich only and not applicable for the poor. Suddenly people started thinking about their money and they stopped asking questions even though they could have done so by giving even a dirham to the poor!

All the exegetes (mufasirrun) of Qur'ān agree that when this verse was revealed, no one acted on it except for Imām Ali ('a). He had one dinar with him. He exchanged it for 10 dirhams and he gave the poor one dirham at a time until he had asked 10 questions from Rasulullāh (s). Then Allāh (s.w.t.) revealed another āyah to cancel this āyah and it is the following:

﴿أَشْفَقْتُمْ أَن تُقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ نَجْوَاكُمْ صَدَقَاتٍ فَإِذْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَتَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

Were you afraid of offering charities before your secret talks? So, as you did not do it, and Allāh was forgiving to you, maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt, and obey Allāh and His Messenger. And Allāh is well aware of what you do.

- Surah al-Mujādilah, 58:13

So this verse 13 is the Nāsikh and the previous verse 12 is the Mansukh.

The Number of Warriors

Allāh revealed to Rasulullāh (s) about the faithful (mu'mineen):

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ حَرِّضِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَى الْقِتَالِ إِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ عَشْرُونَ صَابِرُونَ يَغْلِبُوا
مِائَتِينَ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفًا مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ﴾

O Prophet! Urge on the faithful to fight: If there be twenty patient men among you, they shall overcome two hundred; and if there be a hundred of you, they shall overcome a thousand of the faithless, because they are a people who do not understand.

- Surah an-Anfāl, 8:65

The verse was to tell the faithful that with their faith and patience and with Allāh on their side, one of them was sufficient against ten of the faithless. But then there were some amongst the Muslims who were cowards and could not face the enemy with a ratio of one against ten. So they expressed their fears to Rasullāh (s) and Allāh revealed:

﴿الآن خَفَّفَ اللَّهُ عَنْكُمْ وَعَلِمَ أَنَّ فِيكُمْ ضَعْفًا فَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ مِائَةٌ صَابِرَةٌ يَغْلِبُوا
مِائَتَيْنِ وَإِنْ يَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أَلْفٌ يَغْلِبُوا أَلْفَيْنِ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ﴾

Now Allāh has lightened your burden, knowing that there is weakness in you. So if there be a hundred patient men among you, they shall overcome two hundred; and if there be a thousand, they shall overcome two thousand, by Allāh's permission; and Allāh is with the patient.

- Surah al-Anfāl, 8:66

So the ratio was reduced to one Muslim against two of the faithless instead of one Muslim against ten of the faithless. This verse 66 is the Nāsikh and the previous verse 65 is the Mansukh.

There are other examples as well, where Allāh changed some of the laws regarding some punishments in Islām, the laws of inheritance, the permission to fight in Jihād to defend oneself, and so on.

Lesson 5

The Qur'ān & Its Terminologies (cont'd)

Muhkam and Mutashābih

Some āyāt of the Qur'ān are very direct in their message. As soon as we read them, the meaning is obvious and it can have only one meaning. There is no room for another interpretation. Such an āyah is called a Muhkam (Definite) verse. The plural of muhkam is muhkamāt.

And other āyāt of the Qur'ān cannot be interpreted directly. We must study them in relation to other āyāt of the Qur'ān in order to extract their meaning otherwise we can easily misunderstand what the āyah means to say. This type of an āyah is called a Mutashābih (Indirect) verse. The plural of mutashābih is mutashābihāt.

Some people define the muhkamāt as “clear” verses and the mutashābihāt as “ambiguous” verses. Then they debate why Allāh has made some of the āyāt of the Qur'ān ambiguous i.e. why verses have multiple meanings that cause confusion. And some Muslims (like the Wahabbi) interpret every verse of the Qur'ān literally. If it does not make sense literally they say we should just read and accept the āyah but not ask questions about it. But of course that does not make any sense because why would Allāh reveal a verse if He did not want us to know what it means!

Mutashābihāt therefore does not mean verses of Qur'ān that have multiple, confusing or contradicting meanings. Rather mutashābihāt refers to those verses with deeper meanings and we need to look at other verses of the Qur'ān in order to understand them.

And in fact, the āyāt (verses) of the Qur'ān are all interdependent. Some verses act as muhkamāt to help us understand other mutashābihāt verses and in some cases, the mutashābihāt act as muhkamāt to help us understand other verses.

