

## Core Curriculum

### 2 Foundations of Islam - Theology

#### 2.1 **Entering Islam: The Shahada**

##### INTRODUCTION

The shahāda is the Islamic confessional creed. It is the the fundamental key to entering Islam. The word “shahāda” comes from the verb sha-hi-da, meaning “to testify” or “bear witness.” In reciting the shahāda, a Muslim bears witness that:

1) There is no deity but God alone and 2) Muhammad is His Messenger. Together, they are known as the shahāda, the Muslim testimony to faith.

Not only does the shahāda form the bone marrow and crux of Islam, it is also necessary to testify to it in order to become a Muslim. Without acknowledging the shahāda, a person cannot become a Muslim!

In this lesson, we will go over the meaning of the shahāda as well as some of the basic features, practices, and implications associated with converting to Islam.

##### BODY OF TEXT

Indeed they, when it was said to them, "There is no deity but Allah," were arrogant. And were saying, "Are we to leave our gods for a mad poet?" Rather, the Prophet has come with the truth and confirmed the [previous] messengers. (Chapter 37 of the Holy Qur’ān, verses 35 to 37)

In order to become a Muslim, one must pronounce the shahāda. It is common practice to utter the shahāda in Arabic. If you are not a Muslim and you are seeking to convert to Islam, please

repeat after me: Ash-ha-du... an Lā ilāha ...illAllāh ...wa Ash-ha-du ... anna ... Muhammadan ... rasūlullāh. These Arabic words can be translated in the following way: I testify that there is no deity but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

If you said these words with real sincerity, then congratulations, you are now a Muslim! It does not matter who you are, how you were born or what you did in the past. By sincerely testifying to the shahāda, all of your past sins are erased. In short, you are born again!

Before discussing some of the practices that become necessary after conversion to Islam, it's important to look into the deeper meanings of the shahāda.

The word shahāda literally means to witness and to testify to a fact, just like how one would testify in a court setting. Notice that the word "I believe" is not used and this is an important point to remember for the following reasons: When one enters Islam, mere belief where one only thinks that something may be true is not enough. One is expected to testify to the truth and fact that Allah exists. One is expected to testify to the fact that He is the only God and that Muhammad is His Prophet and Messenger for all of humankind.

But what do these two statements really mean?

The first part of the testimony of faith, Ash-ha-du an Lā ilāha illAllāh or "I testify that there is no deity but Allah," can be understood in several complementary ways. First, it is a rejection of polytheism\*. Unlike other religions who believe that there are many gods, Islam rejects the very existence of multiple gods.

Rather, it states that there is only one God and that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all of existence.

Recall our discussion of God in Islam and how He is not an object that exists alongside other objects in the world. He is the unconditioned source and cause of all existence.

The second, complementary meaning of Ash-ha-du an Lā ilāha illAllāh means that there is no deity worthy of worship except for Allah. Although someone may believe in one creator God and reject the existence of other supernatural gods, he or she may still worship things other than God. This may be the worship of money, fame, power, food, or other things. The Arabic

word for worship, 'ibādah literally means to "enslave oneself to something" for it comes from the root word 'abd or slave.

When we say "worship," in Islam, it means to enslave one's heart and soul to something to the point that that entity is all one thinks about. For example, a person's whole life may be devoted to their physical appearance. As a result of this, this person may sacrifice prayer, going to the Masjid, or even abandon fasting altogether for the sake of working out at the gym. This would be considered a worship of an entity other than God.

Ash-ha-du an Lā ilāha illAllāh means to testify that no one or no thing takes priority before Allah. The love of money, fame, power, love of oneself or anything else must not come before Him. In order to achieve this, one must therefore free oneself from any form of enslavement to Allah's creation in order to be a true Muslim!

The second testimony of faith, Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasūlullāh, or I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, can also be understood in several complementary ways.

First, it is to testify that Muhammad was a truthful Prophet and that he was selected by God to deliver His message to all of mankind, primarily through the revelation of His Holy Book, the Noble Qur'an. It is also to testify that he was the last and final Prophet and Messenger from God. After him, there are no more Prophets or Messengers.

Among other things, this message confirmed the Prophethood of previous Prophets like Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The message confirmed that there is an unseen world (ghayb) in which angels, spirits, demons, heaven and hell exist. It confirmed the coming Day of Judgment where all of mankind's deeds will be judged before God. The message also contained God's will to humankind where they were instructed to pray, fast, help the poor and be compassionate to His creation.

The most important message of the Prophet Muhammad (s), however, was his instruction to follow the Imams from his Holy Household, or Ahl al-Bayt, after his death, starting with his cousin, son-in-law and first Imam of the Shias, 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib. This is why Shias sometimes include wa Ashhadu anna 'Alīyyun Wāliullāh after the shahāda, which can be translated the following way: "and I testify that Ali is the Saint of Allah."

Shias believe that the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) are of fundamental importance for Islam. Among other important reasons, they are the keys to properly and correctly understanding the teachings of Allah and His Messenger. Without the Ahl al-Bayt who succeeded and preserved the message of Islam, all we would be left with would be fallible opinions and interpretations of Islam. Only the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) had perfect and infallible knowledge of Islam. Only they had an unerring understanding of Islam and only through them can a person reach perfection of faith.

The other complementary meaning of the second part of the shahāda is that the Prophet Muhammad is supposed to be the primary role model for our lives. This means that we should adopt his mannerisms, which include, among other things, respecting and serving humankind, especially our parents and the poor.

It also means that one should always control one's temper and show compassion to all of God's creation, including animals and the environment. These of course, are only examples and no

way exhaust the vastness of the Messenger's Prophetic example! But I hope that you got at least a glimpse of what it means to take the Prophet Muhammad (s) as a role model and example to follow in life.

After one converts to Islam, there are a series of religious obligations that one must follow through. The first obligation is to perform ghusl, or a ritual bath that spiritually cleanses a person and readies him (or her) for obligatory ritual practices. These practices, among other things, include the following: 1) praying five times a day, 2) fasting during the Muslim month of Ramadan, 3) paying the zakat tax to the poor and needy and if possible, 4) performing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a person's life.

These fall under the rubric of *Furū' al-Dīn*, or "Practical Branches of Islam." We will look into these rituals in more detail in the following lessons, but for now you should just keep in mind that these practices are meant to keep you in constant remembrance of Allah and help remind you that He must take priority in all aspects of your life.

In addition to practices, one must also be mindful of the core beliefs in Islam which are needed in order to attain a proper understanding Allah and His message. These core beliefs fall under the rubric of what we call *uṣūl al-dīn* or "the principles of religion." The principles of religion

include the following core beliefs:

1. Tawḥīd, or Oneness of God: where God is the one and only Creator of the universe.
2. ‘Adālah, or Justice: where God is Just and does not mistreat or do any evil against His creation. God’s justice, however, is balanced and overwhelmed by His mercy. If humans received what they truly deserved, few would find salvation .
3. Nubūwwah, or Prophethood: where God, since the creation of mankind, has sent a 124, 000 Prophets, one after the other, to spread God’s message so that they may be guided to Him.
4. Imāmah or Divine leadership: where God appoints divine leaders to continue guiding humankind and preserve Islam after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.
5. Qiyāmah or Resurrection: where God will resurrect mankind and hold each and every person accountable for the deeds that he or she has done. The state of a person’s soul will ultimately determine whether the person goes to heaven or hell.

In the next lesson, we will have a more detailed overview of the uṣūl al-dīn, inshā’ Allāh.

With that being said, the following is very important to keep in mind: Entering Islam and uttering the shahāda is not simply acknowledging a set of doctrines, beliefs and ritual practices. If it was, then the shahāda would be a very feeble thing for it would not take you very far in your spiritual and moral life.