The following are examples of muhkamāt and mutashābihāt verses in the Qur'ān. Look at the following āyah:

﴿الرَّحْمَانُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى﴾

The All-beneficent, settled on the Throne.

- Surah Tā Hā, 20:5

At first we are not sure whether to interpret this āyah literally or not i.e. that Allāh sits on a Throne. Then we read other āyāt like:

﴿فَاطِرُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ... لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ...﴾

The Originator of the heavens and the earth... nothing is like Him...

- Surah ash-Shura, 42:11

This āyah, among others, makes us realize that Allāh is not a physical body limited by time and space and therefore 'settled on the Throne' means having dominance and mastery over the universe and not literally sitting on a throne. So the first āyah is a mutashābih verse and the second is a muhkam verse.

Here is another example:

﴿إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ﴾

looking at their Lord,

- Surah al-Qiyāmah, 75:23

The āyah above suggests that people will be able to look at their Lord on the Day of Judgement but then we find another āyah in the Qur'ān that says:

﴿لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ﴾

Eyes cannot reach Him, yet He reaches (even) the sights (of others), and He is the All-gracious, the All-aware.

- Surah al-An'ām, 6:103

This clarifies that Allāh cannot be seen with the eye and therefore "looking at their Lord" on the Day of Judgement means looking towards Him for mercy, salvation, and so forth, just like we "look" forward to something happening but it doesn't mean literally seeing with the eyes. So the first āyah is mutashābih and the second one is muhkam.

Here is a third example:

﴿... نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ...﴾

... They (the hypocrites) have forgotten Allāh, so He has forgotten them....

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:67

If we interpret this mutashābih āyah literally then it means that Allāh can also forget! But then we find other muhkam verses such as:

﴿... وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا﴾

... and your Lord is not forgetful.

- Surah Maryam, 19:64

As well as:

﴿قَالَ عَلِمَهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي فِي كِتَابٍ لَا يَضِلُّ رَبِّي وَلَا يَنْسَى﴾

*He (Nabi Musa (‘a)) said, ‘Their knowledge is with my Lord, in a Book. My Lord neither makes any error **nor forgets.**’*

- Surah Tā Hā, 20:52

This makes it clear for us that ‘*He (Allāh) has forgotten them*’ in 9:67 means He has left them alone to go astray instead of guiding them because they have neglected and forgotten Allāh and have been occupied with the world and its pleasures.

And as a final example, look at this verse:

﴿... وَلَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذُنُوبِهِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ﴾

...The guilty will not be questioned about their sins.

- Surah al-Qasas, 28:78

The verse above seems to suggest that the criminals will not be questioned for their sins. But why they ‘*will not be questioned*’ is clarified by the following muhkam āyah:

﴿فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذَنْبِهِ إِنْسٌ وَلَا جَانٌّ... يُعْرَفُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَاهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ

﴿بِالنَّوَاصِي وَالْأَقْدَامِ﴾

On that day neither humans will be questioned about their sins nor jinn.... the guilty will be recognized by their mark; so they will be seized by the forelocks and the feet.

- Surah ar-Rahmān, 55:39-41

Tarjumah, Tafsir, Ta’wil and Tadabbur

Tarjumah means ‘translation’. For example, when you read an āyah of the Qur’ān in English, you are reading the tarjumah of the original āyah that is in Arabic. In your diniyat text books, every āyah of Qur’ān is given in Arabic followed by its tarjumah in English.

Tafsir is the commentary of the āyāt of Qur’ān. A Mufassir (one who does tafsir) explains to us more about the verses of the Qur’ān. A tafsir may explain, for example, what each Arabic word in an āyah means, any special grammar points about the āyah, the history behind the āyah, when it was revealed, for whom it was revealed, any hadith from Rasulullāh (s) or the Imāms (‘a) about that particular āyah, and so on.

Tadabbur is to reflect on the āyāt of the Qur’ān and try and relate to them in our own lives. For example, the Qur’ān mentions that backbiting is like eating the flesh of dead body of the person we are backbiting:

﴿..وَلَا يَغْتَبِ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ..﴾

...and do not backbite one another. Will any of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it...