Instead, the shahāda is meant to be a transformation of one’s entire being. If one simply believes, but his or her life is not completely transformed, then he or she has not really testified to Ashhadu an Lā ilāha illAllāh wa Ash-ha-du anna Muhammadan rasūlullāh.

The shahāda is not just a matter of what’s in our heads. The shahāda must be ever present inwardly and outwardly in every aspect of our lives. It is to know that God is watchful of everything we do in this life and that we will be accountable to Him in the unseen world to come

The word for religion in Islam is called dīn, which comes from the old Persian word dā’ina, meaning “a way of life.” The sixth Shi’i Imam Jafar as-Sadiq (as) explains the wider transformative implications of acknowledging Islam as one’s religion in the following ḥadīth: if you want to know the religion of a person, do not look at how much he prays and fasts, rather, look at how he treats people.

What does transformation mean in Islam? Transformation means that one's life is based on loving God with all of his or her being, obeying and following His commands, loving and serving His creation (even one's enemies), and above all, observing inner humility for without real humility of the heart, no transformation can be possible.

How can an arrogant person ever want to really change? With humility, one acknowledges that this material world is not the only world. One acknowledges that there is an unseen world (ghayb), like the Afterlife where we will be judged with God's justice and mercy.

## 2.2 The Usūl al-Dīn: The Fundamental Beliefs of Islam

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Thank you for tuning back in to the Muslim Converts Channel. In our previous lesson, we overviewed the basic Muslim creed through which one enters and converts to Islam. The creed which one utters before conversion is called the shahāda. The shahāda is a testimony, that is, a testimony to a fact and not just a thought that one can do away with!

Stating the shahāda is the door through which one enters Islam. Accepting the contents of the shahāda naturally means that we must accept that which is taught to us by Allah (swt) through His revealed Book (the Qur’an) and His Messenger Muhammad (s).

The shahāda contains within itself the foundations of Muslim beliefs called the usūl al-dīn or “principles of the Muslim religion”. All Muslims must believe in these principles for their faith to be complete.

These principles or foundations are the following: Tawḥīd, ‘Adāla, Nubuwwa, Imāma and Ma‘ād. In this lesson, we will briefly introduce these principles. In the following lectures, we will discuss them one by one in more detail, inshā’ Allāh.

These five foundational principles form the core beliefs of Islam. The usūl al-dīn guides the

worldview of a believer and provides him or her with the proper grounding in how to think about God and the world.

The rest of Islam's beliefs, and even practices, are based on these five principles. Failure to believe in any one of them will lead to a faulty understanding of Islam.

#### BODY OF TEXT

O You who have attained faith, hold fast unto your [correct] belief in Allah, His Messenger and the Book [the Qur'an] which he has bestowed upon His Messenger as well as the Scripture He sent down to those before [him.] Those who deny Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day, has indeed gone astray. (Chapter 4 of the Qur'an, verse 136)

The *uṣūl al-dīn*, or principles of the Islamic faith, are a group of five basic tenants which a Muslim must hold for their Islam to be complete. It is the basic covenant that a Muslim holds with God. The *uṣūl al-dīn* are *Tawḥīd*, *ʿAdāla*, *Nubuwwa*, *Imāma* and *Maʿād*. Here we will give a brief outline as to their significance and insha'Allah, we will expand on them more fully in the lectures to come.

**Tawḥīd:** *Tawḥīd* refers to the "oneness" of God in Islam. *Tawḥīd* is the most important foundation of Islam. Without *Tawḥīd*, none of Islam or the Qur'an would make sense. It is therefore the vital life source that animates the whole of Islam.

The term has a multilayered meaning. Its first layer of meaning is that there is only one God or deity. This deity is the one who brought all of existence into being.

The other meaning is that only He is worthy of worship and only He maintains, sustains and administers the world of creation. As the One and Only God, He has no other divine partners in any of His actions.

**ʿAdāla:** *ʿAdāla* means Divine Justice. In Islam, we do not believe that concepts of good and bad are arbitrary. We believe that things have intrinsic moral worth, either good or evil. As a corollary\* of *tawḥīd*, we believe that goodness and justice are part and parcel of *tawḥīd*. In other words, Allah is a good and just God. Whenever He commands something, He always acts in, and commands goodness.

All His actions, therefore, have purpose and they are aimed for the greater good. God, according to Islam, never does any wrong, nor does He do anything without purpose. He seeks the Good in everything and never breaks His promises. In this sense, ‘adāla is a system of balance.

God makes it obligatory upon Himself and to humankind. Transgressing this balance leads to corruption. ‘Adāla will be fully manifest on the Day of Judgment where everyone is measured against this vital balance.

**Nubuwwa:** Nubuwwa means Prophethood. As the Creator of mankind, part of Allah’s divine justice is that He guides humankind towards salvation. This means that the goal and purpose of the creation of humankind is to reach closeness to Allah.

As a result of His justice, God sent Prophets to teach humankind on how to purify and save their souls and ultimately reach closeness to Allah. The last and most important of these Prophets was the Prophet Muhammad (s). Prophets who receive Holy Scriptures are called Messengers. The Prophet Muhammad (s) was also a Messenger since he delivered the Holy Qur’an.

**Imāmah:** Imāmah means divine leadership. Since the Prophet Muhammad (s) was the last Prophet and Islam was the last religion to be revealed by Allah, Allah appointed leaders to guide humanity. These divinely guided leaders were tasked to preserve and protect the authentic message of Islam. These divinely guided leaders are called Imāms.

The Imāms are able to fully protect the message of Islam as they receive divine knowledge from Allah and are infallible and perfect in knowledge.

The 12 Imāms are from the Holy Household of the Prophet Muhammad (s). The Holy Household of the Prophet (s) are a group of pure individuals from his family who are selected by God to guide humankind.

**Mā’ād:** Ma’ād (also called Qiyāmah) means resurrection, as in the resurrection of all of humankind that will take place on the Day of Judgment. As a Just and Good God, Allah is concerned about the spiritual health of humankind.



He has therefore set a system of reward and punishment in order perfect people's spiritual state and outward behavior. Those who are successful in this endeavor will enter Heaven, whereas those who are not may enter the Hellfire.

Ma'ād is the result of God's justice to humankind where He rewards the good with good just as He promised, and He lets those who chose evil witness the bad consequences of their choices.

These five principles are foundations of a complete Islam. As principles, they are "hardcoded" in Islam and are not up for interpretation. Their details and implications, however, are subject to interpretation.

Before we end this lesson, it is important to state that there is an even smaller set of principles which one must believe in order to be a Muslim even if one's Islam is "incomplete." These are called the ḍarūrīyāt al-dīn or "necessary foundations in order to be considered a Muslim." The ḍarūrīyāt al-dīn are four: Tawhīd, Nubuwwa, Ma'ād and items which all Muslims agree upon (e.g. obligatory of prayers).

Without belief in these core concepts and one cannot be a Muslim. However, one can still be a Muslim if, for example, a person was to reject Imāmah without being aware of its truth as it is not part of the ḍarūrīyāt al-dīn.

For this reason, the uṣūl al-dīn as such are all necessary for a complete Islam that is in accordance with Allah's will upon mankind, but they are not all necessary in order to be a Muslim.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh

## 2.3 **Tawhīd: The Unity and Oneness of God in Islam**

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Thank you for tuning back to our Channel. In our previous lesson, we covered the concept of the uṣūl al-dīn in Islam. The uṣūl al-dīn, as you recall, refer to the fundamental articles or

principles of the Islamic faith. We learned that they are necessary for proper guidance.

The most important of these principals is the principal of Tawhīd. Tawhīd refers to the absolute Oneness and Unity of God. It is the most important and fundamental aspect of all of Islam. Without Tawhīd, none of Islam or any other of the uṣūl al-dīn make any sense. We say this as all beliefs in Islam are predicated on the idea of a One and Indivisible God.

In this lesson, we will outline the major implications of tawhīd regarding the nature of God in Islam, and regarding our behavior with ourselves and God.

#### BODY OF TEXT

And verily, We have sent among every community a Messenger [proclaiming]: “Worship Allah [Alone], and shun false deities” Then among them were some whom Allah guided and of them were some who were deserving of error. So travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who denied [the truth.] (Chapter 16, verse 36 of the Holy Qur’an)

Say He is Allah, the One, the Eternal, He does not beget nor is He begotten, and there is none like Him (Chapter 112 of the Holy Qur’an)

Tawhīd is the Absolute Oneness and Unity of God. Tawhīd is shahāda summed up in one word. It denies the existence of any deity or god except for the God who brought forth all of existence. It holds that God is of one essence only and is incompatible with any form of polytheism.

Tawhīd also means that God has no partners in any action He does, either in creating the world or in sustaining it. Yes, He does have angels and other beings who perform tasks, but they do so as His servants and not His partners. He is in no need of them and can manage existence without them.

Tawhīd is not just an abstract belief about the nature of God, it has direct implications in terms of how we are supposed to live, worship and relate to others. First, it means that only God alone can be worshipped. Worshipping other imaginary deities and idols is futile.

As discussed earlier when we covered the subject of shahāda, worship is not only outward worship of gods and idols. The Arabic word for worship is ‘ibāda, which literally means to

“enslave oneself to something” as ‘ibāda comes from the root word ‘abd, meaning slave or servant.

When we say “worship,” in Islam, it means to enslave or submit one’s heart and soul to something to the point that it takes full priority in our thoughts and in our goals in life. One may, for example, submit and enslave one’s heart to a particular person, to one’s own ego, or material objects like money. Tawhīd implies that one’s heart and mind must submit and serve Allah only and must hold priority over any other thing.

With that said, tawhīd is the antithesis of shirk. Shirk is a term that may refer to polytheism, idol worship or ascribing partners to God. Although many people may deny the most apparent form of shirk, there is a second form of shirk that is more common.

This form of shirk is where a person ascribes particular attributes of Allah to creation. Sometimes people deify their Prophets and religious leaders, which is a form of shirk. At other times, they believe that particular human beings, like their bosses, are their sustainers in this world, whereas in reality, only Allah is the true Sustainer.

From an Islamic point of view, God is the only provider and sustainer and hence His name al-Razzāq, meaning the Sustainer. If a human being happens to give you paychecks, know that they do so by the will of Allah (swt). Whatever comes to you via the creation, it is originally from Allah. No one can reduce or raise your salary without the will of Allah.

There is an even subtler form of shirk that many people are guilty of. The Qur’an says:

And most of them believe not in Allah except that they associate others with him (Chapter 12 of the Qur’an, verse 106)

The 6th Imām of the Prophet’s Holy Household, Ja’far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) remarked on this verse: it is because people often say “if it weren’t for such and such person I would have been ruined”

We often attribute actions to God’s creation whether it is nature or other human beings. We think that they are the reason for our success or failure in life. Although our own choices do play a role, everything is ultimately in the hands of God.

According to Imām as-Sādiq, tawhīd implies that Allah is the one who controls and sustains everything, and to ascribe control to someone else is a form of shirk. This does not mean that we are not responsible for things. To the contrary, we are responsible for our efforts. The final results that come about, however, are in the hands of Allah. Without effort, Allah will not give us results.

This then, should make us think about the events that happen in our lives. We often get sad that we didn't reach a certain goal that we wanted, or lost someone we loved. Tawhīd means that whatever happens in this world is through the will of God.

God always has morally sufficient reasons for letting the things that happen in the world happen even if we don't understand or know them at that moment. Put differently, although we may interpret things as "going the wrong way," a person who adopts the worldview of tawhīd will never be disappointed, for he knows all is under the control of Allah. Everything therefore moves towards the ultimate good.

What we often interpret as Allah being "unfair" to us is our own shortsightedness. The only way we could ever make such a judgment is if we know the beginning and end of all things. Since our knowledge is very limited, we can never make such a judgment. As responsible and mature Muslims, we must therefore trust Allah only for only He knows the beginning and end of all things and knows what is best for us.

Remember earlier we said that without tawhīd, none of Islam or the uṣūl al-dīn makes sense. We have Prophets and Imāms because they are sent by the One God to guide mankind.

We have objective notions of good, bad, justice and corruption because we can attribute them to a source outside of human opinions. The Day of Judgment only makes sense if there is One God who judges our actions in accordance with the scale of justice and mercy.

## 2.4 **Adala: Divine Justice in Islam**

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be

upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome to the Muslim Converts Channel. In our previous lesson, we looked over the concept of Tawhīd in Islam. Tawhīd is, as understood by Muslims, is the Absolute Unity, Oneness and undivided nature of God. In this lesson, we will look at one of the most essential attributes of God in Islamic theology called ‘adāla, or Divine Justice.

Our first step will be to look at it from a theological perspective, namely what it means for God to be “just.” Second, we will look at it from an anthropological (human) perspective, that is, what are the implications of Divine Justice for individual persons and humankind as a whole.

BODY OF TEXT

Indeed, Allah does not wrong the people in anyway, but it is people who are wrong themselves (Chapter 10, verse 44 of the Holy Qur’an)

Tawhīd implies that God, in His absolute unity, is completely perfect and devoid of any faults. By faults we mean shortcomings like ignorance and need. The God of Tawhīd is Absolutely Unique and transcends all forms of limitations and imperfections. He is perfect in every sense. This means that He is absolutely self-sufficient, He is in need of nothing and no one, He is all-knowing (that is, He knows everything) and is All-Wise.

Evil, according to Islam, is the product of a defect, ignorance, and need. God in Islam, in His perfection through tawhīd, is devoid of evil. People often commit evil deeds because they need or are lacking something. As a result, we see them trying to satisfy their own egos or their need for revenge. Or we see them pursuing power which they are lacking, or aim for purposeless pleasure. Sometimes they do so because of simple ignorance and foolishness.

God in Islam is also known by his attribute al-Ghanī (the self-sufficient) meaning that He is fully rich in Himself and needs nothing. He is also al-‘Alīm, the All-Knowing. He is also al-Ḥakīm, or the All-Wise. The combined result is that He is not ignorant, foolish or in need or lack of anything. So here we can conclude that He cannot commit evil by the very fact of His own nature.

As He is devoid of all evil, He must be Absolutely Good and Just. Divine Justness in Islam (which

stems out of God's perfect Goodness) is called 'adāla. 'Adāla in Arabic literally means to keep a form of balance in weight. In His treatment of humankind, Allah makes 'adāla obligatory upon Himself and therefore always acts within goodness and justice. This means that He never wrongs His creation.

For example, Allah is the ultimate Judge of deeds on the Day of Judgment. On that Day, God will establish justice and will not punish people with more than what they deserve. Yes, He may punish them with less than what they deserve out of His Absolute Mercy (for His Mercy takes precedence over His Justice) but He will never punish someone more than what he or she deserves.

The opposite is also true. Allah makes a number of promises to His creation, one of which is to reward those who trust in Him and do good. The Qur'an says:

But the ones who truly trust in God and do righteous deeds; We will admit them to gardens in which rivers flow beneath where they will live in forever. [This is] the promise of Allah and [it is] truth. And whose word could be truer than God's? (Chapter 4, verse 122 of the Holy Qur'an).