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:12

Now, after reading this āyah, we may reflect on it (i.e. do tadabbur) and think of why Allāh has given this example and how it applies to our society today. Of course when we do tadabbur, we are not saying that what we have thought of is **the** meaning of the verse that Allāh intended. It is simply our own realizations and reflections. It is ok to do tadabbur as long as the views we come up with does not contradict any other āyah of the Qur'ān or the authentic ahādith. In fact, the Qur'ān itself encourages us not to just recite it but to ponder on its verses:

﴿أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا﴾

Do they not reflect (do tadabbur of) the Qur'ān, or are there locks on the hearts?

- Surah Muhammad, 47:24

And lastly, Ta'wil is the hidden meaning or inner interpretation of an āyah. Every āyah of Qur'ān can have up to seventy different inner meanings. That is why the Qur'ān is so profound and deep and it is a living miracle and still relevant and useful even 1400 years later. However ta'wil cannot be done by anyone. It can only be done by Rasulullāh (s) and the ma'sumeen ('a) from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) whom the Qur'ān calls 'those firmly grounded in knowledge' (ar-rāsikhuna fil 'ilm).

In the words of the Qur'ān:

﴿...وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ...﴾

...But no one knows its (the Qur'ān's) interpretation (ta'wil) except Allāh and those firmly grounded in knowledge...

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:7

Rasulullāh (s) stressed that no one should try and give their own interpretation of the Qur'ān and he said, 'whoever interprets the Qur'ān according to his own opinion, reserves himself a seat in the Fire (of Hell).'⁴

Abu Basir reported from Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) that he said, 'whoever interprets the Qur'ān according to his own opinion, if he gets it right, he shall have no reward for it; and if he gets it wrong, he shall be further removed from paradise.'⁵

In other words, there is no benefit to forcing our own interpretation on a verse of Qur'ān even if it might be correct.

⁴ al-Fayd al-Kāshāni, *Tafsir as-Sāfi*, 3:7

⁵ Tabātabāi, *Tafsir al-Mizān*, 3:7

Why is there so much restriction and stress not to give our own ta'wil on the verses of the Qur'ān? Well, because if everyone did that, soon the Qur'ān will have a completely different meaning from what Allāh wanted it to have!

The Ma'sumeen ('a) can of course tell us the ta'wil of a verse. The beauty of their ta'wil is that it does not contradict the tafsir either i.e. the hidden meaning (ta'wil) can be true and so can the apparent meaning (tafsir). For example, Allāh says:

﴿فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ﴾

So let man consider his food

- Surah 'Abasa, 80:24

Then Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) has explained this verse with a ta'wil and said, 'it means, let man see where he gets his knowledge from' i.e. his spiritual food.

This is a beautiful meaning. The literal meaning is true, that we should look at the food we eat, how it grows in the earth, how Allāh makes the earth fertile, the water cycle and rain that helps the crops grow, the sun and its heat, the nutrients in the food and how they help our body to become strong and to fight illnesses, etc. and how all these blessings are signs from Allāh. But also, the ta'wil is true: knowledge feeds our minds and hearts just like food feeds our body. Just like bad food can harm our body, similarly bad knowledge can create doubt and disbelief in Allāh in our minds and hearts. So instead of taking every idea from anyone, we should look where it is coming from and ensure it is coming from a pure source before we put that knowledge 'into our minds' just like we put food 'into our bodies.'

Another example of ta'wil is for the following āyah:

﴿عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ . عَنِ النَّبَاِ الْعَظِيمِ . الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ . كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ . ثُمَّ كَلَّا

﴿سَيَعْلَمُونَ﴾

What is it about which they question each other?! [Is it] about the Great News, the one about which they differ? No indeed! They will soon know! Again, no indeed! They will soon know!

- Surah an-Nabā, 78:1-5

The tafsir of this āyah is that the "Great News" is the Day of Judgement and that is what the Qur'ān was referring to when the verse was revealed. But from the Imāms ('a) we also have a ta'wil that says the "Great News" (Nabā al-'Adheem) is Amir al-Mu'mineen Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a). This is also mentioned in the du'as of the Ma'sumeen ('a) such as in Du'a an-Nudba where Imām al-Hujjah al-Mahdi ('atfs) is referred to as 'Yabna Nabā al-'Adheem' meaning 'O Son of the Great News'.

The tafsir is also right and the ta'wil is also right because it is from a ma'sum Imām ('a) and because people are still 'asking each other' and arguing about the right of

Imām Ali (‘a). But of course ordinary people are not allowed to do such ta’wil of the Qur’ān.