Another part of Allah's justice is that He does not test people beyond their capacity for it would be unfair and unjust to do otherwise. He tests with what they could potentially bear. For this reason, the God of Islam says in the Qur'an: And We task no soul except [with that which is in] its capacity, and with Us is a record which speaks with truth; and they will not be wronged. (Chapter 23, verse 62 of the Holy Qur'an)

In order for all of existence to reach the Absolute Good, everything needs to be held at a perfect balance. Just as the balance of the nuclear force or the balance between matter and antimatter in the universe is essential to sustain it, there is a moral balance that must be observed among human beings. Any transgression from this balance of justice leads to corruption.

According to the Ahl al-Bayt (as) or Holy Household of the Prophet Muhammad (s), good, bad, evil, justice, injustice all have intrinsic worth. Goodness and justice are not moral notions that God arbitrarily decides on. Goodness (which justice stems from) is part and parcel of Allah's own essence. This means that whatever God creates, and whatever moral worth there is in creation, it is the expression of God's own essence as the Absolutely Good.

Notions of good, evil, justice and injustice are therefore not arbitrarily decided nor are they subjective. For this reason, human beings cannot ultimately decide what is just and what is not. They cannot invent them for themselves and apply them to the world.

They must therefore acquire them through God’s special revelation on earth and apply it first and foremost to themselves, and then to the world. According to Islam, any person who believes that he or she can solely decide questions of justice and injustice for himself or herself without any reference to God is considered a tāghūt. Tāghūt literally means one who “crosses limits” or “transgresses boundaries.”

Just as idol worship is tāghūt, so is trying to act like God and set the ultimate terms of morality and justice. God, in His All-Knowing and All-Wise nature, set the balancing terms for justice for us, any transgression of this balance will lead to corruption, both within the heart as well as in the person's conduct in the world. Evil, according to the Qur’anic narrative, is always a product of “transgressing boundaries” and hence going out of the bounds of justice.

The Qur’an says: those who have true faith fight for the cause of Allah whereas those who knowingly reject the truth fight in the cause of the tāghūt. So fight the friends of Satan. Indeed, Satan’s guide is weak! (Chapter 4, verse 76 of the Holy Qur’an).

## 2.5 **Nubuwwa: The Purpose of Prophethood in Islam**

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to our Channel. In our previous lesson, we overviewed the concept of ‘adāla in Islam. As you may recall, ‘adāla referred to Allah’s Divine Justice. Divine Justice, put simply, is Allah’s fair treatment of His creation.

We know that God created humankind and that one day (the Day of Judgment) He will resurrect and hold all of humanity accountable for their deeds. For God to be fair, He needs to warn us about this Day and give us the proper guidance in order that we be successful . In Islam, the means through which God does this is called nubuwwa, or Prophethood.

In this lesson, we will overview the meaning, basics and purpose of Prophethood in Islam.

#### BODY OF TEXT

Nubuwwa is an Arabic term that is often translated as Prophethood. On the same scale, the term nabī is usually translated as Prophet. This translation can, however, be problematic at times. In the English language, the word “prophet” is usually understood as someone who has a connection with God, is a teacher inspired by God, or someone who proclaims God’s will on earth.

Although these definitions are true for the Islamic term nabī, not all people who have a connection with God and are inspired by Him or proclaim His will on earth are considered nabīs in Islam. For this reason, we need to be careful when we use the word Prophet.

We need to make sure that our understanding of the term is in accordance with how it is understood in Islam and not other religions or its conventional use in the English language.

In Islam, a nabī is a person who receives inspiration from God, like dreams, visions, knowledge, understanding and wisdom. This kind of unmediated inspiration is called ilhām in Islam. Nabīs, however, also receive something that is called wahī. Wahī is a special kind of direct revelation that Allah reveals to nabīs through the medium of the Archangel Gabriel or Jibrā’īl in Arabic. Those who are not Nabīs may receive inspiration, but only nabīs receive revelation through the angel Gabriel (as).

When God reveals (through wahī) a new system of laws to a nabī, this nabī also assumes the rank of a rasūl, which literally translates as “Messenger.” Someone who is a nabī can also introduce a new law, but this is usually in the form of a specific law that complements a previous system of laws that was revealed via a Messenger.

For example, the Prophet Shu‘ayb (as) was tasked by Allah to propagate a law prohibiting cheating in business, but this law only complemented the larger system of laws that was set in place by the Prophet Abraham (as). In this sense, you may think of a rasūl as bringing a new constitution, and a nabī as making amendments to that constitution (i.e. adding, slightly changing and so on).



As such, all rasūls are nabīs in Islam, but not all nabīs are rasūls!

Understanding basic Prophethood in Islam is critical. Prophets reveal to mankind the correct way to live in order to attain salvation. They bring the “manual” of how to live a life that is pleasing to God and teach it so that people may find spiritual and material success both in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

As teachers, Prophets also play the critical role of being role models for us. Prophets are therefore liaisons who bring the message of guidance from Allah to humans. They live it themselves in front of us so that we may learn by their example on how to implement theory into practice.

In other words, they bring us the message, explain it and demonstrate it to us via their actions. Their actions are what we call sunnah in Islam, which literally means their “tradition,” “practice” or “culture.” In the case of the Prophet Muhammad (s), his sunnah is preserved in an oral tradition called the ḥadīth, which refer to his sayings or maxims or describe some of his practices as described by his contemporaries.

In Islam, we believe that the Prophet Muhammad (s), as a nabī and a rasūl, was the final Prophet sent by God to mankind. This is because Islam is considered as the final and perfect religion. It contains all solutions for mankind’s spiritual problems. It contains everything we need to know in order to attain salvation in God. Since the religion of Islam is perfect and complete and is meant for all of mankind in all places and all times, there is no more need for any new revelation from Allah.

The veracity of a Prophet is established through miracles which no one else can perform or repeat. The Prophet Muhammad’s greatest miracle, among other miracles, was the Qur’an whose eloquence not even the most eloquent of Arabs could mimic.

The Qur’an, the Divine Scripture of the Prophet, was not a miracle solely based on its eloquence, but it was also based on the power of its messages in the form of true stories, allegories and clear arguments. When the Qur’an challenged the doubters to bring a single verse like it, the Arabs could not do so and had to opt for a decade long war instead.

Although the content of its message could not be challenged, its interpretation could be

distorted. For this reason, Allah chose Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt, that is, the Holy Household of the Prophet, to protect the interpretation of the Qur'an after him.

We believe that the Prophet Muhammad (s) was the most knowledgeable of all Prophets and that He was the best of all role models. Each Prophet had a special form of knowledge that was unique to him, and each Prophet had specific manners and ways of being that was special to him.

The Prophet Muhammad contained within him the knowledge of all of the divinely revealed Prophets and more. Furthermore, we believe that he was the best of all role models and displayed the most perfect moral character.

There has been a total of 124, 000 Prophets sent by God according to Islam. Some of these major Prophets were Adam, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. They brought with them Divine Scriptures, such as the Torah of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus. Adam is considered to be the first of these Prophets. Jesus was also a Prophet but unlike Christianity, Islam does not believe that he was God nor was he the son of God.

Historically speaking, nabīs in Islam were dispatched by God for specific regions only. With the exception of the Prophet Abraham (as), the Prophet Muhammad (s) was the only universal Prophet for he was the Prophet of the end of times. As religion was always evolving, Islam became the peak of that evolution.

It doesn't matter whether you live in Africa, East Asia or North America, the divine message revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, as well as his moral and spiritual example, are meant for all peoples in all places and in all times.

When the basic shahāda is recited, it is always good to testify that the Prophet Muhammad "is the seal of all Prophets" in addition to "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." This means that he is the last and final messenger and prophet.