On the other hand, the Wahabbi say any kind of ta’wil is harām and we should only understand the Qur’ān literally without trying to explain its inner meaning. And they say, if we don’t understand it then we should just keep quiet. But this makes no sense at all. For example, Allāh says:

﴿وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَكْمَىٰ وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا﴾

But whoever has been blind in this [world], will be blind in the Hereafter, and [even] more astray from the [right] way.

- Surah al-‘Isrā, 17:72

Now if we only interpret this literally, it means anyone who is visually-impaired and handicapped in this world will also be visually-impaired in the Hereafter. But the ta’wil means that whoever is ‘blind’ to the Truth and refuses to ‘see’ i.e. accept the Truth in this world then he or she will be raised literally blind on the Day of Judgement. We therefore need the ahādith of Rasullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) to understand the Qur’ān correctly.

Asbāb an-Nuzul

The word ‘asbāb’ is the plural of ‘sabab’, which means ‘reason’ or ‘cause’. And an-Nuzul means ‘revelation’. Therefore *asbāb an-nuzul* means ‘the Reasons for Revelation’ or ‘the Causes of Revelation’.

When we study the Qur’ān, it is important that we first ask: why was this āyah revealed? Was it for a particular person or a particular reason or incident that took place? In other words, we must try and find the sabab an-nuzul (cause of revelation) for that āyah.

Of course the Qur’ān is not a book of history only and it is a living Book that we can apply to our lives even today. But in order to make sure that we don’t give the āyāt of the Qur’ān wrong meanings or apply it incorrectly in our lives, we should try and understand what Allāh intended when He originally revealed every āyah.

For example, look at the following verse:

﴿سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَقَعِ﴾

An asker asked for a punishment bound to befall

- Surah al-Ma’ārij, 70:1

When we read this āyah initially, we have no idea what it is talking about. Thereafter we look at the books of history and tafsir (commentaries of Qur’ān) and we find that

this verse was revealed at Ghadir Khumm when Rasulullāh (s) declared Imām Ali (‘a) as his successor and said, *man kuntu mawlāhu fa hādha ‘Aliyyun mawlāhu* (whoever considers me to be his master, then this Ali is his master now). Then a man came to Rasulullāh (s) and said to him angrily, ‘is this from Allāh or are you appointing him only because he is your cousin and son-in-law?’ And Rasulullāh (s) assured the man it was from Allāh. Then the man looked up to the heavens, because he didn’t believe Rasulullāh (s), and prayed to Allāh, ‘O Allāh, if this is true, then strike me with Your punishment right now!’ And as soon as he said that, a stone fell from the heavens and hit the man on the head and killed him instantly.

This incident and story is the *sabab an-nuzul* for the verse. It tells us the Cause of Revelation. Thereafter we can learn from the verse the importance of Imām Ali (‘a)’s authority and guardianship (*wilāyah*) and realize that he was appointed by Allāh’s orders to succeed Rasulullāh (s).

Imām Ali (‘a) used to say, ‘Ask me (anything) about the Book of Allāh. By Allāh! There is not a single verse which was revealed during night or day, during travel or at home, but that Rasulullāh (s) read it to me and taught me its meanings...’⁶

⁶ Shaykh at-Tusi, *Amāli*.

Lesson 6

'Ilm al-Ghayb

'Ilm al-Ghayb literally means 'Knowledge of the Hidden'. When we say someone has knowledge of the 'Hidden' or the 'Unseen', it could mean knowledge of that which our physical eyes cannot see, such as the angels, the intermediate world where the dead go to ('ālam al-barzakh) and even knowledge of the Next World (ākhirah) and matters related to the Day of Judgement, Paradise (al-Jannah) and Hellfire (an-Nār).

But 'Ilm al-Ghayb could also refer to what is unknown of the past and future, or even present. The past might be knowledge of all the prophets and messengers that were sent and the nations that came and disappeared. The present may be what illness we may be suffering from, what we will earn today, who will die and who will be born today, what the weather will be like exactly, and so on. The future may be when we will die, or when the Imām ('atfs) will return or even when the world will come to an end.

Hidden Knowledge of the Anbiyā and Awsiyā

The Shi'ah Muslims as well as many Sunni Muslims who are not Wahabbi, all believe that the prophets and messengers of Allāh as well as their rightful successors (awsiyā) can also possess hidden knowledge and predict matters to occur in the future. In fact, some saintly individuals (awliyā) may also possess this knowledge through these anbiyā and awsiyā.