## **2.6 Imāmah or divinely guided leadership in Islam after the Prophet Muhammad.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! Last time we spoke about the role and importance of nubuwwa, or Propethood, in Islam.

According to Islam, the last of these Prophets was the Prophet Muhammad (s). The Prophet Muhammad was the last of the Prophets because the divine message he delivered was complete.

It was a universal message for all peoples in all places and in all times. This does not mean that previous messages were somehow faulty, but it just means that the fullness of divine revelation had to wait until the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad (s).

But isn't this unfair? How can he be the last Prophet? Shouldn't humanity always have a divine guide on earth to guide them to God? Shouldn't God have emissaries on earth to protect His last religion?

The answer to these questions is a loud yes!

In Islam, we believe that the Prophet Muhammad (s) was succeeded by twelve divinely appointed emissaries or leaders who were tasked to protect the final religion of God and guide humankind to salvation. These non-Prophet emissary leaders are what we call "Imāms" who work within the framework of an already revealed religion.

In this lesson, we will go into the meaning of Imāmah and why it is so important in Islam. Given the hot discussions that this subject often generates among Muslims, we will also delve into how Imamah differentiates the two major expressions of Islam today, namely Sunni and Shia Islam.

#### BODY OF TEXT

...We raised among them Imāms guiding [people] by Our command when they were patient and had sure faith in Our signs (Chapter 32, verse 24 of the Holy Qur'an)

The point of religion is to guide humans to salvation. A religion without a guiding person cannot fulfill this task. For this reason, we need God to send people human examples and role models who can properly convey, interpret and embody God's guiding principles. Islam was the peak of God's revelation on earth. It was revelation at its fullest.

The task of conveying this final message was given to God's last Prophet, the Prophet Muhammad (s). The Prophet Muhammad was indeed the last Prophet as there was no more need for new revelation. Revelation in Arabic is called wahī.

The institution of non-prophetic guidance after the Prophet Muhammad (s) is called Imāmah in Islam. Imāmah literally means "leadership" and the one who embodies the institution is called an Imām, which literally means "leader."

When the Prophet Muhammad (s) was nearing his death, he appointed 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib as his successor. Imam Ali was his #1 and life long student. He was also his son-in-law who married to the Prophet's (s) only daughter Fatima al-Zahra (as). This meant that after the Prophet's (s) death, 'Alī (as) was to assume the title of Imām. An Imām is a divinely guided leader who is infallible from sins and mistakes.

Although the Prophet Muhammad (s) was also an Imām, Imām 'Alī (as) differed in so far as he was not a Prophet, meaning that he did not receive revelation. Prophetic wahi usually contains a new message for humankind. As the Imams did not received prophetic wahi, the only message they preached was that of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and nothing new.

According to Islam, Imām 'Alī (as) was the first Imām in a line of 12 Imāms. These 12 Imams were to guide humankind until the Day of Judgment. These Imāms were all to be from the Ahl al-Bayt, that is, the Holy Household of the Prophet (s).

The Imāmah of the first 11 Imāms lasted approximately 249 years, beginning with Imām 'Alī (as) after the demise of the Prophet Muḥammad (s) 632 A.D

These two and a half centuries were the formative years of Islam. All of Islam's major schools of law and theology can be traced back to that time. One feature of these formative years is that they were ripe with disagreements and differences of opinion.

This of course is natural as these opinions were produced by fallible people who had no access to divine knowledge. However, the Imāms who succeeded the Prophet (s) were present during these years and helped preserve authentic Muhammadan Islam. This Islam can still be found today in the Muslim school of the Ahl al-Bayt (as).

#### Muslims have Twelve Imāms:

The first of these Imāms was ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib, (b. stands for bin) the first and foremost of the Prophet’s students. The second Imām was Imām ‘Alī’s (as) son Imām al-Ḥasan (as).

The third Imām was Imām ‘Alī’s (as) other son Imām al-Ḥusayn (as). The fourth Imām was Imām al-Ḥusayn’s (as) son Imām ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (as).

The fifth Imām was Muhammad b. ‘Alī al-Bāqir (as), the sixth was Imām Ja‘far b. Muhammad al-Ṣādiq (as), the seventh Imām was Mūsā b. Ja‘far al-Kāzim (as), the eighth Imām was ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Ridā (as), the ninth was Imām Muhammad b. ‘Alī al-Taqī al-Jawād,

The tenth Imām was ‘Alī b. Muhammad al-Naqī al-Hādī, the eleventh was Imām Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Askarī (as).

And finally the twelfth Imām, who is our current Imam, is called Muhammad b. Hasan al-Mahdī (aj).

The only Imām who was not directly present in public was the 12th Imām (may Allah hasten his return). The 12th Imām, due to political persecution, went into occultation or hiding and will emerge during the end of times to restore justice and peace all around the world.

He will rise as the Mahdī, or the promised messiah and savior of the world. The Imām has been in occultation for centuries now, but this is not something to raise eyebrows over as God can make anyone live as long as He wants.

Now the following question may be asked: if we always need a divinely appointed Imām to guide humankind, doesn’t the absence of the 12th Imām defeat its purpose? What use is an Imām whom no one, or at best, very few people have access to?

The answer is the following: guidance comes in many shapes and forms. Guidance may be direct, where an individual goes and asks an Imām a particular question. At other times the Imām may come to that individual, or group of individuals, and give them advice.

In the case of the 12th Imām, we know that he will always have a number of individuals whom he has under his wing and through them guides humankind to salvation.

Another form of guidance is esoteric. Here the Imam is also able to guide humankind from a metaphysical frequency. In other words, just like Satan can whisper in the hearts of millions of people in the world, the guiding light of an Imām can also instill and inspire millions of hearts with good thoughts.

One day, one of the Prophet's companions, Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh, was informed about the coming of the 12 Imāms. When the Prophet reached the subject of the 12th Imāms, he said the following:

...he it is who will remain hidden from his followers and friends for a such a long period that no one will remain firm on the belief of his Imamah except he whose heart has been tested by Allah for faith...

For which Jābir asked:

'O Messenger of Allah! Will his followers get any benefit from him during his occultation?' (The Prophet, s.a.w.a.) said: 'Certainly, by Him Who has sent me with prophethood! they will be guided by his light and benefit from his mastership during his occultation as people benefit from the sun when it is hidden in cloud. O Jabir! this is part of the hidden secrets of Allah. So keep it hidden except from the people who deserve to know.<sup>1</sup>

So when we look at it this way, present or not, people can always count on the Imām of the time to guide them!

A final topic we would like to touch on is the role of Imāmah as a dividing marker between Sunni and Shia Islam, that is, the two major sects or expressions of Islam today.

So far our description of Imāmah has been in line with the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (as), which

is also known as Shia Islam or Shi'ism. Sunni Islam does not believe in a divinely guided succession of Imāms from the Holy Household of the Prophet.

For most Sunnis, Imāmah, when discussed, can refer to various things. These include, among other things, the political leadership of regular people, or the holding of religious leadership roles by fallible people.

These people are no different than lay men and lay women except that they have received higher training in the religious sciences. Ideally, this group of individuals are supposed to be more pious than your regular folk.

Examples of these kinds of imams are Friday prayer leaders, scholars of law, scholars of theology.

1 The original Arabic of this hadith can be found in al-Shaykh al-Sadūq's Kamāl al-Dīn, volume 1 p. 253. The translation used is from Saeed Akhtar Rizvi.

In its literal sense of leadership or religious leadership, Shia Islam also accepts the existence and need of such an "Imāmah." But Imāmah, as a divinely appointed form of guiding leadership, is what really distinguishes it from other expressions of Islam.

Just like Islam would not make sense without tawhīd, Shia Islam would not make sense without Imāmah. For Shia Islam, without the presence of an Imām along with his guiding light on earth, guidance and salvation would not be possible and the world would come to an end. With the death of the 12th Imam, Shia Islam believes that the world will end and Judgment Day will begin.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh

## 2.7 Ma'ād: The Day of Judgment in Islam

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be

upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! So far, we have discussed the first four aspects of the *usūl al-dīn*. The last principal we will look into is the fundamental belief in the Day of Judgment. Whether it is Divine Justice (*‘adl*), Prophethood (*nubuwwa*) or Divine Leadership (*Imāmah*), all of these principles culminate into this last fundamental belief.

Without the doctrine of the Day of Judgment, none of these principles would make sense. Without belief in the Day of Judgment, one cannot be a Muslim. Life in this world is the first phase of human life. In this life, there is choice. The life in the next world is the second, eternal stage where we will reap the consequences of the choices we made in the first stage of our lives.

In this world we can make choices on how to lead our lives. Just because one can make choices, it does not mean that the right ones are being made. The Day of Judgment is about coming to God having made the right choices.

In this lesson, we will look into the idea of the end of the world in Islam, the general features of humankind’s resurrection after its destruction. We will also look at humanity's accountability to God as well as notions of rewards and punishments in the Afterlife.

#### BODY OF TEXT

Say: it is Allah who gives you life, and then causes you to die, and then He will assemble you on the Day of Resurrection, which is beyond doubt, but most do not understand (Chapter 45 of the Qur’an, verse 26)

Among other names, the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-dīn*) is also known as the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*). Another name for resurrection is *ma‘ād*, which literally means to “come back” as in coming back to life after death.

The Day of Judgment in Islam is the day when all humans will be resurrected after their death. The event prior to the Day of Judgment is the total destruction of the world and all life on earth. When the world reaches its peak in corruption and its lowest point in religious faith, a final war between good and evil will take place.

The religion of Islam holds that at the peak of the world’s darkness, God will send a savior.



This savior is the 12th Imām of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) who is known as al-Mahdī. He is believed to come and rectify the world's corruption and bring justice and faith to all of humanity.

This final event of Imām al-Mahdī's (aj) reappearance will set the stage for the total end of the world. The Mahdī is believed to be the promised messiah of Islam. His death will mark the end of the world and the beginning of the Day of Judgment.

According to Islamic tradition, when Allah wills to bring the Day of Judgment into effect, He will send down the Archangel Isrāfīl who will blow his trumpet and destroy the world with all life in it. Isrāfīl will then blow his trumpet and the world will come back again and all the humans that ever lived on the earth will be resurrected to life again.

As resurrected people, every single human on earth will stand before God and account for all his or her deeds. Foremost of all, people will account for the state of their spiritual hearts. When they lived, how much of a role did God have in their lives? How did they treat people, animals and nature? Did they waste their lives pursuing trivial matters? What was their relationship with God's Prophets? Did they reject them out of hand even after coming to know the truth?

According to Islam, each human being will be given a book where all their deeds will be written in. The misdeeds that they did will be shown in front of them. Perhaps you can think of a video that recounts all that you did, except that at this point it will be available for all to watch.

When humans will be questioned by God and His angels, people at times will not even be able to speak; their body parts will start speaking on their behalf and confess the kind of deeds they did whilst they were alive.

It is not known when the Day of Judgment will begin, but it can be said that on some level, it begins in the grave after one dies. When humans die, people are visited by two angels called Munkir and Nakīr who come to test the state of people's souls and their relationship to God in the grave.

Part of the process of testing is asking them questions regarding Allah. If they led godly lives while they were alive, they will be able to answer the questions in a positive way and pass the initial phase of judgment.

However, if they spent their lives rejecting God, they will have a harder time answering these questions the right way.

So as you can see, the questioning by angels is the beginning phase of the Day of Judgment.

On the Day of Judgment, a person's deeds and his or her relationship with God will be questioned.

But we shouldn't forget that salvation does not depend only on human actions, but also on the justice and mercy of God. If Allah were to judge humanity solely based on His justice, very few would be able to enter heaven, if none at all. However, according to Islam, the mercy of God supersedes His justice. This means that although many will fall short, they will enter paradise by the grace of God.

So let's recap and see how the Day of Judgment is connected to the other principles of the Usul al-Din:

On their own, humans cannot know about the Day of Judgment or the requirements needed for salvation. As such, out of His justice, Allah must send Prophets to warn humankind of the Day of Judgment and prepare them for it by giving them guidance. Imāmah is a guardianship mechanism whereby the original instructions and correct form of guidance is preserved after Prophethood ends.

## 2.8 The Sharī'a: Purpose and Practice

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! So far we've been dealing with the usūl al-dīn or fundamental beliefs of Islam. We have discussed the central role they play in the salvation of humankind.

Islam is not just about theory nor is it just about beliefs. Throughout our discussions so far, especially in the introduction of this section where shahāda was discussed, we learnt that Islam is about testifying to a fact concerning the reality of the world, namely that there is one God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all of humankind and that the Prophet Muhammad (s)

is His Messenger.

He is our role model and guide in helping us attain salvation in God. The shahāda, as we saw, has various entailments, the most important of which are the usūl al-dīn.

Yet the usūl al-dīn also has its own important implications and entailments in the real world. In other words, Islam is not just about having particular beliefs in your mind. Islam also has a set of responsibilities that are meant to discipline the human heart and help humans find salvation on the Day of Judgment.

These set of responsibilities that the usūl al-dīn entail coalesce under an institution called the Sharī'a. In this lesson, we will overview the meaning of the Sharī'a, its purpose and the scope of its practice.

#### BODY OF TEXT

And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and be on your guard [against evil]. And if you turn away - then know that upon Our Messenger is only responsible for conveying the message. (Chapter 5, verse 92 of the Holy Qur'an)

The term Sharī'a literally means "way" as in the way to God. Sharī'a is generally associated with Islamic law, but this is only partially correct. The Sharī'a is a general term denoting God's general will upon humankind of which "law" is a part of.

From the time of Adam (as) to the Prophet Muhammad (s), Allah has revealed to humankind the "how to" of successfully living in this world and attaining salvation in the next.

These instructions are comprehensive, and the supreme manifestation of this message is the Qur'an, the authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (s) and their explanations by the 12 Imāms.

Islam means submission or surrender. It is the surrendering of one's will to that of Allah. The Sharī'a shows us how God wants us to surrender to Him.

The Sharī'a is there principally to show how a Muslim should live his or her life by surrendering

to Allah's will. If followed correctly, the Sharī'a upholds human and civil rights and greatly encourages compassion, peace and tolerance of human beings.

Unfortunately, the wrong interpretation of the Sharī'a or Islamic law has created a number of unIslamic practices which fundamentalist Muslims have adopted worldwide.

Sadly enough, these practices often result in the loss of human rights, respect, dignity and life which are fundamental parts of Islam and Islamic law in general.

It is important that a person chooses an educated and compassionate scholar as a source of Islamic teachings. Please send us an email and we can help connect you with proper scholars.

The God of Islam not only establishes laws for our betterment, such as prayer, or abstinence from evil deeds, such as murder, but He also establishes them in order to test us on whether or not we are ready to set aside our own will and selfish desires and surrender to Him instead.

The Sharī'a as such is a way of life. It is a beautiful and joyful surrender to God.

When we speak of the Sharī'a as a way of life, we speak of it in terms of its universality. It is applicable to all individuals and can be lived anywhere in the world. Even if one lives in a non-Muslim country, one can still live the holy life of surrender.