Muslims such as the Wahabbi strongly object to this and say it is *shirk* to believe that anyone can have 'Ilm al-Ghayb besides Allāh. To support their arguments, they quote verses of Qur'ān such as:

﴿قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ أَيَّانَ يُبْعَثُونَ﴾

Say, 'No one in the heavens or the earth knows the Unseen except Allāh, and they are not aware when they will be resurrected.'

- Surah al-Naml, 27:65

﴿وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبُرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ﴾

With Him are the keys of the Unseen; no one knows them except Him. He knows whatever there is in land and sea. No leaf falls without His knowing it, nor is there a

grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything fresh or withered but it is in a manifest Book.

- Surah al-An'ām, 6:59

﴿وَيَقُولُونَ لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَقُلْ إِنَّمَا الْغَيْبُ لِلَّهِ فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الْمُنتَظِرِينَ﴾

They say, 'Why has not some sign (i.e. miracle) been sent down to him from his Lord?' Say, '[The knowledge of] the Unseen belongs only to Allāh. So wait. I too am waiting along with you.'

- Surah Yunus, 10:20

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنزِلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَآذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

Indeed the knowledge of the Hour is with Allāh. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Indeed Allāh is All-knowing, All-aware.

- Surah Luqmān, 31:34

But in contrast to this, we find there are verses of Qur'ān that prove that others as well, may have 'Ilm al-Ghayb. For example:

﴿عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَىٰ غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا . إِلَّا مَنِ ارْتَضَىٰ مِنْ رَسُولٍ ...﴾

Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except to a messenger He approves of...

- Surah al-Jinn, 72:26-27

Or for example:

﴿...وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ ...﴾

...and they do not comprehend anything of His knowledge except what He wishes...

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:255

So how do we explain this apparent contradiction?

The answer is very simple: there is no contradiction; the verses that talk of 'ilm al-ghayb belonging to Allāh alone are emphasizing that no one can have hidden knowledge without Allāh's permission and independent of Him. In other words, such

verses are to let us know that soothsayers, astrologers and people who pretend to predict the future out of their own knowledge or through sorcery and magic, or communication with the jinn, should not be believed.

But this does not mean that Allāh cannot or will not give any of His hidden knowledge to those whom He appoints and who represent Him.

In fact, there are numerous examples in the Qur'ān of Allāh sharing His 'ilm al-ghayb with His prophets and messengers:

1. Allāh (s.w.t.) informs Rasulullāh (s) of a future Roman victory over the Persians:

﴿غُلِبَتِ الرُّومُ . فِي أَدْنَى الْأَرْضِ وَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ غَلِبِهِمْ سَيَغْلِبُونَ . فِي بَعْضِ
سِنِينَ ...﴾

Rome has been vanquished in a nearby territory, but following their defeat they will be victors in a few years.

- Surah al-Ankabut, 30:2-4

2. Allāh (s.w.t.) informs Rasulullāh (s) of a future victory over Makkah:

﴿لَقَدْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ رَسُولَهُ الرُّؤْيَا بِالْحَقِّ لَتَدْخُلَنَّ الْمَسْجِدَ الْحَرَامَ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ
آمِنِينَ ...﴾

Certainly Allāh has fulfilled His Messenger's vision in all truth: You will surely enter the Sacred Mosque, God willing, in safety,...

- Surah al-Fath, 48:27

3. Nabi 'Isa ('a) used to inform people of what they would eat in future and what they had hidden in their homes:

﴿... وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ...﴾

...And I will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses...

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:49

4. The mother of Nabi Musa ('a) is given hidden knowledge of the future that her son, Nabi Musa ('a) will return to her safely:

﴿وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا
تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ﴾

We revealed to Moses' mother, [saying], 'Nurse him; then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear or grieve, for We will restore him to you and make him one of the messengers.'

- Surah al-Qasas, 28:7

5. Allāh (s.w.t.) informs Rasulullāh (s) about the hidden history of past prophets:

﴿تِلْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ...﴾

These are accounts of the Unseen which We reveal to you...

- Surah Hud, 11:49

In the last āyah above, as well as 3:44, 12:102, and other āyāt, the phrase *min anbnā'il ghayb* (accounts of the Unseen) is used, which clearly categorize the news of the past as *ghayb* (hidden or unseen) knowledge.

It is therefore very clear that if human beings reveal any hidden knowledge that is from Allāh, it does not mean they are His partners or that it is *shirk*. What is *shirk* is to believe that someone can access *'ilm al-ghayb* on their own, without and even against Allāh's Will and Permission.

'Ilm al-Ghayb in Hadith

We have numerous ahādith from Rasulullāh (s) and the Aimmah from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in which they have predicted the future or revealed what is hidden in people's minds or even their past. Those who are opposed to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and their Shi'ah, argue that this is *shirk*. They also argue that if the Imāms knew the hidden they how did they get martyred? In other words, if Imām Ali ('a) knew he will be struck in the Masjid of Kufa on 19th Ramadān 40 AH, then why did he go to the masjid? If he knew, then it would be like suicide and if he didn't know then why do the Shi'ah say he had hidden knowledge of it? Similarly examples are quoted for Imām Husayn ('a) going to Karbala and the poisoning of the other Aimmah ('a).

There is no doubt that the Aimmah ('a) knew how they would be martyred and Rasulullāh (s) had informed them of this from what the archangel Jibrāil ('a) had told him. But the Aimmah ('a) also knew that this was Allāh's Will and because they had surrendered completely to Allāh's Will, they did go to their martyrdom with the intention of dying or taking their own lives but with the intention of surrendering to Allāh and letting His Will be done.

Here is an example of Imām Ali ('a) predicting his own martyrdom:

It is reported that when people gathered to pay allegiance (bay'ah) to Amir al-Mu'minin Imām Ali ('a), Abd al-Rahmān b. Muljam al-Murādi, may Allāh curse him, also came but Imām Ali ('a) refused to accept his pledge of allegiance twice to thrice. Finally he allowed him to pledge his allegiance. Then Imām Ali ('a) said, 'what prevents the most wretched person of the community from doing his wicked deed now? For I swear by Him in Whose Hand is my life (i.e. I swear by Allāh), you will colour this (with blood) from this' and he put his hand on his beard and his head.

When Ibn Muljam left, Imām Ali ('a) recited the following words of poetry:

*Stiffen your chest for death, for indeed death will meet you.
Do not show grief at death, when it arrives in your valley.*

Imām Ali ('a) called Ibn Muljam back a second time and warned him to be trustworthy and not to be treacherous or break his oath. Ibn Muljam, may Allāh curse him, protested and said to Imām Ali ('a), 'I have not seen you do this with anyone except me.' Then he left and Imām Ali ('a) said, 'I want what's good for him but he wants my death!'⁷

The following is another example of hidden knowledge that Imām Ali ('a) revealed that he was told of by Rasullāh (s):

Abd Allāh b. Abbās reports that he was with Imām Ali ('a) at Dhu Qār, where they were preparing for battle and Imām Ali ('a) predicted, 'exactly a thousand men will come from Kufa and pledge allegiance to me.'

Abd Allāh b. Abbās says he became worried that if the number of people that Imām Ali ('a) had predicted would be more or less then it would prove he was wrong. So he began to count them. After 999 men had come and pledged allegiance, the people stopped. Abd Allāh b. Abbās was now very anxious and began having doubts in his mind.

As he was thinking of this, he saw a man approaching alone. He was wearing a woolen cloak and he had a sword, a shield and some other weapons. He said to Imām Ali ('a), 'stretch out your hand so that I may pledge allegiance to you.'

This man was none other than Uways al-Qarani, whom Rasullāh (s) had blessed and predicted to Imām Ali ('a) that Uways would die a martyr fighting for the Truth. When Abd Allāh b. Abbās saw this, he was amazed at the accuracy of Imām Ali ('a)'s prediction.⁸

⁷ Shaykh Mufid, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, p. 6-7

⁸ Shaykh Mufid, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, p. 237-8

There are numerous other examples such as Imām Ali (‘a) informing his close Shi’ah how exactly and where they would be killed. These included Maytham at-Tammār, Kumayl b. Ziyād, Rushayd al-Hijri and Qanbar, the servant of Imām Ali (‘a). Similar examples of predicting the future and revealing hidden knowledge are widely reported from the other Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) as well.

Lesson 7

Ar-Raj'ah

(The Return of the Dead)

Definition

Ar-Raj'ah means 'The Return'. It refers to a concept in Islām that after the coming of Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) and before the Day of Judgement, a group of people from the good and evil, will be brought back to life. And this 'Return of the Dead' to the earth is also one of the signs of the end of the world, before the start of the Day of Judgement.

The Sunni Muslims do not believe in the concept of ar-Raj'ah but it is an important belief in the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Ar-Raj'ah in fact will not be for those who died before the coming of Rasulullāh (s). The only people who will be brought back to life will be the very good and pure from the Islāmic Ummah (Nation) and the very evil. The pure will be brought back because of their desire to support Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) in his mission and also to avenge themselves against the evil. And the evil will be brought back to be paid for their evil in this world before the Judgement in the Hereafter.

Objections to Raj'ah

The non-Shi'ahs have raised objections such as, 'what is the need to punish the evil in this world when Allāh will punish them on the Day of Judgement?' and so on. However, as we have mentioned earlier, ar-Raj'ah is not just to punish the evil in this world before they are punished again in the Hereafter but it also fulfills the desire of every Shi'ah and mu'min who wanted to be with Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) but died before the coming of the Imām ('atfs).

The Shi'ah therefore stress the importance of believing in ar-Raj'ah and it has been discussed and upheld by great Shi'ah scholars such as Shaykh al-Mufid, Sayyid al-Murtada, 'Allama Majlisi, Shaykh al-Kulayni and Shaykh as-Saduq.

'Allama Majlisi, for example, has written, 'how can a faithful (mu'min) doubt a truth from the pure Imāms when there are numerous traditions (hadith mutawātir) from them concerning this matter, and in fact hundreds of traditions....'⁹

The famous Shi'ah scholar and muhaddith, Shaykh Hurr al-Amili as well as said the ahādith on ar-Raj'ah are too many to even count.¹⁰

⁹ 'Allama Majlisi, *Bihār al-Anwār*, v. 53.

There are two main issues that we need to discuss concerning ar-Raj'ah: first, whether it is possible for such a thing to happen. And second, proof that it will happen from Qur'ān and Hadith.

The Possibility of ar-Raj'ah

Firstly, the fact that Allāh can bring all the dead back to life on the Day of Judgement is sufficient proof that if He wills, He can bring a group of them back to life even before that.

Secondly, ar-Raj'ah has already occurred in previous Nations (Umam pl. of Ummah) and this is confirmed by the Qur'ān. For example:

1. The coming back to life of a group from the Banu Isrāil:

﴿وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَىٰ اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ
وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ. ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾

*And when you said, 'O Moses, we will not believe you until we see Allāh visibly.' Thereupon a thunderbolt seized you as you looked on. **Then We raised you up after your death** so that you might give thanks.*

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:55-56

2. The coming back to life of the murdered victim from Banu Isrāil:

﴿وَإِذْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا فَادَّارَأْتُمْ فِيهَا وَاللَّهُ مُخْرِجٌ مَّا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ. فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبُوهُ
بِبَعْضِهَا كَذَلِكَ يُحْيِي اللَّهُ الْمَوْتَىٰ وَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

*And when you killed a soul, and accused one another about it - and Allāh was to expose whatever you were concealing - We said, 'Strike him with a piece of it:' **thus does Allāh revive the dead**, and He shows you His signs so that you may apply reason.*

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:72-73

3. The death of thousands of people and then their being brought back to life again i.e. their raj'ah:

¹⁰ Lectures of Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani, *Ilāhiyāt*, v. 4, p. 290-1.

﴿لَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ فَقَالَ لَهُمُ
اللَّهُ مُوتُوا ثُمَّ أَحْيَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا
يَشْكُرُونَ﴾

Have you not regarded those who left their homes in thousands, apprehensive of death, whereupon Allāh said to them, 'Die,' then He revived them? Indeed Allāh is gracious to mankind, but most people do not give thanks.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:243

4. The resurrection of Nabi 'Uzair ('a) after he was dead for a hundred years:

﴿أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّى يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ
بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ
يَوْمٍ قَالَ بَلْ لَبِثْتَ مِائَةَ عَامٍ فَانظُرْ إِلَى طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ وَانظُرْ إِلَى
حِمَارِكَ وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَانظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا
لَحْمًا فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾

Or him (that is Nabi Uzair ('a)) who came upon a township as it lay fallen on its trellises. He said, 'How will Allāh revive this after its death?!' So Allāh made him die for a hundred years, then He resurrected him. He said, 'How long have you remained?' Said he, 'I have remained a day or part of a day.' He said, 'Rather, you have remained a hundred years. Now look at your food and drink which have not rotted! Then look at your donkey! [This was done] that We may make you a sign for mankind. And look at the bones, how We arrange them and then clothe them with flesh!' When it became evident to him, he said, 'I know that Allāh has power over all things.'

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:259

5. The bringing of the dead back to life by Nabi Isa ('a):

﴿وَرَسُولًا إِلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ
مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ
وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدْخِرُونَ فِي
بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

*And [he will be] an apostle to the Children of Israel, [and he will declare,] “I have certainly brought you a sign from your Lord: I will create for you out of clay the form of a bird, then I will breathe into it, and it will become a bird by Allāh’s permission. And I heal the blind and the leper **and I revive the dead by Allāh’s permission.** And I will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses. There is indeed a sign in that for you, should you be faithful.*

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:49

After all these examples, it is impossible to deny that ar-Raj’ah is very much possible and not something illogical to believe in as a Muslim.

Shaykh as-Saduq has reported a hadith from Rasulullāh (s) that he said, ‘Everything that has happened in previous nations will also happen in this nation (Ummah) exactly the same, even to the degree of a sandal strap or an arrow’s feather.’¹¹ And the Sunni scholars have also reported very similar ahādith from Rasulullāh (s).¹²

Those who say it is wrong because it supports the belief in reincarnation have misunderstood the concept of ar-Raj’ah. Those who believe in reincarnation say the soul of a person enters a new body and the person is reborn again. However in the case of ar-Raj’ah, we mean resurrection of the same dead body just like on the Day of Judgement and just like the case of all the examples from the Qur’ān that we have given earlier.

Proof of ar-Raj’ah in Qur’ān and Hadith

The proof of ar-Raj’ah in the Qur’ān is the following verse:

﴿وَيَوْمَ نَحْشُرُ مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ فَوْجًا مِمَّنْ يُكَذِّبُ بِآيَاتِنَا فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ﴾

*The day We shall resurrect **from every nation a group of those who denied Our signs, and they shall be held in check.***

- Surah an-Naml, 27:83

Note that this verse says only a group from every nation will be resurrected and not everyone. This cannot be about the Day of Judgement because we know from another verse of the Qur’ān that on the Day of Judgement, everyone will be brought back to life:

﴿وَيَوْمَ نُسَيِّرُ الْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً وَحَشَرْنَاَهُمْ فَلَمْ نُغَادِرْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا﴾

¹¹ Shaykh Saduq, *Kamāl ad-Din*, p. 576

¹² *Sahih Bukhāri*, v. 9, Kitāb al-‘Itisām; *Kanz al-‘Ummal*, v. 11.

*The day We shall set the mountains moving and you will see the earth in full view,
We shall resurrect them, **and We will not leave out anyone of them.***

- Surah al-Kahf, 18:47

Of course, one could ask how we know the righteous will also be brought to life during the Raj'ah since the verse 27:83 only mentions the evil i.e. 'a group of those who denied our Signs'? We know that the righteous will also be brought back during the Raj'ah from numerous ahādith.

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'when he (the Mahdi ('atfs)) rises, a faithful (mu'min) will be told in his grave, "O so-and-so, your master has appeared. If you wish to meet with him then rise and if you wish to remain here in God's blessings then remain.'¹³

Also from Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), he said, 'when the time for the rising of the Qāim is at hand, it will rain for the whole of Jamādi al-Akhar and ten more days in Rajab (i.e. 40 days), a rain that people have never witnessed before. From it, Allāh will cause the flesh of the faithful (mu'minin) to grow again in their graves. It is as if I can see them now coming from the direction of Juhayna shaking the dirt off their hair.'¹⁴

And in one hadith from Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), he said that one of the first people to come back to the earth will be Imām al-Husayn ('a) and he will rule until he grows old.

Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) said that even Rasulullāh (s) and Imām Ali ('a) will return.

In another hadith Imām as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'every true believer (mu'min) who was killed will return and live until he dies a natural death and every true believer who died a natural death will return until he is killed (and attains martyrdom).'¹⁵

¹³ Shaykh at-Tusi, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 459.

¹⁴ Allama Majlisi, *Bihār al-Anwār*, v. 53.

¹⁵ *Mizān al-Hikmah*, the chapter on ar-Raj'ah.