One does not need to be in a Muslim majority country to pray, feed the poor, fast, show kindness and gratitude to one's parents, or abstain from evil deeds such as murder, theft, lying, fornication and so on and so forth.

For example, the Qur'an says the following:

[The true servants of Allah are] they [who] fulfill their vows, and stand in fear of a Day which is bound to spread far and wide, and they give food in spite of their intense want for it unto the needy, the orphan and the captive [saying in their hearts] "we feed you for the sake of Allah alone: we desire neither reward nor gratitude from you"

"They (the true believers) give food, out of love for Allah, to the poor, the orphan and the slave, saying: We feed you only for Allah's pleasure - we desire from you neither reward nor

thanks." (Chapter 76, verses 7-9 of the Holy Qur'an)

These responsibilities can be fulfilled anywhere in the world. One does not need to be in a Muslim majority country to feed the poor or fulfill a vow!

One important question that is often asked is if the Sharia can be implemented in non-Muslim countries. By this they mean the implementation of specific laws at the governmental level.

According to mainstream understandings of Islamic law, there is no necessity to establish the Sharia in this way in non-Muslim countries. One can go on living a full life of surrender without having to enforce the Sharia's codes on others.

If anything, mainstream Islamic law makes it obligatory upon Muslims to follow and obey the laws of non-Muslim countries when they are living in them as long as the laws do not contradict the explicit foundations of Islamic practice.

For example, if a Muslim were asked not to pray anymore, he or she would be under no obligation to obey such a command. However, a Muslim would, according to the mainstream understandings of Islamic law, have to obey civil laws, such as stopping at red lights, obeying copyright laws, etc.

In conclusion, the Sharī'a is a way of life to God. Ideally speaking, it is a life of joyful and blissful servitude to God and a process of inner purification through which one attains salvation. It is universal and can be lived in almost every circumstance.

The commands of the Sharia are meant to instill obedience to God. Without commands, how can there be obedience?

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh

## 2.9 The Islamic Concept of the Nafs: Battling the Human Ego

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel! In our last lesson, we talked about the Sharī'a. We learnt that the Sharī'a is a way of life. More specifically, it is way of reaching closeness to God through a life of servitude and surrender to Him. We do this by following his commands.

We also learnt that humans by nature are always in a state of servitude, either serving their delusions and attachments, or serving God Almighty. The goal of the Sharī'a is to instil a specific discipline in the human soul whereby it can rechannel itself and surrender to God through the habit of obedience.

Obeying God is an internal struggle. On the one hand, we have the desire to want to do our own thing, but on the other, God is asking us to do what He wants. The platform and the grounds in which this struggle takes place is inside the human soul. Simply put, it is a struggle against the evil inclinations of the ego, or nafs as it is called in Islam. In this lesson, we will go over the types of nafs in Islam.

#### BODY OF TEXT

For unto him who shall have transgressed the bounds of what is right, and preferred the life of this world [over God and the good of his own soul,] the Hellfire shall be his refuge. But unto him who shall have stood in fear of his Sustainer's presence, and held back his inner self from base desires, then indeed Paradise shall be his refuge (Chapter 72, verses 37-41).

So far in our current section we have had little trouble in translating Arabic terms to English. Today's discussion is about the concept of the nafs which is an Islamic term with NO equal meaning in the English language and may mean different things depending on the context.

In this lesson, we will be discussing the part of the nafs that commands to evil which is otherwise known as nafs al-ammarah in Arabic. According to Islam, the inner dimension of person is divided into two camps, the first is the spiritual self - commonly known as the fitrah - and the lower or base self which commands us to evil, commonly known as the nafs. The nafs that commands to evil is the realm that produces delusion and attachment to mental illusions. It is the center of our unruly desires, base thoughts and heedlessness.

These mental illusions include, among other things, the need for power, fame, excessive

money, and worst of them all, pride and arrogance which most of the aforementioned desires stem from. Pride and arrogance are especially problematic for they are the grounds through which humans defy Allah.

Allah commands humans to do good and to obey Him for the sake of their own souls, but it is the pride and arrogance which the nafs produces that refuses to surrender to God and instead, surrenders unto its own whims or hawā as the Qur'an calls it.

So the battle against the nafs is a battle against inordinate and spiritually subversive desires. It is a battle against desires that support and facilitate a lifestyle of heedlessness (ghaflah) towards God.

Seeing how the nafs is the prime source of a human's downfall, it is the prime target of Shaytān who whispers in the human self and tries to compel it to do evil. The way one protects oneself from Shaytān is self-control, that is, control of the nafs. God has given every human ability an inner gauge that helps us orient ourselves towards God.

A diseased self is where this inner gauge and will to control the nafs becomes corrupted. As one sins, darkness develops inside. As this darkness develops, it becomes harder to fight one's nafs. One must not despair however, for not only does God forgive but despite one's circumstances and mistakes, God has given us a way to win this battle.

How does one go about in winning this battle? Recall that the battle is between the nafs and the fitrah. Whichever one wins depends on which one we feed the most. If we spend our lives indulging in every whimsical and carnal desire, such as gluttony, drugs, cigarettes, or wanting to show off, we will simply make the evil nafs stronger.

As time goes by, it will be harder and harder to fix ourselves if we get into the habit of submitting to our selfish desires. Yet if we spend more time on spiritual activities, such as prayer, reading the Qur'an, and saying no to the whims of the nafs, then one strengthens the fitrah. As one repeats this over and over again, it becomes easier and easier to say no to the nafs.

If you haven't noticed already, the key factor that determines which side wins in the battle of the self is habit. Our habits are what determine the inherent strength of our fitrah or our nafs

and hence why so much of Islam is about repetition. Acquiring healthy habits is the basis of purifying the self in Islam.

The Qur'an says:

The Day where neither wealth nor children will benefit anyone except for he who comes to Allah with a pure and sound heart. (Chapter 26 of the Qur'an, verses 88-89)

A subject that has often been repeated in our lessons is that of the pure heart or al-qalb al-salīm. The pure heart is what truly determines success in the eternal life to come. The pure heart is a heart that is full of God's remembrance and is empty of sin, pride and other spiritual pollutants. This comes about through feeding the soul with spiritually "nutritious food."

Doing it once or twice, or haphazardly is not enough. Long vigils of prayers here and there are not sufficient either. In fact, sometimes it can be spiritually detrimental. What does work is consistency whatever spiritual practice one does. That is the key to success in winning the battle against the nafs. Simply asking God's forgiveness is not enough. One must couple it with action!

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh

## 2.10 Satan, Jinns and Angels: Their Influence in the World

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu 'Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel!

This will be the last lesson of our section. Among other things, we have so far looked at the shahāda, the usul al-din as well as the concept of the evil nafs.

In today's lesson, we will do a quick overview of the connection between humans, Satan and jinns. Furthermore, we will be looking into the psychological effects of demonic influences on the human mind and their relationship to the evil nafs.



## BODY OF TEXT

[Allah] said: Descend from Paradise, for it is not for you to be arrogant here. Go then, among the debased shall you be. [Satan] said: Grant me respite until the Day where we will be resurrected. [Allah] said: Indeed you will be among those who will be granted respite. [Satan] said: now that you have thwarted me, I will surely ambush [mankind] along your Straight Path and shall most certainly fall upon them openly and secretly, from their right and from their left, you will surely find most of them to become ungrateful. (Chapter 7, verses 13-17 of the Holy Qur'an)

Physical life is not the only kind of life that exists in the world. In addition to physical beings like humans, Allah also created spiritual beings who are alive, and like humans, are highly intelligent. Among them, two of them stand out, namely Angels and Jinns. First, we have angels. Angels in Islam are made out of light and unlike other beings, they cannot sin.

There are different reasons as to why this might be, some traditions say that they have no free will whereas others say they don't sin because they have no desires. Whatever the case may be, we know that they cannot sin.

Furthermore, archangels, that is, the highest ranking angels, cannot make mistakes either. Mistakes may be possible for lower ranking angels such as the angels of the earth (*malā'ikat al-arḍ*) since we have no evidence in our religious sources stating or implying that they are infallible from mistakes.

Angels are part of God's legions, they not only manage the universe, but they also play a role in managing our guidance. For example, we have angels on each of our sides, one registering our good deeds, and the other registering our bad deeds. We also have angels that whisper or encourage good deeds. Other angels play the role of protecting our lives (in the West we often call them "Guardian Angels") and we die when Allah commands them to cease protecting us.

The higher realm angels are responsible for bringing down divine revelation on earth. For example the Archangel Gabriel is the angel that brings down revelation. Others are responsible for bringing about the Day of Judgment, like the Archangel Isrāfīl.

We also have another race of spiritual beings called the Jinn. The Jinn are intelligent beings who are made out of smokeless fire. Unlike angels, Jinns can commit sins as they have desires and free will. Although some are good, many are also evil.

The leader of the evil Jinn is called Iblīs, commonly known as Satan or the Devil. He is the worst of the Jinn. When Adam (as) was created, God asked Satan to bow down to Adam. Satan, in his conceit and pride refused to obey Allah's order.

Satan thought that he was far superior than a being that was made out of clay since he as a Jinn was made out of smokeless fire. Why prostrate to an inferior being Satan asked himself!

Until that point, Satan had been a Jinn who was ranked on the same level, if not higher, than the angels. On a side note, you can see that Islam does not believe that Satan was an angel, but a Jinn given that angels cannot sin.

As a form of revenge against humankind, Satan promised that he would spend his whole life trying to deviate humankind from God. He gathered innumerable other Jinns and put them to task. The way Jinns work is that most often, they cannot influence us physically. However, what they may do is whisper evil thoughts into our hearts. The intention behind these whispers is to get people to act upon them. By acting on them, Satan wants us to become sinful and ungrateful towards God.

The Qur'an says:

Truly, Shaytān is an open enemy to mankind (Chapter 12, verse 5 of the Holy Qur'an)

Shaytān and his legions want the destruction of humankind. He encourages immorality, sinful pleasure, and pointless fun. Worst of all, he and his legions push people into despair and depression by suggesting all sorts of depressing and evil thoughts in their minds.

Humans are free to reject these demonic suggestions, but the Jinns, particularly Satan, has a lot of experience in countering our resistance. He often does not ask a person to sin outright, but he does try to get a person to slowly take the necessary steps that will eventually lead to sin. For example, Satan may tempt a man to associate with an unrelated woman, thinking that what he's doing is for the greater good or that he's just being "friends" with her.

Often enough, this is how the path to fornication begins, that is, it is through good, permissible intentions that Satan whispers in people. Eventually, step by step, Satan will influence such a person to fornicate.

Our inner selves and the spiritual battles that take place in them are therefore not empty of outside influences. As we battle our evil inclinations, Jinns, that is, demons, attempt to whisper thoughts in our minds so as to entice us to evil. On the opposite spectrum, the Prophets and Imams of God, in addition to angels, try to do keep us from evil and entice us to the good. Whichever one we choose however, is entirely up to us.

## 2.11 The Problem of Evil, Suffering and Pain

### INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Converts Channel!

The greatest spiritual crisis that humans will ever face is the problem of evil and suffering. The question goes like this, if God is all good, why does He permit evil and suffering? Why doesn't He stop it? After all, if He loves His creation, He would protect them just like a mother protects her children.

In this lesson, we look at two aspects of the problem of evil in this world. The first is the intellectual problem of evil and suffering. The second is the emotional problem

of evil and suffering. On the latter, we will give some pointers on how to deal with suffering in the modern world.

### BODY OF TEXT

#### Answering the Intellectual Problem of Evil

The intellectual problem of evil sees God and evil as mutually incompatible. If God is all-good

and all-loving, then He would naturally want to alleviate suffering from us and get rid of evil. Since there is great suffering and evil in the world, then God is either

1. powerless to do anything about suffering and evil
2. or careless and callous about His creation
3. or He does not exist

Obviously none of these options are good as they do not help the case for any monotheistic conception of God. Since God is the creator of the universe, it is impossible that He be powerless. Many people see God as All-Loving and All-Good which means that He would or should stop evil if He did indeed exist. Since evil still persists, many atheists will say that this is proof that God, or at least the Abrahamic understanding of God, does not exist.

This is a rather simplistic depiction of the intellectual problem of evil since there is another way of looking at the problem of God and evil that is logically sound.

Yes, God is All-Good and All-Loving, and as the creator of the universe, He is also All-Powerful. So why does He allow evil to exist?

A popular answer that theologians give is the following: God brought us unto this earth in order to test us. If God interferes in every single instance of evil in this world, then what is the point of free will and testing? It is by being tested on this earth that we grow spiritually. With constant divine intervention, we as individuals cannot grow spiritually.

The second answer is that God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil to exist. This means that our knowledge and awareness of things is very limited. God sees things from eternity and knows all possible outcomes. He allows evil to exist to the extent that it will have a positive effect in the world or the afterlife or both. We

may not be able to see the good of it as of now, but on the “macroscale” of things it does lead to an ultimate good no matter how bad it seems in the short-term.

This last part thus requires some honesty and humility. We can't predict with 100% accuracy what will happen five minutes from now, how can we ever make a judgment on the effects of evil acts throughout the span of human history in this world and the Hereafter?

## The Emotional Problem of Evil

The emotional problem of evil is about people's dislike or even hatred of God who permits suffering in the world. People lose their loved ones, their health, their jobs or see society around them fall apart where much of it is due to evil acts such as murder or illnesses and disease brought about by war. They are angry that God doesn't do anything about it.

Remember that often enough, this kind of attitude stems from a subtle and hidden assumption that there is no afterlife. The person expressing such anger may outwardly believe in the Hereafter and God's Final Judgment, but deep down inside he or she isn't really certain about it.

From an Islamic perspective, and indeed from an Abrahamic perspective, God has the last word on the Day of Judgment. Our lives here are limited, and those of us who live in the 21st century will notice that time goes by super-fast. Know that you will soon die and on your deathbed, you will forget most of the evil and suffering that came your way.

This world, as we said earlier, is a world where God tests our free will. If we didn't have free will, we couldn't be truly good. In order to be truly good and reach union with God, one must be able to choose good over evil. For God to get rid of evil in the world, which is the result of human intentions, he would need to get rid of our free will. But if he did this, he would also take our ability to truly love and do good.

For Allah, this isn't worth the price. Why should Allah sacrifice our potential for infinite greatness and good for the sake of some evil people? And it's not like they're going to get away with it, they will be accountable for every single thing they do in their lives whether it is a small lie or a big thing like murder.

But what about those who suffered from evil? According to Islam, God will reward those who suffered from evil on the Day of Judgment. He will do this on multiple levels. First, their suffering will be a means for having their sins forgiven. Second, they will get extra rewards in heaven.

Third, there are some forms of evil that may cause long term psychological pain for its victims.

On the Day of Judgment, God will make some people forget the horrible things they suffered in this world in order to fill them with inner peace. It will be as if none of it ever happened.

Finally, remember that suffering is our best teacher. We learn more from suffering than from our happy days. Our happy and comfortable days tend to make us heedless, whereas suffering wakes us up and makes us realize that nothing in this world is dependable. We can only depend on God.

Until Next Time, Thank you for watching. As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh