



Course 2

**Islamic Creed
& Faith**

Narrated Ibn `Umar:

I was with the Prophet
(peace and blessings of Allah be
upon him) while he was eating fresh
dates.

He said,
"From the trees there is a tree
which resembles a faithful
believer."

I wanted to say that it was the date
palm, but I was the youngest
among them (so I kept quiet).

He added, "It is the date palm."

Sahih al-Bukhari

Table of Contents

Islamic Creed & Faith 1

Preface 3

LESSON 1 9

What is the Nature of Faith? 10

Faith Differs from Knowledge 11

Faith is Conviction Free of Doubt 16

Faith is Action 20

Faith is Not Predicated on Seeing 21

Faith is Individual 24

Faith Wears Out 27

Faith is from God 29

Faith is Accepted Before Death 32

Faith is Never Wasted 40

Faith is the Basis of Acceptance for Good Deeds 43

Faith Creates Associations and Disassociations 46

Table of Contents

LESSON 2 55

What is Correct Belief? 56

Sources of Knowledge about Islamic Belief 58

Six Pillars of Faith — Based on
the Qur'an and Sunnah.....61

LESSON 3 69

Pillar 1 — Belief in Allah Most High 70

Worshipping Only God 71

Believing in the Guidance of God 76

Affirming God's Names and Attributes 79

The Name "Allah" 86

Oneness 90

Mercy..... 94

Love 97

Forgiveness.....102

Creation.....105

Table of Contents

<i>Uniqueness</i>	106
<i>Closeness</i>	109
<i>Lordship</i>	111

LESSON 4 **118**

Pillar 2—Belief in Angels	119
--	------------

LESSON 5 **129**

Pillar 3— Belief in the Books of God	130
---	------------

LESSON 6 **147**

Pillar 4—Belief in the Messengers of God	148
---	------------

Table of Contents

LESSON 7 165

Pillar 5—Belief in the Hereafter 171

Death 173

The Grave 178

The Day of Judgment 182

The Trumpet Blasts 184

Recreation 186

Gathering and Waiting 190

Records, Account, & Scales 196

Dragging to Hell of Disbelievers 202

The Pool of “Kawthar” for Believers 204

The Bridge of Believers 206

The Plain of Retribution between Believers 208

Heaven and Hell 212

Table of Contents

LESSON 8 218

Pillar 6—

Belief in Predestination 219

1—Allah Knows Everything 219

2—Events are Written in a Record with Allah .. 222

3—Events Occur through Allah’s Will 224

LESSON 9 228

Nullifiers of Faith in Islam 229

Disbelief 230

Polytheism 234

**Specific Acts
of Disbelief and Polytheism 239**

Table of Contents

APPENDIX A..... 250

Allah's Names, Derived from the
Qur'an and Sunnah 250

APPENDIX B..... 261

Qur'anic References on
Stories of Prophets of God 261

Islamic Creed & Faith

Course Objectives: _____

At the end of this course, the student should be able to:

- Understand the nature of faith;
- Articulate core Islamic beliefs concerning the Six Pillars of Faith;
- Define disbelief and polytheism;
- Identify commonplace actions which nullify correct faith.

Co-requisite: _____

Video Recorded lectures

Islamic Creed & Faith

Recommended Reading: _____

- *Fundamentals of Tawhid by Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips*
- *Islamic Creed Series by Umar S. al-Ashqar*
- *Guide to Sound Creed by Salih al-Fawzan*
- *A Brief Introduction to the Aqeedah of Ahl Assunnah wal Jama'ah by Abdullah al-Athari*
- *Belief in Allah - What Does it Mean? by Muhammad b. Saleh al-Uthaymeen*
- *Conditions of Laa ilaha illa Allaah by Jamaluddin Zarabozo*
- *Authentic Creed by 'Abdul-'Aziz b. 'Abdullah b. Baz*

Preface

Faith is the basis of God's acceptance. Correct belief is the essence of Islam, the foundation of the religion, and the key to Paradise. It serves no use to practice the pillars of Islam—testimony, prayer, fasting, charity, and pilgrimage—in the absence of faith. Therefore, understanding, internalizing, and acting in accordance with correct faith are an imperative priority for every person who is seeking closeness to God.

Learning about tenants of faith is an essential component to understanding Islam. In combination with knowledge of worship, law and ethics, the Islamic tenants of faith complete one's understanding of the basics of Islam.

Preface

In this course, God willing, you will gain an understanding of what we as Muslims are ordered to believe in, according to the Qur'an and the Sunnah (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In this textbook, we will discuss three main topics related to faith in Islam:

- 1) The nature of faith,**
- 2) The six essential pillars of faith in Islam, and**
- 3) Matters that go against or nullify one's faith.**

Preface

This text is specially designed for newly reverted Muslims. Therefore, it attempts to present the most essential information related to these topics in a simple and easy to understand manner free of Arabic jargon or unnecessary sectarian debate. We therefore do not cover academic terminology, issues of interpretive debate, and other advanced discussions in Islamic creed studies, i.e. the specialty branch of science of Islamic studies called “Aqeedah”.

If a student wishes to pursue more detailed investigation of faith studies in Islam, there are extra resources available in the NMA learning portal. Additionally, we highly recommend Shaykh Umar al-Ashqar’s eight-volume Islamic Creed Series as a next step and reliable reference.

Preface

A special note regarding faith studies:

As we venture on this path of learning about Islamic beliefs, we will be examining issues that compose the platform of a person's religious identity and determine one's place in the hereafter. Faith and disbelief form a sharp line between Heaven and Hell. In studying creed and faith, therefore, it is important to keep in mind the difference between understanding and accepting these principles versus applying them to judgments of other people.

It is not our purpose to judge and condemn others. This is self-evident to most people; however, there have been many misconceptions and misapplications of Islamic creed by beginning students and we therefore must make a clear

Preface

distinction, from the beginning, between learning for the purpose of self-enlightenment and misapplying that learning to judging and condemning others.

There is a difference between knowing that an act is clearly categorized as disbelief, leading to the Hellfire, and saying that a particular person who does that action is a disbeliever or a denizen of the Hellfire. Calling someone a disbeliever is an extremely hefty accusation entailing many consequences in this world and the hereafter. If one witnesses a person committing the sin of an act of disbelief, then it is just that—an act of disbelief, not necessarily a person of disbelief, especially if that person claims to be a Muslim.

Preface

Our goal in studying Islamic creed is learning, applying our learning to our personal practice of Islam, and passing knowledge on to others if possible.

Labeling specific individuals as disbelievers or damned to Hell is not by any means our goal nor is it generally a productive activity.

May Allah Most Gracious grant us guidance from His light, and establish faith firmly and steadfastly in our hearts!

LESSON

1

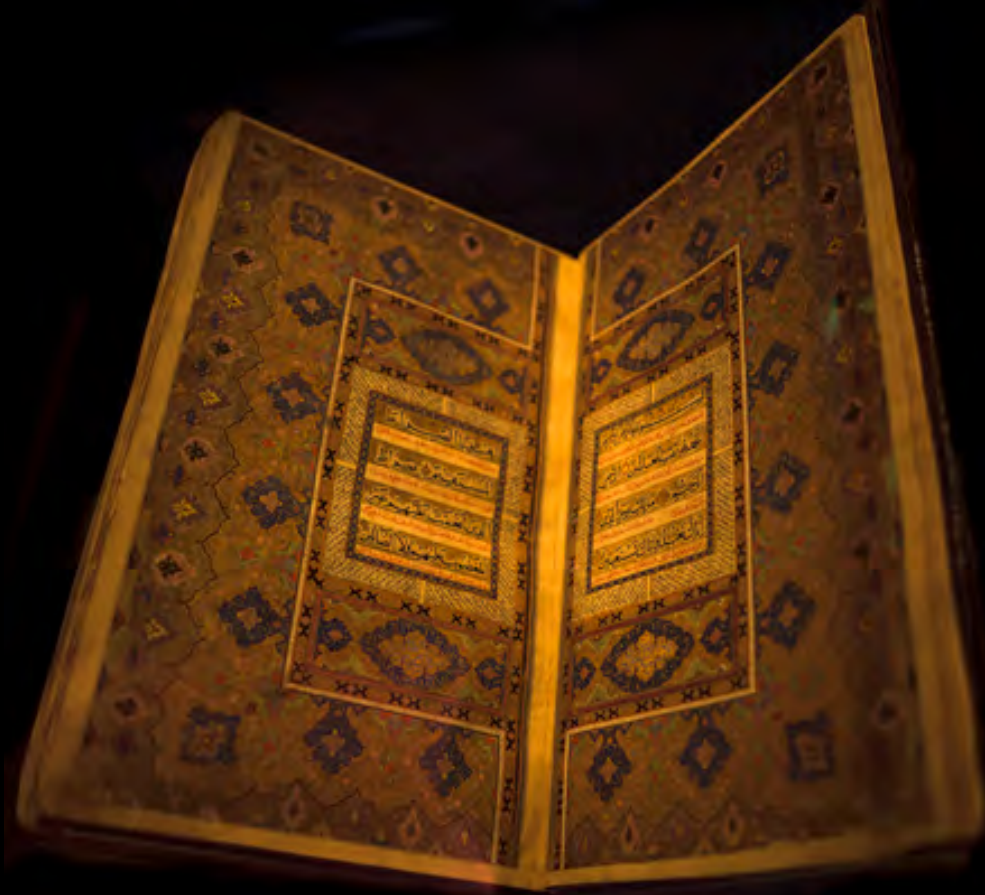
What is the Nature of Faith?

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Understand the nature of faith in the heart;
- Recognize consequences of faith in this world and the Hereafter.

Faith, called “*Iman*” in Arabic, means knowing, believing, and committing wholeheartedly to that belief. True faith vanquishes doubt. Faith is intrinsically tied to action, waxing and waning in conjunction with one’s good or bad deeds. By its nature, faith wears out and requires renewal. Correct faith is a blessed state of the heart, ultimately in Allah’s control and subject to His divine judgment. Faith is the only acceptable basis for good deeds.



Faith Differs from Knowledge

Knowledge is requisite to faith but does not equate to faith. Knowledge and understanding precede faith and are therefore crucial in seeking a path to God. This is merely logical. How can we have faith in something we are unaware of? Knowledge is a blessing because it can enable us to have faith. Allah describes some of the people of the scriptures, in their reactions to the Qur'an, saying,

“Lo! Those who were given knowledge before it, when it is read unto them, fall down prostrate on their faces, adoring, saying, ‘Glory to our Lord! Verily the promise of our Lord must be fulfilled. They fall down on their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility.”
(Qur'an, 17:107-109)

They had been given knowledge and thereby they attained faith and became believers. However, knowing does not necessarily mean accepting and believing. Contrast these righteous people of the scripture against others who demurred to accept Islam although they knew very well that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) possessed all the virtues and signs of being the final prophet as foretold in the Torah. Allah mentions them, saying,

“Those unto whom We gave the scripture recognize (this revelation) as they recognize their sons. But lo! A party of them knowingly conceal the truth.”
(Qur’an, 2:146)

People might reject faith despite knowledge due to corruption in their hearts.

Pharaoh is another example of faithlessness despite knowledge. He knew that Prophet Moses's signs proved his message, but he persisted in denying the message through arrogance. The Qur'an quotes Moses's address to Pharaoh, saying,

*“He said, ‘You surely know that these signs have been sent down by none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth.’”
(Qur'an, 17:102)*

Arrogance is a spiritual pitfall which destroys many people. Indeed arrogance and faith cannot coexist in the heart.

There are other factors that motivate a person to deny the truth about God and religion, including social pressure, desire for wealth or worldly status, fear of persecution, and even simple laziness. Allah describes some disbelievers, saying,

“And when they mount upon ships they pray to Allah making their faith pure for Him only, but when He brings them safely to land behold! they ascribe partners (to Him in worship) that they may disbelieve in that which We have given them, and that they may take their ease.” (Qur’an, 29:65-66)

And,

“The reckoning for mankind draws closer while they turn away, heedless. Never does there come to them a new reminder from their Lord but they listen to it while they play; with preoccupied hearts.”

(Qur'an, 21:1-3)

Faith means not only knowing the truth but loving and honoring it above all else.

Faith is Conviction Free of Doubt

Faith implies surety, leaving no room for doubt or confusion. It is not enough to think that perhaps there is a God or believe there *might* be angels, for example. That is not faith. Faith is strongly rooted conviction.



Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave glad tidings of Paradise to the believers, and he described them as having no doubt

in their testimony of faith. He said, “No one who meets Allah having testified, ‘*La ilaha illa Allah*’/ There is no god worthy of worship except Allah,’ having no doubt about it, shall be barred from the gardens of Paradise,” (Muslim). Allah Most High declares, concerning His Book, the Holy Qur’an,

“This is a book in which there is no doubt, a guidance to the God-fearing, who believe in the unseen.” (Qur’an, 2:2-3)

Then, Allah pairs doubtfulness in His revelations with disbelief in the Qur'an, saying,

“And if you are in doubt concerning that which We reveal to Our slave (Muhammad), then produce a chapter of the like thereof, and call your witnesses beside Allah if you are truthful. And if you do it not—and you can never do it—then guard against the fire prepared disbelievers, whose fuel is of men and stones.” (Qur'an, 2:23-24)

In another verse, Allah describes people of Hellfire, saying,

“Hinderer of good, transgressor, doubter.” (Qur'an, 50:25)

Being a person who doubted Allah and His revelation is part of the disparaging description of the disbelievers. On the other hand, God Most High describes believers, saying,

“Only those are believers who have believed in Allah and His messenger and afterward, doubt not.” (Qur’an, 49:15)

Such conviction naturally leads to action. The place of faith is in the heart but its expression is in the tongue and body.

Faith is Action

Faith and action go hand in hand. What we say with our tongues and what we do with our limbs is intrinsically intertwined with the state of our hearts. Furthermore, faith fluctuates, and this waxing and waning of one's faith is in pulse with one's good or evil actions. Good deeds increase faith. Sins decrease faith. The better the deed in the sight of God, the higher its level of faith. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Faith has some seventy branches, the highest of which is to say, '*La ilaha illa Allah*/' There is no god worthy of worship but Allah,' and the lowest of which is to remove something harmful from the road," (Tirmidhi).

Faith is Not Predicated on Seeing

Generally, faith involves believing in what one cannot see, hear, touch, or otherwise sense directly. The old adage, “Seeing is believing,” is not accurate in regard to matters of faith. There are people who stubbornly reject the truth despite knowing it, as mentioned in the above point. Allah describes them, saying,

“And if they were to see a fragment of the heaven falling, they would say, ‘A heap of clouds!’” (Qur’an, 52:44)



And,

“And if We should send down the angels unto them, and the dead should speak unto them, and We should gather against them all things in array, they would not believe unless Allah so willed. Howbeit, most of them are ignorant.” (Qur’an, 6:111)

For such people, seeing the invisible matters of faith—“the unseen”, as referred to in Islam—does not solve their problem because their obstacle is in their hearts and they are unable to accept the truth due to their own corruption.

For believers, whose hearts incline toward faith and long for the Face of their Lord, seeing increases their faith. For example, Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) asked Allah to show him the resurrection in order to increase his faith, and so Allah demonstrated it to him with birds. Allah recounts the story, saying,

“And when Abraham said, ‘My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.’ He said, ‘Do you not believe?’ Abraham said, ‘Yes, but (I ask) in order that my heart may be at ease.’” (Qur’an, 2:260)

Faith is Individual

Faith is an intimate personal decision. It is not merely an ethnic identity or an inherited trait. It cannot be passively acquired by any means. Rather, it is a matter of actively believing. Alongside this, faith is a free choice. By definition, faith is sincere and therefore cannot be an act of compulsion. Allah says,

*“Believe therein or believe not.”
(Qur’an, 17:107)*

And,

“There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is distinct from error. And he who rejects false deities and believes in Allah has grasped a firm handhold which will never break.” (Qur’an, 2:256)

And, about the Prophet Muhammad's mission, Allah says,

“You are by no means a compeller over them. But warn by the Qur'an the one who fears My threat.” (Quran, 50:45)

Clearly, there is no compulsion in religion. Faith is a free and willing choice by its nature.

With freedom of choice comes accountability. Every person is individually accountable for his or her own faith. Allah says,

“No laden one shall bear another's load, and that man has only that for which he makes effort...and that your Lord, He is the goal.” (Qur'an, 53:38-42)

People cannot plausibly blame others for their choices in faithlessness. Allah Most High says,

“O you who believe! You have charge over your own souls. He who errs cannot injure you if you are rightly guided.” (Qur’an, 5:105)

No one can force another person to believe or to disbelieve. For example, no parent or teacher or ruler can force a person to believe or disbelieve. Not even prophets of God are capable of granting others faith or withdrawing it from them, as demonstrated by the stories of Prophet Abraham, whose father persisted in disbelief, and Prophet Noah, whose son perished in the flood alongside other disbelievers, as well as Prophet Lot, whose wife failed to follow him in piety.

Faith Wears Out

Faith requires continuous refreshment. A person might destroy his or her faith through sinfulness or neglect. Faith can also wear out, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described, “The faith in the heart of any of you wears out as your garment wears out. So ask Allah to renew your faith in your hearts,” (Tabarani). We supplicate to Allah Most High to renew our faith. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also used to call upon Allah, saying, “O Turner of Hearts! Keep my heart steadfast upon Your religion,” (Tirmidhi & Ibn Majah). Allah quotes the supplication of believers, saying,

“Our Lord! Cause not our hearts to stray after You have guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from Your presence. Lo! You, only You are the Bestower.” (Qur’an, 3:8)



Faith is from God

Correct belief and rooted faithfulness is guidance from Allah, a special blessing and a mercy. Allah says,

“Nay, verily this is an admonishment. So whomsoever wills may heed. And they will not heed unless Allah wills. He is the fount of piety and the fount of forgiveness.”

(Qur’an, 74:54-56)

God rewards faith to those whom He chooses in fairness. Allah declares,

“As for those who strive in Us, We surely guide them to Our paths, and lo! Allah is with the good.” (Qur’an, 29:69)

God gives people opportunities to believe, but they will take or leave their chances in accordance with the purity of their hearts. Allah says,

“Whenever a chapter (of the Qur’an) is revealed, there are some of them who say, ‘Which of you has thus increased in faith?’ As for those who believe, it has increased them in faith and they rejoice. But as for those in whose hearts is a disease, it only adds wickedness to their wickedness, and they die while they are disbelievers.”
(Qur’an, 9:124-125)

No one can grant faith except Allah Most High. Even prophets who deliver the message of God cannot lead people into faith, unless God wills faith for that individual and according to God’s intimate and complete knowledge of the person’s heart. Allah says,

“Even if you (O Muhammad) desire their right guidance, still Allah assuredly will not guide the one who misleads. Such have no helpers.” (Quran, 16:37)

The faculties that enable a person to reach faith are gifts from God. Allah says,

“He it is Who gave you being, and assigned unto you ears and eyes and hearts. Small thanks you give!” (Qur’an, 67:23)

Our ears enable us to hear the message. Our eyes enable us to perceive God’s signs in prophets’ miracles and in creation. And our hearts may be a vessel for faith and understanding. Yet, people often use these faculties for sinfulness and deny faith, which is ungrateful and rejecting of the

most important gift, the gift of guidance in religion. Allah Most High says,

“The worst of beasts in Allah’s sight are the ungrateful who will not believe.”
(Qur’an, 8:55)

Faith is Accepted Before Death

Life is a test: will you believe and act in righteous conduct or not. Allah Most High declares,

“(He) Who created life and death to try you, which of you is best in conduct.”
(Qur’an, 67:2)

The test is over, pass or fail, at the moment of death. We find the rewards or punishments, consequences of our decisions in this world, after life. Allah describes the reward of the believers in the hereafter, saying,

“Such on the Day of Resurrection will be only for those who believed during the life of the world.” (Qur’an, 7:32)

Real faith occurs in the life of this world, before death comes to the soul.



If a person rejects faith during his or her life, it does not help them to believe after death. After death comes to the soul, faith is moot and is not rewarded by God. Allah speaks about rejecters of faith, saying,

“Then, when they saw Our doom, they said, ‘We believe in Allah alone and reject (all) that we used to associate (in worship with Him)!’ But their faith could not avail them when they saw Our doom. This is Allah’s law which hath ever taken course for His bondsmen.”
(Qur’an, 40:84-85)

When people are in the throes of death, they are about to lose all worldly possessions, status, relationships, and concerns. They are about to meet their reckoning and return to their Lord and Creator. Those who knew and were convinced but did not submit to the

truth about God and religion repent at that moment, but that moment is too late. Repentance is accepted until the last breath of life but not afterward.

People on the Day of Judgment will wish to return to the life of the world in order to redo choices they made, but it will not be accepted from them and their regret will not avail them. Allah urges people to embrace faith before death, saying,

“Say: O My slaves who have been prodigal to their own hurt! Despair not of the mercy of Allah, Who forgives all sins. Lo! He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. Turn to Him repentant, and surrender unto Him before there comes to you the doom, when you cannot be helped.” (Qur’an, 39:53-54)

He further describes the fate of the person after death, who failed to enter into faithfulness, saying,

“[The soul] would say, ‘Oh, that I had a second chance that I might be among the righteous!’ Nay, for My revelations came unto you, but you did deny them and were scornful and were among the disbelievers.”
(Qur’an, 39:58-59)

There are no second chances after death for those who were warned and informed in this life.

There is an exceptional case in regard to this issue, and that is the people who did not receive the message calling to faithfulness during their lifetime. They are not considered disbelievers because they had no opportunity to accept or reject faith. For them, their test occurs after death, on the Day of Judgment.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described four such cases, saying, “There are four who will be tried on the Day of Resurrection: the deaf person who could not hear anything, the mentally disabled, the senile elderly, and the person who died during an interval period [between prophets]... Allah will take their pledge to obey Him, and He will send word to them to enter the fire. By the One in Whose

hand is the soul of Muhammad, if they enter it, it will be cool and safe for them,” (Ahmad & Bayhaqi).

This shows Allah’s mercy and justice. He does not punish without warning and giving ample chance to believe and save oneself. Allah says,

“And We never punish until We have sent a messenger.” (Qur’an, 17:15)

As for those whom Allah punishes in the hereafter, they were all warned in this life and willfully chose to reject faith. Allah says,

“And those who disbelieve are driven into Hell in troops till, when they reach it and the gates thereof are opened, the warders thereof say to them, ‘Came there not unto

you messengers of your own, reciting unto the revelations of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day?’ They say, ‘Yes, surely.’” (Quran, 39:71)

A similar description occurs in other verses, where Allah quotes the denizens of Hellfire, saying,

“They say, ‘Yes, verily, a warner came to us, but we denied and said Allah has not revealed anything and you are only in great error.’” (Qur’an, 67:9)

Allah is Most Merciful, Most Just. He does not punish without warning. But after His warning, there is no second chance and no excuse will be accepted for those who choose to reject faith.

Faith is Never Wasted

Allah rewards pure and upright faith without dint. Allah Most High promises,

*“Whosoever surrenders his purpose to Allah while doing good, his reward is with his Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.”
(Qur’an, 2:112)*

Believers of any time period, who followed the prophet of God who came to them, are accepted by Allah Most High. Allah describes people who followed the scriptures of Prophet Moses and Prophet Jesus before the coming of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them all), saying,

“Of the People of the Scripture there is a staunch community who recite the revelations of Allah in the night season, falling prostrate (before Him). They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie with one another in good works. They are the righteous. And whatever good they do, they will not be denied the mead thereof. Allah is Aware of those who ward off (evil).” (Qur’an, 3:113-115)

And Allah Most High quotes other believers, saying,

“Our Lord! We have heard a crier calling unto faith, ‘Believe in your Lord!’ so we believed. Our Lord! Therefore forgive us our sins, and remit from us our evil deeds, and make us die a death of the righteous. Our Lord! Give us that which You have promised us by Your

messengers. Confound us not upon the Day of Resurrection. Lo! You do not break Your tryst.” (Qur’an, 3:193-194)

And He Most High answers them, saying,

“And their Lord has heard them (and He says): Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost.” (Qur’an, 3:195)

In another verse, Allah says,

“It was not Allah’s purpose that your faith should be in vain, for Allah is full of pity, Merciful toward mankind.” (Qur’an, 2:143)

Faith is the Basis of Acceptance for Good Deeds

Only deeds built upon a foundation of correct faith are acceptable to God, as indicated in the Qur'anic verses,

“If anyone rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost.” (Qur'an, 5:5)

And,

“But it has already been revealed to you, as it was to those before you, that if you were to join [gods] with Allah, truly your work will be fruitless and you will surely become among the losers.” (Qur'an, 39:65)

And,

“Those who disbelieve and turn away from the way of Allah, He renders their actions vain. And those who believe and do good works and believe in that which is revealed to Muhammad—and that is the truth from their Lord—He rids them of their ill deeds and improves their state. That is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood and because those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus Allah coins similitudes for mankind.” (Qur’an, 47:1-3)

And,

“Those who disbelieve, perdition is for them, and He will make their actions vain. That is because they are averse to that which Allah has revealed; therefore He makes their actions fruitless.” (Qur’an, 47:8-9)

And,

*“A similitude of those who disbelieve in their Lord: Their works are as ashes which the wind blows hard on a stormy day. They have no control over what they have earned. That is the extreme failure.”
(Qur’an, 14:18)*

The best of deeds are ultimately futile if they are not done with faith, performed sincerely for the sake of God and in the way of His revealed teachings (i.e. the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Faith without action is a sin, but action without faith is a waste of time and effort. A person might do many good deeds and then destroy them all by committing a sin that is weightier than all his or her good deeds combined, i.e. the sin of disbelieving

in God or the sin of believing in something in rivalry to God.

Faith Creates Associations and Disassociations

From the nature of faith in the heart is that it ripples into other actions of the heart, namely love and brotherhood or its opposite. Islamic faith creates love between Muslims. People of faith will find that people who staunchly oppose faith feel some degree of animosity toward them and may even act upon their hatred with oppression and injustice.

People of Islamic faith share a unique brotherhood and love for each other, through their love for Allah. Allah describes the brotherhood of Muslim believers, saying,

“Surely, the believers are naught else than brothers.” (Qur’an, 49:10)

And,

*“The believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another.”
(Qur’an, 9:71)*



Brotherhood among the faithful is both a natural consequence of similar faith and an ordinance from Allah. Allah Most High orders the believers to be unified for His sake, saying,

“Hold fast altogether to the rope of Allah and do not separate. And remember Allah’s favor toward you, how you were enemies and He made friendship between your hearts so that you become as brothers by His grace.” (Qur’an, 3:103)

The brotherhood of Islamic faith has many implications, such as mutual help and support. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) characterized the brotherhood of Islamic faith in the similitude of bricks in a strong wall, saying, “A believer to another

believer is like a brick—they support each other,” (Bukhari & Muslim). Furthermore, he described feelings of brotherhood as part of faith itself, saying, “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself,” (Bukhari & Muslim).

From the brotherhood of Islamic faith emanate many manners, laws, and principles of interpersonal relations in Islam. A few of these numerous guidelines are mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in his famous pilgrimage sermon, wherein he said, “Beware of suspicion for suspicion is the greatest falsehood. Do not try to find fault with each other, do not spy with one another, do not vie with one another, do not turn away from one another, and be

servants to Allah, brothers to one another as you have been commanded. A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He does him no wrong, nor does he desert him, nor does he despise him. Fear of Allah is here, fear of Allah is here (and he pointed to his heart). It is evil enough that a Muslim should look down on his brother. For every Muslim is sacred to another—his blood, his honor and his wealth,” (Bukhari & Muslim).

While faith unites the faithful together in a unique band of brotherhood, it also separates followers of a faith from those who violently oppose it. Allah cites a historical example, wherein a nation sought to exterminate the Muslims among them by burning them altogether in a pit of fire. Allah recounts their story in the Qur'an, saying,

“They had nothing against them save that they believed in Allah, the Mighty, the Owner of Praise.” (Qur’an, 85:8)

When a group or nation persecutes Muslims for their faith, it becomes incumbent upon all Muslims to distance themselves from the oppressors in their wrongdoing and to refrain from helping them in their campaign against the believers, even if those tyrannical people are blood relatives. Allah Most High says,

“O you who believe! Choose not My enemy and your enemy for allies. Do you give them alliance when they disbelieve in the Truth which has come to you, driving out the Messenger and you because you believe in Allah, your Lord?” (Qur’an, 60:1)

And,

“You will not find a folk who believe in Allah and the Last Day loving those who oppose Allah and His messenger, even though they be their fathers or their sons or their brethren or their clan. As for such, He has written faith upon their hearts and has strengthened them with a Spirit from Him, and He will bring them in to Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide. Allah is well pleased with them, and they are well pleased with Him. They are Allah’s party. Lo! Is it not Allah’s party who are successful?” (Qur’an, 58:22)

It should be clarified here that Allah Most High forbids oppression toward Muslims or Non-Muslims. Furthermore, Allah Most High encourages believers to be kind and just toward disbelievers. Allah says,

“Allah does not forbid you from showing kindness and dealing justly with those who did not war against you and drive you out of your homes. Lo! Allah loves the just dealers. Allah only forbids you from friendship with those who have warred against you on account of your religion and have driven you out of your homes and helped to drive you out. Whoever allies himself with them—such are the wrongdoers.” (Qur’an, 60:8-9)

The spirit of a Muslim toward a disbeliever who is not actively fighting the Muslim on account of his or her faith is to bear with them patiently and with tolerance, treating them with kindness and hoping for their repentance. Even the disbelievers who severely oppress followers of faith can reform and become brothers of the faithful. The distance that grows between people, separating the faithful from those

who oppose faith, is conditional and not absolute. People may change, as Allah says,

“It may be that Allah will ordain love between you and those of them with whom you are at enmity. Allah is Mighty, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” (Qur’an, 60:7)

LESSON 2

What is Correct Belief?

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Appreciate sources of knowledge about correct belief;
- List the Six Pillars of Faith in Islam.

There are many different belief systems in the world today. When we speak of correct faith, we mean believing in Allah and His messengers and what His messengers espoused. The question is: What did the messengers of God tell humanity to believe?

For example, what are we supposed to believe happens to the soul after death? Is there a Heaven and a Hell? Are those figurative or literal places? Do souls of the dead wander the world? Do they grant wishes to the living?

Even more importantly, now that I believe basically in an All-Powerful Creator, One God, and I have submitted myself to His ordinances, I want to know my Lord more fully. What are His attributes? What is the nature of His relationship toward the creation? Toward me?

These questions fall into the realm of creed studies in Islamic sciences. While we cannot delve deeply into all such quandaries in the limited scope and purpose of this text, it is important to at least cover the basic beliefs which every Muslim should know and to discuss the methodology of establishing a correctly guided understanding of Islamic beliefs.



Sources of Knowledge about Islamic Belief

Allah Most High has revealed correct belief in the guidance He sent to His messengers.

Every messenger of God preached the same beliefs. God Most High sent different messengers with somewhat different laws and practices in worship, but all of the messengers called mankind to the same core values and tenants of faith.

The prophets of God received divine inspiration through which they were informed about matters people cannot directly observe, such as what occurs after death. God chose them to convey His message to the people to whom they were sent. And He sent a last and final messenger to deliver His last and final message to all of humanity after him.

Every messenger was given proofs, in the form of miracles and other signs, to convince people of their prophethood, and arguments to convince people of the truth to which they called. For the final message, we have the Holy Qur'an, which conveys the message, presents arguments to convince the intellect, and is in and of itself a miracle. Additionally, we have the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to explain the Qur'an. Both of these bodies of literature have been preserved, and they are our references in what we should believe in and what we should reject.

Whatever we find in the Qur'an, we believe, because it is the uncorrupted truth and the pure word of God. Allah says,

“Allah has revealed the Scripture with the truth. Lo! Those who find a cause of disagreement in the Scripture are in open schism.” (Qur'an, 2:176)

And,

“Those who are of sound instruction say, ‘We believe in it; the whole is from our Lord.’ But only men of understanding really heed.” (Qur'an, 3:7)

Likewise, whatever we find reliably and authentically related from the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)—i.e. the “Sunnah”—we accept as true and valid. Without these two inseparable sources of guidance, we would not know about matters of correct belief and we would fail to fulfill the duties incumbent upon us as creations of God and His worshippers.

Six Pillars of Faith—Based on the Qur'an and Sunnah

We learn correct belief from the Book of God and the statements of His noble prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and they teach correct belief in clear terms.

Faith in Islam can be summarized as belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment, and Divine Decree. These six matters compose the basics of Islamic faith as outlined in many verses of the Qur'an and several statements of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). All of a Muslim's beliefs are derived from these tenants.

The six pillars of faith are taught in several verses. Allah Most High says,

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward the East or West, but righteousness is the one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the books, and the prophets.”
(Qur’an, 2:177)

And,

“The messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the believers. Each of them believes in Allah, His angels, His books, and His messengers.” (Qur’an, 2:285)

And,

“O believers! Believe in Allah and His messenger and the book which He has bestowed on His messenger and the book which He bestowed aforetime. He who disbelieves in Allah, His angels, His books, His messenger and the Last Day has gone far astray.” (Qur’an, 4:136)

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) defined faith, saying, “Belief means to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and to believe in Fate, the sweet of it and the bitter” (Muslim).

For unseen matters related to the pillars of faith, we as Muslims believe generally in their existence and we also believe in and affirm any specific details which have been revealed to us through Allah’s Book or through reliable and authentic narrations of the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

In regard to details which were not revealed or which we do not know, we refrain from speculative interpretation and conjecture. Allah commands mankind,

“Do not follow that whereof you have no knowledge. Verily, the hearing and the sight and the heart—each of these will be questioned.” (Quran, 17:36)

He also forbids speaking without knowledge in the verse,

“Say: ‘What my Lord forbids are all acts of indecency—committed openly or secretly—sin and wrongful oppression, and that you associate with Allah that which has not been sanctioned by Him, and that you say concerning Allah something about which you have no knowledge.’” (Qur’an, 7:33)

And, describing the devil, Allah says,

“He enjoins you only the evil and the foul, and that you tell concerning Allah that which you know not.” (Qur’an, 2:169)

Speaking about Allah without knowledge is forbidden, as one might say something horrendous and false without realizing it. Knowledge based on the revelation

of God is the only trustworthy source of information about the unseen, and we should avoid relying on guesswork about such important issues in faith.

For example, we believe in Allah, confirming His general existence. Additionally, we affirm that He Most High is Everlasting, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Hearing and other details given in the Qur'an and in authentic narrations of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). As for what is not revealed, or what we cannot comprehend in knowledge, such as the issue of how Allah Most High sees or hears, then we do not comment on such elusive issues and we reserve our belief for what He has affirmed about Himself in His revelation. We accept that He sees and hears because that was revealed, as pronounced in many

verses of the Holy Qur'an. How Allah sees or hears is not revealed to us and it is beyond our comprehension, so we do not speak on that matter other than to say, "Allah knows best."

As for whatever detailed descriptions of matters of the unseen exist in discourse in other faiths, scriptures, people's opinions or cultures—we reject concepts if they contradict what we know from Islamic sources, and we are silent if Islamic sources are silent regarding them, neither accepting nor denying.

The Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) contain many specific descriptions of Allah Most High, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Hereafter. It is not possible to compile all

such information in the scope of this text. However, we will give an overview and some brief details regarding each of the pillars of faith.

Surveying cultures around the world and examining assertions of other faith groups, one finds many mistaken customs and erroneous beliefs concerning Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Hereafter, and Fate; we discuss a select few, salient for our modern age.

LESSON

3

Pillar 1—Belief in Allah Most High

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Know core Islamic beliefs concerning God Almighty;
- Understand basic assertions of Islamic monotheism;
- Discuss some of God's names and attributes.

Pillar 1— Belief in Allah Most High¹

LESSON 3

Belief in God includes the belief that He is the one real God, the One worthy of worship to the exclusion of all else; that He is the creator and benefactor of all mortals Who provides for them and knows their secrets and confessions; that He can reward the obedient of them and punish the disobedient.

Islamic faith in God carries certain implications, including the following:

- 1) Worshipping God alone;**
- 2) Believing in His guidance;**
- 3) Affirming descriptions of God found in His revelation.**

1. Portions of the discussion of the six pillars of faith are modified from a lecture by the esteemed scholar of Islam, Shaykh Abdul-Azeez ibn Abdullah ibn Baz, may Allah have mercy on his soul and grant him continuous reward for his enduring contributions to Islamic knowledge.

Worshipping Only God

Belief in God and His Oneness implies worshipping Him and Him alone. It is precisely for this worship that Allah has created us. Allah says,

“Nor did I create the Jinn² or humans except to worship Me. I do not want any sustenance from them, nor do I want them to feed Me. For Allah is He Who gives (all) sustenance, Lord of Power, Steadfast (forever).” (Quran, 51:56-58)

And,

“O mankind! Worship your Lord, Who has created you and those before you, so that you may ward off (evil); Who has appointed the earth a resting place for

1. “Jinn” are a creation of God possessing free will, like humankind. While humans were created from clay, jinn were created from fire and therefore their nature differs from that of humans in many ways. Jinn can be male or female, Muslim or non-Muslim.

you and the sky a canopy, and causes water to pour down from the sky thereby producing fruits as food for you. And do not set up rivals to Allah when you know (better).” (Qur’an, 2:21-22)

Allah has sent the messengers and has revealed books to make clear the reality of His Oneness and the worship due to Him. Prophets and messengers were sent by God for this realization, its propagation, and to admonish mankind to avoid whatever conflicts with it. Allah says,

“And We assuredly raised among every nation a messenger (proclaiming), ‘Serve Allah and shun false gods.’” (Qur’an, 16:36)

And,

“And We sent no messenger before you (Muhammad) but We inspired him, (saying), ‘There is no god save Me (Allah), so worship Me.’” (Qur’an, 21:25)

And,

“A book whose verses are established, then explained, from One Wise, Well-Acquainted (with all things); that you should not worship any but Allah. Verily, I am to you a warner and bearer of glad tidings from Him.” (Qur’an, 11:12)

Of all the acts we mortals perform, worship is reserved solely for Allah. Worship includes acts of reverence, such as supplication, fear, hope, prayer, fasting, slaughter, and oaths. All that and more should be motivated by submission to Him

out of awe, complete love for Him and humility before His greatness.

Most of the Qur'an has been revealed for this great purpose, i.e. to guide people to worship One God. Allah says,

“So worship Allah, making your religion pure for Him. Is not pure religion for Allah?” (Qur'an, 39:2-3)

And,

“And your Lord decreed that you should not worship other than Him.” (Qur'an, 17:23)

And,

“So beseech Allah, making your religion purely for Him, even though the unbelievers have an aversion to it.” (Qur'an, 40:14)

The meaning of these verses repeats in several places in the Qur'an as well as being reiterated and explained by statements of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "It is the right of Allah over His bondsmen that they worship none other than Him and do not give anything else a share of the worship due to Him," (Bukhari & Muslim).

Worshipping God alone and denying false gods is a hefty issue in Islamic creed and one that is important to pursue in detail because it reflects the essence of our faith in God and establishes our relationship with Him as His devoted worshippers. A more detailed discussion of God's oneness and how to honor that in worshipping Him alone can be found in the last chapter of this textbook, "Nullifiers of Faith".

Believing in the Guidance of God

From the great mercy of God is that He would not leave mankind floundering without guidance, purposeless. Allah says,

“Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the difference of night and day are tokens for men of understanding, such as remember Allah standing, sitting, and reclining, and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth (and say): ‘Our Lord! You did not create this in vain. Glory be to You!’” (Qur’an, 190-191)

Belief in Allah implies belief in His guidance, the guidance of Islam. This includes those things which Allah Most High has made obligatory on His servants, such as the five pillars of Islam³ as well as obligations contained in Islamic law.

The most important and the greatest of the five pillars of Islam is to bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. Bearing witness that there is no god but Allah inherently implies the reservation of worship for Allah alone and abstinence from worship of all else. This is the meaning of “La ilaha illa Allah/ There is no god but Allah.” It means nothing has the right to be worshipped except Allah.

3. The five pillars of Islam are 1) to bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger, 2) to perform the prayers, 3) to give alms, 4) to fast Ramadan, and 5) to perform Hajj for whoever is able.

Therefore, anything worshipped other than Allah—be it human, angel, devil, rock or whatever—is worshipped in vain. Allah says,

“That is because Allah, He is the true reality, and that whereon they call instead of Him, it is falseness.” (Qur’an, 22:62)

Allah created humankind for this prime reason and commanded them to it. He sent the messengers and the books so that humanity might reflect and ponder it well so as not to fall into the ignorance of devoting a share of His worship to other than Allah.

Affirming God's Names and Attributes

Belief in God entails the belief that He is the Creator and the Ruler over His creation. He is the Orderer and Ordainer. He does whatever He wills and to Him belongs the dominion of this world and the hereafter. He is the Lord and Cherisher of all beings. He sustains and is ever watchful over His creation. There is no creator other than Him, no Lord other than Him. Allah says,

“Indeed your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rose above the throne. He covers the night with the day, seeking it rapidly, and has made the sun and the moon and the stars subservient by His command. His verily is all creation and commandment. Blessed be Allah, Lord of the Worlds.” (Qur’an, 7:54)

Belief in God affirms belief in all the descriptions of God found in the Qur'an and in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). We believe in them without exception. In discussions of Islamic creed, God's descriptions found in the Qur'an and statements of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are termed His "names and attributes".

God has many names, including the word "God" or "Allah". Allah mentions some of His names, saying,

"He is Allah, other than Whom there is no God, the Knower of the invisible and the visible. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is Allah, other than whom there is no God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian,

the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb, Glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partners (unto Him)! He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner.” (Qur’an, 59:22-23)

And then He—Most High—concludes,

“His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise.” (Qur’an, 59:24)

Clearly, Allah’s many names are beautiful and they instruct us about His perfection, His mercy to the creation, and other descriptions of Him.

Allah also has many attributes. The difference between a name and an attribute becomes clear by examples. For example, one of God's glorious names is "Al-Rahman", often translated to mean "The Beneficent" or it could also mean "The All-Merciful", that is the One whose mercy touches all creation. Lexically, it begins with a definite article, "the", and is an adjective. This name appears repetitively throughout the Qur'an and is included in the first verse,

"In the name of God, The Beneficent, The Merciful." (Qur'an, 1:1)

An example of an attribute, on the other hand, is that Allah Most High has a face, as mentioned in the verse,

“And the Face of your Lord full of Majesty and Honor, will remain forever.” (Qur’an, 55:27)

Though no one has ever beheld the face of God, seeing God will be among the rewards given to believers in Paradise. God says,

“Far removed from it [the Hellfire] will be the righteous, the one who gave his wealth in charity to be purified, and not to return a favor, only seeking the face of his Lord Most High, and so he surely will be pleased.” (Qur’an, 92:17-21)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described the sight of Allah’s face in Paradise, saying, “When people of Heaven enter Heaven, Allah will say, ‘Do you want anything more from Me?’ They will say, ‘Haven’t You honored us and admitted us to Paradise

and saved us from the fire?’ Then the veil will be lifted, and they will never be given anything more beloved to them than looking upon the face of their Lord, the Exalted,” (Muslim). Like His glorious names, Allah’s attributes are perfect and befit His Majesty and Lordship.

When it comes to interpreting the physical attributes of Allah Most High, we keep in mind the following principle: He is unlike anything else, and no one, including the prophets of God and His angels, has ever seen Allah. In understanding any of His glorious names and attributes, we keep in mind His absolute perfection.

The Qur’an and statements of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) contain many, many descriptions of Allah Most High, though

those names and attributes of God are not exhaustive. A soul that yearns for closeness to God and looks forward to the meeting with Him is eager to learn about Allah's names and attributes. The light of this guidance is a comfort to the heart and a balm to the searching soul. Allah says,

“(Allah) guides unto Himself all who turn (to Him), who have believed and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find tranquility.” (Qur’an, 17:27-28)

Some of Allah's names and attributes are discussed below. For a list of Allah's names derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, refer to the appendix.

THE NAME “ALLAH”

Muslims most commonly refer to God as “Allah”, and that is His most frequently used name in the Qur’an and narrations of Prophet Muhammad’s statements (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In Arabic, it means “The God” and is used by Arab pagans, Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike.

The word “Allah” predates Islam; however, it was never the name of an idol, person, or worldly object. It was used by pagan Arabs before the dawn of Islam to refer to the unseen God whom they worshipped through intercessory idols. Every tribe had its own idol, whom they believed to be a daughter of Allah. Idol worshippers used to construct versions of that idol from stone, wood, palm fibers

and other materials to pray to their idol at home, to travel with, and to erect in temples. They had no concept of the unity of any of these idols as there were multiple statues of each of them. There were many, many idols but only one “Allah”. Pagan Arabs knew Allah was an unseen and all-powerful Creator. Allah mentions this in the Qur’an, saying,

“Surely, if you were to ask them, ‘Who created the heavens and the earth?’ they will say, ‘Allah.’ Say, ‘Consider then those you worship beside Allah, if Allah willed some hurt for me, could they remove His infliction from me? Or if He willed some mercy for me, could they restrain His mercy?’ Say, ‘Allah is my all. In Him do the trusting put their trust.’” (Qur’an, 39:38)

Arabs understood the word “Allah”, whether they worshipped Him alone or not. That is why the phrase “La ilaha illa Allah/ There is no god except Allah,” immediately changed the tides of religious discourse in the Arabian peninsula when the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) proclaimed his message. Arabs knew that this statement, through which a person enters Islam, negated their intercessory idols whom they extolled, and affirmed only the unseen God Whom they knew to be the all-powerful source of all creation. The statement did not introduce a new god to them; rather, it struck down their various idols, and other religions’ gods beside Allah, leaving only Allah to be worshipped and revered.

As English speakers, Muslims use the English word “God” and the Arabic word “Allah” interchangeably and we usually refer to Allah by one of these words, God or Allah. But we may also call Allah by His other names revealed in the Qur’an and Sunnah. Pagan Arabs at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) overheard Muslims calling Allah “Al-Rahman” and other names and objected, claiming that Allah had only that one name, “Allah”. Thus, the Qur’anic verse was revealed, answering their objection, saying,

“Say, ‘Call upon Allah or call upon The Beneficent; whichever you would call (it is the same), for to Him are the most beautiful names.’” (Qur’an, 17:110)

Whichever name of Allah one uses in supplicating to God, the prayer is directed at the same God, Allah, The One, The Eternal.

ONENESS

Among Allah's foremost qualities is His absolute oneness. He has no duplicate, no predecessor, no successor, no partner, no equal, no rival and no family. Allah says,

“Say: He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal. He does not beget, nor was He begotten. And there is no one comparable to Him.”

(Qur'an, 112:1-4)

He is not lonely in His solitude for He is in need of no one. Allah says,

*“They say, ‘Allah has taken a son.’
Glorified be He! He has no needs! His is all
that is in the heavens and all that is in the
earth. You have no warrant for this. Do
you tell concerning Allah that which you
do not know?”
(Qur’an, 10:6)*

Various misguided creeds have attributed offspring to Allah—glorified and exulted be He far above such attributions. It makes no logical sense for God to have a child, and it contradicts His divinity, for it would mean there is a rival to Him and it would also mean that there is a beginning to him or her while God is eternal. Allah says,

“Yet they ascribe as partners with Him the jinn, although He created them. And they falsely impute sons and daughters to Him, without knowledge. Glorified be He and exalted above what they ascribe! The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort, and when He created all things and is Aware of all things? Such is Allah, your Lord. There is no God save Him, the Creator of all things, so worship Him. And He is custodian over every thing. Vision does not comprehend Him, but He comprehends all vision. He is the Subtle, the Aware. Proofs have come to you from your Lord, so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, is blind to his own hurt.” (Qur’an, 6:100-104)

And,

“And they say, ‘The Beneficent (Allah) has taken a son for Himself.’ Assuredly, you utter a disastrous thing, whereby the heavens are almost torn and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall to ruins, that you ascribe to the Beneficent a son. And it is not suitable for the Beneficent to choose a son. There is none in the heavens or earth but comes to the Beneficent as a slave.” (Qur’an, 19:88-93)

And about the miraculous creation of Jesus, who had a mother but no father, Allah says,

“Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: ‘Be!’ and he was.” (Qur’an, 3:59)

MERCY

Several of Allah's names and attributes deal with His abundant mercy. "Al-Rahman" or "The Beneficent", as mentioned above, is a frequently used name of Allah in the Qur'an. "Al-Raheem" or "The Ever-Merciful" is another name of Allah lexically derived from the same root, the difference being that Al-Rahman indicates widespread mercy while Al-Raheem indicates permanent mercy. Allah's mercy is a foremost characteristic, as He declared at the beginning of creating the worlds, "My mercy shall prevail over My wrath," (Bukhari & Muslim).⁴

4. The full narration is: The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "When Allah created the creatures, He wrote in the book which is with Him over His throne, 'Verily, My mercy shall prevail over My wrath.'" (Bukhari & Muslim).

Many other attributes are connected to God's mercy, such as His divine love, forgiveness, generosity, appreciation, pity, help, protection, provision, gentleness, and bounty.

All of the blessings we have ever experienced in our lives are gifts from Allah's mercy, including those blessings which we may remain unaware of such as the calamities that we have been protected from, the superb order of the universe, and so on. Allah reminds us,

“He gives you all you ask of Him. If you were to count the bounty of Allah, you cannot reckon it.” (Quran, 14:34)

Even the mercy between people, like the love of a mother for her child, is through the mercy of The Beneficent. God's mercy

enables people to be merciful. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) informed us about Allah's mercy toward the creation, saying, "Allah has one hundred mercies, out of which He has sent down only one for jinn, mankind, animals and insects, through which they love one another and have compassion for one another; and through it, wild animals care for their young. Allah has retained ninety-nine mercies to deal kindly with His slaves on the Day of Resurrection," (Bukhari & Muslim).

Allah has prescribed mercy for Himself, and He loves that there should be mercy between His creatures. He rewards merciful people with His mercy.

LOVE

One of Allah's glorious names is, "Al-Wadood" in Arabic, meaning "The Loving". Allah says of Himself,

"And He is the Forgiving, the Loving, Lord of the Throne of Glory, Doer of what He wills." (Qur'an, 85:14-16)

God loves goodness and He loves the believers. Among the rewards given to the believers is love, as He says,

"Surely, those who believe and do righteous works, the Beneficent will appoint love for them." (Qur'an, 19:96)

It is an unfortunate and widespread misconception that Islam promotes a rigid and unloving image of God. The Islamic

concept of God is far from unloving. In fact, God’s love is an awesome force in a Muslim’s life. We believe that God loves goodness, and so we urge our souls to perform all good deeds to draw closer to Him. We believe that God loves doers of good, consequently we should respect and honor them and form friendships with them because they are beloved ones to Him.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spoke about Allah’s love for believers and its tremendous effects in the believer’s life. He (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that Allah Most High declared⁵, ““Whosoever shows enmity to someone

5. This type of recorded statement of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) wherein the Prophet relates a statement of God verbatim and it is not the words of the Qur’an is called a “hadith qudsi.” It is not part of the Qur’an, but it tells us a statement that God has made.

devoted to Me, I shall be at war with him. My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it. I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful servant: he hates death and I hate hurting him,”” (Bukhari).

Perhaps the misconception of Allah as an unloving Lord formed among some people because Muslims do not announce and advertise God's unconditional love to people, as some Christians do, saying, "God loves you," when we do not know if that person is truly a beloved one to God. We say God loves the righteous, not the wicked. In fact, this argument against Islam can easily be turned on its head because it is a hypocritical claim. Christian doctrine portrays God as unloving and severe, unable to forgive humanity without demanding a blood sacrifice of His supposed son. What Christian missionaries say is, "Jesus loves you," and, "Jesus died for your sins," not actually that God loves or forgives with kindness. Rather, they portray God as the punisher and Jesus as the savior, while in Islam God is the savior, the loving, the forgiver. Furthermore, Christians say, "God

loves us; we are His children,” but they simultaneously say that God will condemn and burn people in the Hellfire if they do not accept worshipping Jesus, which is clearly a conditional so-called love.

FORGIVENESS

Allah is the Forgiving, the Oft-Returning in Forgiveness, meaning He erases sins, even if the perpetrator commits an offense over and over again. As long as the person keeps turning to Allah in repentance with sincerity, Allah will forgive him or her.

Repentance entails acknowledging one's wrongdoing, feeling remorse, asking for forgiveness, attempting to repair harmful consequences, and intending never to return to the sin in the future. Certain sins require particular actions in reparation. For example, manslaughter demands the perpetrator to offer reparation to the family of his or her victim.

Allah created humankind with freedom of choice, which leads to mistakes and shortcomings. However, this is the nature of our creation, which Allah intended in order to forgive us because He loves to forgive. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “If you never committed sins, Allah would sweep you out of existence and replace you by another people who would commit sins, ask for Allah’s forgiveness, and He would forgive them,” (Muslim).

Allah forgives any and all sins to the one who repents and reforms. Believing in and hoping for Allah’s forgiveness is part of belief in Him. For this reason, it is a dreadful sin to give up on the mercy of Allah or to condemn another person by asserting that God will never forgive him

or her while that person is alive and able to repent. Allah says,

“Certainly no one despairs of Allah’s mercy except the people who disbelieve.”
(Qur’an, 12:87)

Even after the death of a person, it is not permissible to say that Allah will not forgive him or her, even if he or she committed the severest sins short of disbelief and associating partners in worship with God. Allah says,

“Indeed, Allah does not forgive associating other gods in worship with Him, but He forgives other than that to whom He wills.” (Qur’an, 4:48)

CREATION

Allah created everything that exists.
Allah says,

“Surely, We indeed created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six Days and nothing of fatigue touched Us.” (Qur’an, 50:38)

God is the only absolute creator. He creates and He recreates, and He alone is the originator of creation.

Through His creation, mankind is able to make things but that is only by using the faculties and resources He made. They cannot create from nothing as He did. Allah Most High relates a conversation between Prophet Abraham (peace and

blessings of Allah be upon him) and his people, when Abraham argued with them over their idolatry. Allah says,

“He said, ‘Do you worship something you yourselves carve, when Allah has created you and what you make?’” (Qur’an, 37:95-96)

Allah created everything, including us and what we make, and this is one of the reasons why we owe Him alone our devotion in worship.

UNIQUENESS

There is nothing like Allah Most High. For this reason, we cannot imagine what He looks like or how He is able to do what He does. Allah says,

“Vision cannot encompass Him.” (Qur’an, 6:103)

And,

“There is nothing like Him.” (Qur’an, 42:11)

And,

“There is nothing comparable to Him.” (Qur’an, 112:4)

This attribute of Allah, i.e. that He is not like anything else, is important in regard to interpreting His other attributes. For example, when we describe Allah Most High as having a Face, we cannot know how His Face exists, we only affirm that He has some type of a Face. We do not imagine a human face, for He is not like humans nor like anything in His creation. Imagining His Face as a human face is an error in interpreting His attributes.

Some people have questioned other attributes of Allah in light of His uniqueness, saying, “Then how am I to understand His knowledge, sight, kindness, or any other attribute if He is not like anything else?” The answer is very simple. Allah’s sight means He sees, though we do not know how He sees. It is unlike the sight of anything else in the sense that His sight is all-encompassing. He sees everything hidden subtly, every place, every time, all at once. No one else’s sight is as penetrating as His sight. The same method of understanding applies to other attributes.

CLOSENESS

God is not remote or uninvolved; quite the contrary, He is ever-watchful over the creation, responsive, and close. One of His marvelous names is “The Near”. Allah says,

*“We are never unmindful of creation.”
(Qur’an, 23:17)*

Following this statement in the Qur’an, Allah enumerates some of His mercies upon creation, through which He cares for us, including the rain, vegetation, milk, ships, and guidance through His messengers. Furthermore, Allah says that He is presiding over and in charge of the heavens and the earth, as mentioned in the verse,

“And He is never weary of preserving them [heaven and earth].” (Qur’an, 2:255)

Concerning mankind in particular, Allah declares His closeness, saying,

“And He is with you, wheresoever you may be. Allah is seer of what you do.” (Qur’an, 57:4)

And,

“We verily created man and We know what his soul whispers to him. And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.” (Qur’an, 50:16)

God is closer to people than their own selves in that He knows them more fully, is better able to arrange their affairs, and in other ways.

It should be noted that this closeness does not mean that God is physically⁶ inside a person or within His creation. The Islamic concept of God is not pantheistic. Rather, God, in His physical essence, is separate from and above His throne over the heavens. However, in His knowledge, aid, ordinance, and so forth, He is close.

LORDSHIP

Allah is the Lord of the heavens and earth and all of creation. His lordship means both that He sustains and that He rules over creation. From His sustenance, He provides and nourishes, gives life and guidance. From His rule, He commands and ordains, gives laws and orders the universe. Allah says,

6. Using the word “physical” is problematic in regard to Allah Most High. We cannot conceive of Allah’s physical essence because He is unlike anything in His creation. In Arabic, His physical self is called “dhat,” which is difficult to translate into English.

“And unto Allah whosoever is in the heavens and the earth falls prostrate, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening hours. Say (Muhammad): Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth? Say: Allah!” (Qur’an, 13:15-16)

Allah’s command over the universe He created is absolute, and everything exists and functions by His command in the order of things, such as the manner by which light moves and the orbit of planets around the sun and the consequent leaning of the shadows by which we may tell time and so forth.

An essential part of Islamic belief in God and His Lordship is affirmation that He has the right to prescribe laws for mankind.

Allah says,

“For each (nation) We have appointed a divine law and a way.” (Qur’an, 5:48)

And, in regard to turning away from His laws, He says,

*“Is it the judgment of the time of ignorance that they are seeking? Who is better than Allah for judgment to a people who have certainty (in their belief)?”
(Qur’an, 5:50)*

God Most High is the One Who decrees and informs us about what is right and what is wrong.

Taking other sources of morality in contradiction to His revelation is a form of worshipping others as one’s Lord instead

of Allah. Allah Most High says,

“They have taken their rabbis and monks, and Messiah son of Mary, as lords beside Allah while they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no god save Him; be He glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (to Him)!” (Qur’an, 9:31)

When an early Muslim follower who reverted to Islam from Judaism heard this verse, he commented to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that they did not used to worship their rabbis. The Prophet of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) answered him, saying, “Didn’t they make unlawful what God made lawful, and you made it unlawful? And didn’t they make lawful what God made unlawful, and you made it lawful?” The follower replied,

“Certainly.” And the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained, “That is how you worshipped them.”⁷

Believing the rulings laid out in the Qur’an and Sunnah is part of belief in Allah’s Lordship. Without this belief, we are not complete believers upon the guidance of God. Allah Most High warns us,

“It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have passed judgment over a matter, that they should afterward decide otherwise in their affairs. And whoever rebels against Allah and His Messenger has certainly strayed into manifest error.” (Qur’an, 33:36)

7. The incident was reported in a hadith recorded by Tirmidhi

A contemporary example may be in following secular laws that are in direct conflict with Islamic laws, such as the prohibition of alcohol. In most countries today, for instance, it is legal to consume alcohol after reaching a certain age. If a Muslim follows that law, believing that it is better and more correct than the law of Allah categorically prohibiting alcohol consumption at any age, then he or she has negated Allah's right to rule His creation as its single Lord. Such a person needs to contemplate the meaning of God's Lordship, His wisdom in decreeing laws, and His mercy in providing such guidance to His creation.

“Lord” is a name of Allah by which He is often called in supplication and during prayer. Allah says,

*“Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,
King of mankind, God of mankind.”
(Qur’an, 114:3)*

We ask Allah by His Lordship over us because it is part of the intimate relationship through which we worship Him, acknowledging His provision for us and His right to command. We ask Him to help us perfect our obedience to His laws, and we ask Him to increase His blessings and bounties in our lives.

LESSON

4

Pillar 2 — Belief in Angels

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Discuss core Islamic beliefs concerning angels;
- Identify the role of angels in human life.

Angels are one of God’s creations. They are not gods or demigods, and they have no share in Allah’s Lordship or Divinity. Muslims do not worship angels or pray to God through them. Rather, we believe in their existence and honor them because they are devout worshippers of Allah. Allah mentions His angels many times in the Qur’an. From Allah’s revelation in the Qur’an and Sunnah, we learn about angels, their nature and the role they play in human life in this world and in the hereafter.

Angels were created out of light, as Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described, “The angels were created from light, the Jinn⁸

8. Jinn, as mentioned in a previous chapter’s footnote, are a creation possessing freedom of choice, like human beings. They were created before humankind. Like humans, jinn may be Muslim or non-Muslim. Unlike humans, they may fly, move very quickly across the earth or through the skies, and live for centuries. Like angels, jinn are generally invisible to humans, unless they deliberately take a form we can see. The popular folk myth of an Arabian genie, popping out of a bottle to grant three wishes, emanates from the concept of the jinn, also called jinni. Calling upon jinn for favors is forbidden in Islam. See Qur’an, chapter 72.

from smokeless fire, and Adam from what⁹ has been described to you,” (Muslim). Angels and Jinn were created before humankind. The Qur’an relates God’s declaration to create mankind to the angels, saying,

“And your Lord said to the angels, ‘Lo! I am going to place a viceroy in the earth.’ They said, ‘Will You place therein one who will do harm and shed blood while we, we hymn Your praise and sanctify You?’”
(Qur’an, 2:30)

The nature of an angel differs dramatically from that of a human. Angels are physical beings, yet they do not eat, drink or sleep. Angels are perfect in the sense that they do not falter or neglect the commands of Allah Most High.

9. And that is clay, as mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah. Allah says, “He created man of clay like the potter’s, and the Jinn did He create of smokeless fire,” (Qur’an, 55:14-15).

There are many different kinds of angels, and they have a hierarchy headed by the messenger angel, Gabriel. Angels fulfill various duties at Allah's command, including the following:

- Delivering messages to prophets among mankind;
- Wreaking destruction on wayward peoples;
- Recording virtuous and evil deeds of humankind;
- Guarding the gates of Heaven and Hell;
- Scribing the fate of an unborn child in the womb;
- Gathering the soul out of the body at the time of death;
- Interrogating the soul in the grave;

- Blowing the horn that will sound on the Day of Judgment;
- Holding the throne of Allah Most High;
- Moving the wind and the clouds;
- Sending tranquility upon people in prayer and in religious study gatherings;
- Glorifying Allah, praising Him, and praying to Him;
- Protecting whomsoever Allah commanded them to protect;
- Fighting alongside believers in battle.

As for their looks, in their original forms, angels have different looks from each other; some are scary and some are beautiful, depending on their jobs. Some are incredibly large. They have wings, as the Qur'an describes,

“Praise be to Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, Who appointed the angels messengers having wings two, three, and four. He multiplies in creation whatever He wills. Lo! Allah is Able to do all things.” (Qur'an, 35:1)

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described the archangel Gabriel, who delivered the message of the Qur'an to him, as filling the horizon and having 600 wings.¹⁰

10. Bukhari recorded that Ibn Masud, a companion of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), mentioned Gabriel's 600 wings in exegesis of the Qur'anic verses,

“It is not save an inspiration that is inspired, which one of mighty powers has taught him, one vigorous; and he grew clear to view when he was on the uppermost horizon, then he drew near and came down till he was two bows' lengths or even nearer. And He revealed unto His slave that which He revealed.” (Qur'an, 53:4-10).

These verses describe the Prophet's ascension to heaven; and Ibn Masud would not have related such a detail concerning the unseen world of the angels unless he learnt it from the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Angels are able to appear to people as human beings, as in the story of Mary the mother of Jesus (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Allah says,

“We sent her a spirit from Us, and it assumed the likeness of a perfect man before her. She said, ‘Lo! I seek refuge in The Beneficent from you, if you are God-fearing.’ He said, ‘I am only a messenger from your Lord.” (Qur’an, 39:17-18)

Angels also took human form when they visited Prophet Lot and Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them both), which Allah Most High recounts, saying,

“And tell them of Abraham’s guests, and they entered upon him and said, ‘Peace!’ He said, ‘Surely, we are afraid of you.’ They said, ‘Do not be afraid. Verily, we

bring you good tidings of a boy possessing wisdom.” (Qur’an, 15:52-53)

Abraham and his wife feared the angels at first, thinking they were men, because they refused to eat the food he had graciously offered them as guests (which was, at that time and culture, generally taken as a declaration of hostility against the host). The angels then revealed themselves as messenger angels sent from Allah Most High. The people of Prophet Lot also thought that the angels, who warned him of their looming destruction, were men. Allah tells us,

“And when the messengers came to the family of Lot, he said, ‘Lo! You are a folk unknown to me.’ They said, ‘Nay, but we bring you that concerning which they keep disputing, and bring you the Truth and lo! We are the truth-tellers. So travel

with your household in a portion of the night, and follow their backs. Let none of you turn around, but go where you are commanded.” (Qur’an, 15:62-65)

Likewise, an angel in the form of a man came to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in front of his companions in the famous “Hadith of Gabriel” which established the most well-known evidence in the Sunnah for the six pillars of faith. His companions described the angel as an attractive looking man whom no one recognized, a traveler without the signs of the weariness and dirtiness of travel, wearing pristine white garments, and having jet black hair.

An important distinction between human beings and angels is in their worship of Allah Most High. Angels do not have freedom of choice. They worship Allah in total obedience, glorifying Him, praising Him, praying to Him, adhering to His prohibitions, and fulfilling His commands.

Angels were originally created as angels. Other creation cannot become angels, such as saintly human beings or children after death; and angels do not become other creations, such as devils. There is no such thing as a so-called “fallen angel”. Satan was never an angel; rather, he was a jinn called Iblis¹¹ who used to worship God alongside angels in Paradise. There is also no such thing as a person becoming an angel after death. When humankind is recreated on the Day of Judgment, and those who are Paradise-bound enter it,

they will have different bodies, heavenly bodies unlike the physiques of this world; however, they are not the bodies of angels.

While we do not possess complete and exhaustive knowledge about Allah’s angels and their various roles and duties, we affirm generally a belief in them, that they are literal, physical beings and not metaphorical non-beings, and we affirm in specific all the details about them reported to us in the revelation of Allah Most High. He is the Knower, and He is the Creator, and His word is truth.

11. Iblis is a jinn who, out of arrogance, disobeyed Allah Most High and was consequently outcast. Instead of repenting, Iblis asked God for respite until the Judgment Day and was granted it. He then vowed to misguide as many as would follow his misguidance, and he became Satan, the eternally cursed. Though he may be the first, he is not the only devil. Devils are rebels against all goodness, and they are in degrees among mankind and the jinn. They have no power except the power of suggestion, and it is wrong to fear them or to blame them for one’s own poor decisions. Allah says,

“It is only the devil who would make (people) fear his partisans. Fear them not; fear Me, if you are truly believers.” (Qur’an, 3:175)

And, in recounting the story of Iblis’s ouster from Paradise, Allah declared to him,

“Surely, My (faithful) bondmen—over them you (Satan) have no power, and your Lord suffices as guardian.” (Qur’an, 17:65)

LESSON

5

Pillar 3—Belief in the Books of God

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Identify the purpose of the books of Allah;
- List revealed books of Allah;
- Discuss the relationship between revelations of Allah;
- Discuss the role of the Qur'an as the final Book of God.

Belief in the Books of God

Believing in the scriptures sent down by Allah Most High is an essential part of faith. In the opening verses of Qur'an, Allah describes the believers, saying,

“Those who believe in what was revealed to you (Muhammad) and what was revealed before you.” (Qur'an, 2:4)

And, quoting an announcement to the believers on the Day of Judgment, God says,

“O My slaves! For you there is no fear this Day nor is it you who grieve; you who believed in Our revelations and were self-surrendered. Enter the Garden.” (Qur'an, 43:68-69)

God speaks to mankind through His scripture. Allah says,

“Those who have no knowledge say, ‘Why doesn’t Allah speak to us, or some sign come to us?’ Even so, as they speak, spoke those before them. Their hearts are all alike. We have made clear the revelations for people who are sure. Lo! We have sent thee (Muhammad) with the truth, bringing glad tidings and warning.”
(Qur’an, 2:118-119)

People demand that God should speak to them, or that some miracle should come so that they would believe in Islam. Yet, God has already spoken to them and sent them a miracle, which is His scripture, the Qur’an. God speaks to all humanity through His scripture, inviting them to believe and submit to Him. Allah says,

*“It was not (vouchsafed) to any mortal that Allah should speak to him unless by revelation or from behind a veil or He sends a messenger to reveal what He wills by His leave. Lo! He is the Exalted, Wise.”
(Qur’an, 42:51)*

And,

“O mankind! Now a proof has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a clear Light; as for those who believe in Allah, and hold fast to Him, He will cause them to enter into His mercy and grace and will guide them unto Himself by a straight road.” (Qur’an, 4:174-175)

The Qur’an is the final and most lasting Book of God. As Muslims, we respect, honor, and believe in the Qur’an as the literal word of God Almighty. We accept

its assertions as true, and we believe in the laws and regulations it contains.

The Scripture of God is a tremendous mercy from Him. The Qur'an provides us with the essential message of Islam, descriptions of the history of mankind, laws for our lifestyle and social governance, moral sensibility, and wisdom in judging our affairs. Most importantly, the Qur'an informs humanity about Allah, our Creator, and it outlines a clear path to draw close to Him. For believers, the Qur'an is like a roadmap to Paradise. Reading and studying the Qur'an is a part of a Muslim man or woman's life, a light in a Muslim's home, and a balm in the believer's heart. Allah describes the healing of the Qur'an, saying,

*“And We reveal of the Qur’an that which is a healing and a mercy for believers.”
(Qur’an, 17:82)*

And He further describes the mercy of the Qur’an, saying,

“It is only a mercy from your Lord. Lo! His kindness to you was ever great.” (Qur’an, 17:87)

The Qur’an is not the only scripture sent to mankind. Several messengers of God preceded Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in receiving books and laws. Allah says,

“We have sent messengers with clear proofs and sent with them the book and

the balance so that the people might act with justice.” (Qur’an, 57:25)

As Muslims, we believe in all of God’s previous scriptures, in the sense that we affirm their original form as God’s literal word, and we believe that God ordained those laws for those peoples of those prophets and messengers. Allah revealed several books to His messengers to guide mankind. The books that are known to us, those mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah, include: the Scrolls of Abraham, the Psalms of David, the Torah of Moses, and the Gospel of Jesus (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them all). Allah says,

“Say (O Muhammad), ‘We believe in Allah and that which is revealed to us and that which was revealed to Abraham

and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them and unto Him we have surrendered.” (Qur’an, 3:84)

Making no distinction between the prophets and the books of Allah means that we accept all of them, believe in all of them as truthful—this, as opposed to accepting some prophets and books while rejecting others as false.

Allah Most High refers to disbelievers as picking and choosing which prophet and which part of their books they accept and which they deny. Allah says,

“They say, ‘We believe in some and disbelieve in others,’ and seek to choose a way in between; such are disbelievers in truth. And for disbelievers, We prepare a shameful doom.” (Qur’an, 4:150-151)

And,

“Believe you in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part thereof? And what is the reward of those who do so except ignominy in the life of the world and on the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to the most grievous doom, for Allah is not unaware of what you do.” (Qur’an, 2:85)

And,

“When it is said to them, ‘Believe in what Allah revealed,’ they say, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us,’ and they

disbelieve in what came after it, though it is the truth confirming what they possess. Say, ‘Then why did you slay the prophets of Allah aforesaid, if you are believers?’”
(Qur’an, 2:91)

Believers accept all of Allah’s books and all of the prophets. It does not mean that there are no differences between prophets and books. In fact, there are differences, otherwise there would be no purpose in revealing multiple books. However, those differences do not stretch into matters of basic belief. All of the prophets and all of the books of God rehearsed the same essential message: worship One God, Who created, Who guides, and Who will judge you after death.

The Qur'an mentions previous books of Allah Most High with praise and respect. Allah speaks about the guidance and law in the Torah and the Gospel, saying,

“Verily, We revealed the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the prophets who surrendered (unto Allah) judged the Jews. And the rabbis and the priests judged by such of Allah’s scripture as they were commanded to observe, and thereunto they were witnesses.” (Qur’an, 5:44)

And,

“And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming that which was (revealed) before him. And We bestowed on him the Gospel wherein is guidance and a light, confirming that which was before it in the Torah—a

guidance and an admonition to those who ward off (evil). Let the people of the Gospel judge by that which Allah has revealed therein. Whoever does not judge by what Allah revealed are evil-livers.”
(Qur’an, 5:46-47)

The relationship between the Qur’an and previous revelation from Allah is made clear in the next verse,

“And to you (Muhammad) We revealed the scripture with the truth, confirming whatever scripture was before it and a watcher over it.” (Qur’an, 5:48)

The Qur'an is the book of guidance upon which we rely today. It confirms previous books and establishes the final law and message of God. As Muslims, we respect and revere the Word of God, not only the Qur'an but also the books of God from before the revelation of the Qur'an; however, we know that much of the previous revelation of God has been forgotten, distorted, or abrogated.

The Qur'an relates how previous books have been distorted and lost, condemns those who intentionally altered the Word of God, and finally promises that such a fate would never befall the Qur'an. Allah says,

“Lo! Those who distort Our revelations are not hidden from Us. Is he who is

hurled into the Fire better, or he who comes secure on the Day of Resurrection? Do whatever you will. Lo! He is Seer of what you do. Lo! Those who disbelieve in the reminder when it comes to them (are guilty), for lo! It is an unassailable Scripture. Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it; a revelation from the Wise, the Owner of Praise. Nothing is said to you (Muhammad) save what was said to the messengers before you.” (Qur’an, 41:40-43)

The Qur’an will never be lost or destroyed. It is a protected word.

Historical accounts of the preservation of the Qur’an show its meticulous recording and memorization by adherents to the religion of Islam. This is a unique

history among religious manuscripts; even secular historians marvel at the authenticity of the Qur'an. It is the same word-for-word scripture as its original revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). And it will never be changed or distorted.

The Qur'an and other scriptures of Allah Most High are unlike other books. They are not merely rehearsals of historical events, debatable opinions, or entertainment. It is not merely information; rather, the revelation of God is meant to root deeply into one's heart and become part of one's thinking, and it is meant to be put into action.

We read the Qur'an for guidance. In order to benefit from this guidance, we must reflect and contemplate upon the meanings of the Qur'an and relate them to our lives, and further, we must act upon the understanding we gain from the pages of the Qur'an. If we fail to reflect on the Qur'an, we will not understand it or internalize its moral code. And if we fail to act on our understanding, we will not truly benefit from our knowledge. Allah says,

*“Will they not contemplate the Qur'an?
Or are there locks over their hearts?”
(Qur'an, 47:24)*

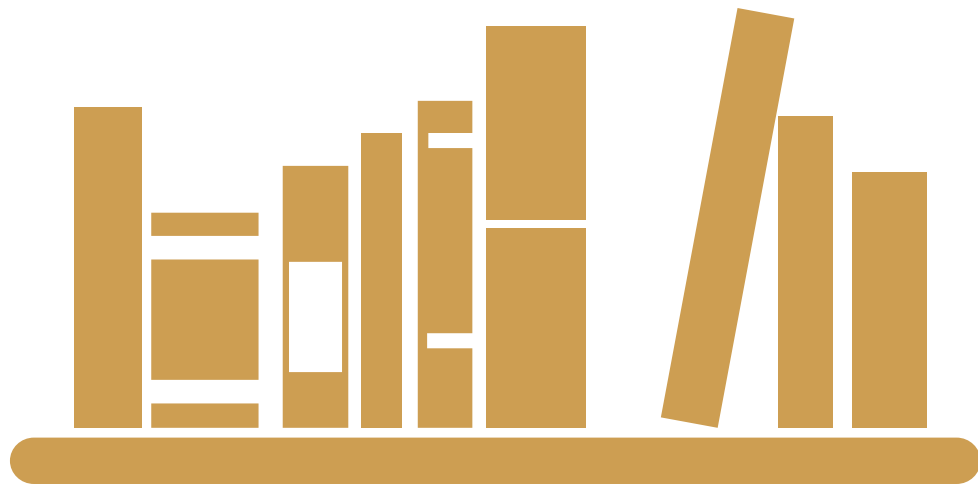
And He compares a person who knows the Qur'an without implementing its lessons to a donkey carrying books. He says,

“The likeness of those who are entrusted with the Law of Moses, yet do not apply it, is as the likeness of the ass carrying books. Wretched is the likeness of folk who deny the revelations of Allah.” (Qur’an, 62:5)

Mankind possesses the resource of Allah’s last and final scripture, the Holy Qur’an, to study and believe in, to follow and benefit from, until the Last Day, if they would only turn to it. Allah Most High says,

“Then We gave the scripture as inheritance to those whom We elected among Our bondmen. But of them are some who wrong themselves, and of them are some who are lukewarm, and of them are some who outstrip through good deeds by Allah’s leave. That is the great favor! Gardens of Eden! They enter them wearing armlets of gold and pearl, and

their raiment therein is silk. And they say, ‘Praise be to Allah, Who has put grief away from us. Lo! Our Lord is Forgiving, Bountiful.’” (Qur’an, 35:32-34)



LESSON 6

Pillar 4—Belief in the Messengers of God

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Articulate the nature and purpose of true prophethood;
- Name some of the many prophets of God in Islam;
- Appreciate the relationship between prophets of God;
- Recognize the role and authority of the final prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Pillar 4—Belief in the Messengers of God

LESSON 6

Among mankind, God raised certain individuals as His messengers, people whom He chose to purify and honor with His message. They are sent to reform humanity. And it is obligatory on the rest of people to follow them, as Allah says,

“O Children of Adam! If messengers of your own come to you, narrating My revelations to you, then whosoever refrains from evil and amends, there shall no fear come on them neither shall they grieve. But they who deny Our revelations and scorn them, such are rightful owners of the Fire.” (Qur’an, 7:35-36)

Messengers of God received inspiration from Him, and they were responsible for proclaiming and exemplifying the message of God to their people, the message to worship God alone. Part of the role of the prophets of God was to warn and to deliver

glad tidings. They are the prophets of God, and they are all among His beloved bondmen.

None of the messengers or prophets of God possessed any of God's Divinity or Lordship; and we do not in any way worship them. We respect and love them, because God loves them and because they are righteous and noble. But we do not seek God through their intercession in worship, nor do we believe that they possess power belonging only to God. Rather, we believe in them, put faith in the message they deliver, and we affirm that their miracles were by God's permission and through His power in order to convince people of the authenticity of the message.

The prophets of Allah were normal people in many respects. They ate and drank and slept. They lived and they died. Many of them married and had children, raised families and provided for them by working various occupations. Like all creation, they relied on God for their guidance, sustenance, and fate. God quotes Abraham in the Qur'an, saying,

“The Lord of the worlds, Who created me, and He guides me; and Who feeds me and gives me drink; And when I become sick, He heals me; and Who causes me to die, then gives me life again; and Who I ardently hope will forgive my sin on the Day of Judgment. My Lord! Vouchsafe me wisdom, and unite me with the righteous.”
(Qur'an, 26:77-83)

And He quotes other messengers of God, saying,

“Their messengers said to them, ‘We are only morals like you, but Allah gives grace to whomsoever He wills of His bondmen. It is not ours to bring you a warrant except by Allah’s permission. In Allah let the believers put their trust!’” (Qur’an, 14:11)

The prophets of God were upright in character, excellent role models for mankind. But what really distinguished them above other pious people was the inspiration that God entrusted to them and the mission they faced. Allah praises His prophets in the Qur’an, saying,

“That is Our argument. We gave it to Abraham against his folk. We raise unto degrees of wisdom whom We will. Lo! Your Lord is Wise, Aware. And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob. Each one of them We guided. And we guided

Noah aforesaid, and of his seed, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do we reward the good. And Zachariah and John and Jesus and Elias. Each one was of the righteous. And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot. Each of them, We preferred above all creation.” (Qur’an, 6:83-86)

The prophets were honored and raised above the rest of humanity in their spiritual status. However, they also had the same essential duty and purpose of life as all other people, to worship God alone. Allah speaks about His prophets, saying,

“But if they had set up (in worship) anything beside Him, whatever they did would have been in vain.” (Qur’an, 6:88)

The prophets and messengers of God received inspiration that others among

humanity did not receive, and they braved an often daunting mission to deliver the message of God's Oneness to humanity. In other respects, however, they were people like other people. Allah says,

“We did not send (as messengers) anyone before you (Muhammad) other than men whom We inspired.” (Qur'an, 16:43)

And,

“Say (Muhammad): I am no new thing among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that which is inspired in me, and I am but a plain warner.” (Qur'an, 46:9)

Some prophets received the message of God later in life, others from very early in their lives. For example, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) became a messenger of God at age forty, while Prophet Jesus (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was a messenger from birth and spoke to mankind from the cradle.

Every prophet of God delivered the same essential message, the message of the Oneness of God and the command to devote oneself to Him alone in worship, to work righteousness, and to shun treachery. Allah Most High says,

“And verily, We raised among every nation a messenger, (proclaiming), ‘Worship Allah and shun false gods.’”
(Qur’an, 16:36)

And,

“And verily warners came and went before and after him (Hud), saying, ‘Serve none but Allah. Lo! I fear for you the doom of a tremendous Day.’” (Qur’an, 46:21)

Every prophet delivered glad tidings of Paradise and God’s acceptance to the believers and warned the disbelievers that if they did not repent and reform, God would hold them to account for their deeds.

Some prophets had many followers, others few, still others none at all. For every prophet of God, there were

antagonists, enemies who not only denied the message of God but went further and violently opposed its messenger. Allah says,

“Thus We have appointed for every prophet an adversary—devils from humankind and jinn who inspire in one another plausible discourse through guile.” (Qur’an, 6:112)

Many of the prophets of God were mocked, driven out of their homelands, attacked and even murdered for their belief in One God and for their call to reform society. Prophets endured this social ostracism and persecution with patience and a steadfast hope in God’s succor. Allah quotes His messengers, saying,

“We surely will endure the hurt that you do us. In Allah let the trusting put their trust!” (Qur’an, 14:12)

Some prophets attained triumph in this world and political dominion; others did not. All the prophets and their followers are ultimately the successful ones, as they are the inheritors of the bliss of Paradise, no matter what tribulations and calamities befall them in the life of the world at the hands of opponents.

There were many, many prophets and many messengers. We do not know all of their names or stories, but a several prominent prophets and messengers are recounted in the Qur’an. Allah says,

“Verily, We sent messengers before you (O Muhammad), among them those of whom We have told you and some of whom We have not told you.” (Qur’an, 40:78)

The number of the prophets of God is around 124,000 and the number of the messengers among them is just over 300, according to a statement of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), (as recorded by Ahmad). A prophet receives inspiration from God and delivers it to the people; a messenger is a prophet who, in addition to this, is given something new in the message, such as new laws.

There is a special relationship between all prophets of God, but a particularly special relationship exists between Jesus

and Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them both). The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Both in this world and the hereafter, I am most akin to Jesus Christ among the whole of mankind. And all of the prophets are paternal brothers; they have different mothers but belong to one religion,” (Bukhari & Muslim). The unity of their messages and missions joined the prophets of God in a brotherhood, so that they are bonded to each other’s stories in this world and the hereafter.

The first to receive divine inspiration was the Prophet Adam. However, he was a prophet and not a messenger. The first nation that went so far astray they required a messenger with a message was the nation of Prophet Noah. Thus, the

first messenger to humanity was Prophet Noah and the last messenger was Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them both), as Allah says,

“Indeed We have inspired you (Muhammad) as We inspired Noah and prophets after him.” (4:163)

The last and final message was given to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and he is the last and final messenger of God. Allah calls the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) the Seal of the Prophets. Allah says,

“Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets. And

Allah is Aware of all things.” (Qur’an, 33:40)

There will be no more prophets or messengers after Prophet Muhammad, with the exception that Prophet Jesus¹² (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them both) will return to earth to finish his lifespan and to rescue the followers of Muhammad from the accursed Antichrist, “Al-Dajjal” in Arabic, the Imposter. However, the return of Prophet Jesus will not bring a new message or any changes in the religion of Islam as it was taught by Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them both). The message is complete, perfect, and final. Allah says,

12. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described the second coming of Prophet Jesus, saying, “The Dajjal (Imposter) will appear among my nation and he will stay for forty. And Allah will then send Jesus, son of Mary, who will resemble Urwa ibn Masud. He (Jesus) will chase him (the Imposter) and kill him. People will then live for seven years peacefully, and there will be no hatred between any two people,” (Muslim). He also said, “The son of Mary will soon descend among you as a just judge. He will break crosses, kill swine, and abolish Jizya (tax paid by Non-Muslims residing in an Islamic state). Wealth will pour forth to such an extent that no one will accept it or need it,” (Bukhari & Muslim).

*“This day I have perfected your religion and completed My favor upon you all, and have chosen for you as religion Al-Islam.”
(Qur’an, 5:3)*

Additionally, the final message is for all of humanity to come, and Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is likewise for all of humanity to come. Allah mentions the universalism of His final message and His final messenger, saying,

“Blessed is He Who has revealed to His slave the Criterion, that he may be a warner to all the world.” (Qur’an, 25:1)

It is logical that a final message must be preserved, otherwise, people in future generations would not have a fair

chance at following proper guidance and they would certainly be spiritually lost and unable to fulfill their purpose of life. Indeed, God promised to preserve His last and final scripture. Likewise, the understanding and practice of that scripture has been preserved through the preservation of the “Sunnah”, the collection of the Prophet Muhammad’s statements and life biography.

The “Sunnah” is the Prophet Muhammad’s way, which has been defined by scholars of Islamic studies as inclusive of his 1) statements, 2) actions, and 3) tacit approvals. That is because he did not speak except the truth, did not act except in piety, and he did not witness wrongdoing except that he protested and changed it if he could.

The Sunnah is an authoritative source of legislation in the religion of Islam, just as the judgments of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were authoritative during his lifetime. Allah orders mankind to follow and to obey the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Allah says,

“O you who believe! Answer Allah and the messenger when he calls you to that which quickens you, and know that Allah comes between the man and his own heart and that unto Him you will be gathered.”
(Qur’an, 8:20)

And,

“Say: Obey Allah and obey the messenger. But if you turn away, then it is only upon him to fulfill his charge (of calling), and

upon you is what you have been charged (to do). If you obey him, you will go aright. But the messenger has no other charge than to convey plainly.” (Qur’an, 24:54)

The authority of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his Sunnah stem from the nature of prophethood. As a prophet, his words and orders concerning religious affairs come from inspiration from God, not from his own personal whims or faulty human judgments. Allah describes the divine inspiration from which the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) guided people, saying,

“Your comrade (Muhammad) does not err, nor is he deceived, nor does he speak out of his own desire. It is only an inspired inspiration.” (Qur’an, 53:2-4)

Many occasions described in narrations of the Sunnah give a sense of this inspired speech. For example, the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would sometimes notice him pausing, sweating, as if receiving communication from God, before answering a question. Additionally, some of the prophecies foretold by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were not contained in the pages of the Holy Qur'an but were part of the Sunnah, and they did indeed come true, which shows they were part of divine inspiration. If the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were alive today and we met him, we would surely pay close attention to what he had to say. And so we do also pay close attention to authentic narrations in the Sunnah.

It is important to note that the Sunnah is an expansive body of literature today, which is studied by specialists in Islamic sciences and has been preserved meticulously since the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Unfortunately, however, periods of corruption in the history of the Islamic world witnessed a great volume of fabricated narrations attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It is therefore necessary for a Muslim to seek the source of the narration, that is, who recorded the statement, in order to rely solely upon authentic narrations of the Sunnah and to avoid misleading fabrications. Weeding out the false from the true narrations of the Sunnah is an important scholarly task, an endeavor taken on by many thousands of Muslim

theologians throughout the age of Islam. Even today, some scholars dedicate themselves to the tradition of identifying the source of narration and endeavoring to authenticate it. Fortunately, these scholars have made it easy for us, as lay people, to access this knowledge by collecting the authentic (“Sahih” in Arabic) narrations as well as some widespread fabrications in separate publications.

Many Muslims, especially those entering Islam from other religions, are curious about the lives of the prophets of God. While we know many details about the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), there is comparatively little recorded about other prophets of God by way of reliably preserved narrations from their followers.

Indeed, in the case of most of the past prophets of Allah Most High, there are no dedicated followers alive to narrate their histories. Thankfully, the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) contain some edifying stories from the lives of the prophets of God. We gather a few such passages in Appendix B. For a more thorough collection, we recommend Ibn Katheer's *Stories of the Prophets*, which has been translated into English by International Islamic Publishing House.

LESSON

7

Pillar 5—Belief in the Hereafter

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Define death;
- List stages the soul travels after death;
- Identify major events of the Day of Judgment.

Belief in the Hereafter

All people acknowledge that life in this world ends. Death is a fact, recognized by every sane adult. With each passing day, we grow closer to it. So, naturally, people throughout the history of man have pondered the ultimate philosophic question: What happens after death?

For some cultures, such as the culture of pagan Arabia at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the answer they came up with was, “Nothing. People’s bodies turn to dust and that is the end of them.” As a result of this belief, they prepared nothing for their afterlife. For other cultures, such as ancient Egyptian culture at the time of the pharaohs and ancient Greek and Roman culture, they believed in a form of afterlife or an underworld

that revolved around their various gods. They prepared for this afterworld by constructing pyramids and other tombs, stocked with supplies to “live” after death. For Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the answer is threefold: 1) there is a Day of Judgment; 2) there is a Paradise for believers; and 3) there is a doom of Hellfire for disbelievers. We prepare for our afterlife by tuning our consciences, purifying our faith, performing good deeds, and avoiding sin.

The stations of life after death are unseen to the human eye but we know about them through revelation of God. What happens to the soul, step by step, from the last moment of breath onward? The Qur’an and the Sunnah contain many detailed descriptions of events that occur

to a soul after it departs from the body.
Here are just a few:

Death

Death is an unavoidable fate, determined by Allah and written before the person's creation. Allah says

“And no person can ever die except by Allah's leave and at an appointed term.”
(Qur'an, 3:145)

And,

“Every soul shall taste of death.”
(Qur'an, 3:185)

This fact and its finality does not require much evidence, as it is observed in everyday life. What we do not observe

is the experience of the soul as it enters the unseen world of the hereafter, the separation of soul from body, the great departure. For that information, we rely entirely on revelation from God.

Death does not merely mean the heartbeat stops or brain activity ceases to register on a monitor. Rather, death is when the soul separates from the body. The task of gathering the soul out of the person's body at the time of death is the job of the angels of death. They are gentle, glad, and reassuring in dealing with the soul of a righteous person. They are stern, repulsed, and terrifying in dealing with the soul of a wicked person.

Allah describes the scene of the angels taking the soul of a believer, saying,

“Those whom the angels cause to die in a state of purity. They say, ‘Peace be unto you! Enter the Garden because of what you used to do.’” (Qur’an, 16:32)

And He describes the moment of death when it comes to the wicked, saying,

“Then how (will it be with them) when the angels gather them, smiting their faces and their backs. That will be because they followed that which angers Allah, and hated that which pleases Him.” (Qur’an, 47:27-28)

And,

“Lo! As for those whom the angels take while they wrong themselves, (the angels)

ask, ‘In what were you engaging?’ They will say, ‘We were oppressed in the land.’ (the angels) will say, ‘Wasn’t Allah’s earth spacious so that you could have migrated therein?’” (Qur’an, 4:97)

Death is the seal of one’s deeds, good or bad, with the exception of the continuous deeds, meaning deeds with consequences that continue after one’s death. For example, a person might raise a pious child, who would pray for him or her after his or her death, and that would benefit the deceased person. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “If a human dies, then his good deeds stop except for three: a continuous charity, a beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child who prays for him,” (Muslim). On the flip side of this, a person might commit

and evil act with bearing far after his or her death, and he or she would accrue more and more sin for that deed after their life ended. For example, the son of Adam who killed his brother receives some sin for every murder committed among people because he was the first to commit murder and his poor example set an evil trend among mankind. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Whenever a person is murdered unjustly, there is a share from the burden of the crime on the first son of Adam, for he was the first to start the tradition of murdering,” (Bukhari).

On one’s deathbed, a Muslim is encouraged to close his or her life with the utterance of the declaration of faith, “La ilaha illa Allah/ There is no god but

Allah.” Indeed, during one’s lifetime, we pray to Allah for what scholars refer to as “the good seal”, and that means to die in a righteous action and not in an act of sin. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Whoever’s last statement is ‘La ilaha illa Allah/ There is no god but Allah,’ shall enter Paradise,” (Ahmad; Abu Dawud; Hakim).

The Grave

The grave is a stage between death and the Day of Judgment. A Muslim person’s corpse is washed, prayed a funeral prayer over, and then carried to his or her grave. On the way to the grave, the soul of a righteous person is eager to reach the felicity of the grave, the joy which begins in the grave and foretells later

fuller enjoyment of eternal Heaven. An unrighteous person, on the other hand, loathes to be buried, regrets his or her life and wishes never to have existed at all. The unrighteous person, knows that the punishment will soon commence, a torment that will never end. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) recommended rushing the body to its grave. As he explained, the pious soul is eager to be buried; as for the impious soul, people should be hasty in burying it as well because they would be glad to be rid of its spiritual filthiness. He (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “You should hasten to bury your dead ones, for if they are good (pious) you will be taking them to goodness, and if they are otherwise you will be relieving yourself of their evil,” (Bukhari & Muslim).

In the grave, angels interrogate the deceased person. They ask three all-important questions:

- 1) *Who is your Lord?*
- 2) *Who is this man sent among you (i.e. your prophet)?*
- 3) *What is your religion?*

The person answers in accordance with his or her true faith during his or her lifetime and cannot resist answering in that manner. The righteous person would answer that Allah is their Lord, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and Islam is their religion. At that point, they see their place in Heaven spread before them in the grave, and a lovely companion enters the grave with them. The person asks, “Who are you?” and the companion answers that it is the person’s good deeds

done in their lifetime. An unrighteous person, on the other hand, stutters and says, “I don’t know,” in reaction to his or her interrogation; the angels crush him or her with terrifying blows; Hell is spread in sheets before him or her in the grave; and a miserable companion enters the grave, who represents their worldly deeds.

A person may be punished in the grave for repetitive sinfulness during his or her life, although he or she would later enter Paradise because they believed in God and His messengers. The grave is a lesser punishment compared to the punishment of Hellfire, and it may expiate and purify the person so that he or she would avoid the greater punishment of Hell.

The Day of Judgment

Also called the Day of Reckoning, the Last Day, the Hour, the Day of Resurrection—the Day of Judgment follows the destruction of this world. Allah says,

“Everything on it will perish; there remains only the countenance of your Lord, Owner of Might and Glory.” (Qur’an, 55:26-27)

The Day of Judgment, or the Last Day, is the last day of existence before eternity begins, the last day before souls of humankind and jinn enter their places in Heaven and Hell. Everyone, from every time period and every place, every single person ever created will be recreated and resurrected; and each person will face his or her account. God is the Judge that

day. Indeed, His kingship over the Day of Judgment is among the first descriptors He offers of Himself in the opening verses of the Qur'an. He says,

“All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds; The Ever-Merciful; The All-Compassionate; Master of the Day of Judgment.” (Qur'an, 1:2-4)

He will admit whomsoever He pleases into Paradise and He will cast whomsoever He pleases into the Fire, according to His divine and perfect sense of judgment and justice. It is a terrifying reality, one which every believer keeps in mind so that he or she might meet their Lord Most High with a clean record of deeds and a pure heart of faith.

Events of the Day of Judgment described in the Qur'an and Sunnah are numerous. Among them, the following are major events:

THE TRUMPET BLASTS

An angel blows a trumpet, which signals the initiation of the Day of Judgment. Upon the first blow, all living creation dies or goes unconscious, except whom Allah chooses to exempt¹³. Upon the second blow, animals and people come back to life. Allah mentions the trumpet in the Qur'an, saying,

13. We do not know, as it was not revealed, who the exemptions will be. There is a statement of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) indicating that Prophet Moses (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) may be one of them. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "The people will fall unconscious on the Day of Resurrection, and I will be the first one to wake up. Then, I will see Moses holding onto one of the pillars of the throne (of Allah), and I do not know if he will be one of those who awoke before me or if he is one of those who are exempted by Allah," (Ibid; a similar narration is found in Bukhari with different wording).

“And the trumpet will be blown, and all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth will swoon away, except him whom Allah wills. Then it will be blown a second time, and behold they will be standing, looking on.” (Qur’an, 39:68)

And,

“They await only a single shout, which will seize them while they are disputing. Then they will not be able to make bequest, nor will they return to their family. And the trumpet will be blown, and behold from the graves they will come out quickly to their Lord.” (Qur’an, 36:49-51)

RECREATION

The resurrection after death is a part of the message of Islam most doubted by the pagan Arabs at the time of Prophet Muhammad's mission. Therefore, there are many verses of the Qur'an addressing the resurrection, stating its reality, eloquently comparing it to the revival of barren land when the rain falls, reasoning its necessity, and pointing out Allah's ability to recreate what He originally created. Allah says,

“Man is self-destroyed; how ungrateful! From what thing did He create him? From a drop of seed. He created him and portioned him, then He makes the way easy for him, then He causes him to die and be buried. Then, when He wills, He brings him to life again.” (Qur'an, 80:17-22)

And,

“Does mankind think that We will not assemble his bones? Nay, verily, We are able to restore his very fingertips!” (Qur’an, 75:3-4)

And,

“And man says, ‘When I am dead, will I be brought back to life?’ Doesn’t man remember that We created him before, when he was nothing?” (Qur’an, 19:66-67)

And,

“Does mankind think that he will be left aimless? Wasn’t he a drop of fluid which gushed forth, then he became a clot; then (Allah) shaped and fashioned and made him a pair, male and female. Isn’t He able to bring the dead to life?” (Qur’an, 75:36-39)

And,

“And He it is Who sends the winds as tidings heralding His mercy, till, when they bear a cloud heavy (with rain), We lead it to a dead land, and then cause water to descend thereon and thereby bring forth fruits of every kind. Thus We bring forth the dead. Haply ye may remember.” (Qur’an, 7:57)

People’s bodies take a different form than their original worldly shape, according to their deeds. For example, a Muslim’s hands, forearms, face, and feet will be luminous, marks of having made ablution for prayer in the life of the world. A person who rejected the message and miracles sent to his or her time would be blind. Allah says,

“Whoever turns away from remembrance of Me, his will be a narrow life, and I shall bring him blind to the assembly on the Day of Resurrection. He will say, ‘My Lord! Why have You gathered me blind, when I used to see?’ He will say, ‘So it is. Our revelations came to you, but you forgot them. In like manner, you are forgotten this Day!’” (Qur’an, 20:124-126)

An arrogant person will be small compared to others, like an ant to a human in this world. A polygamist who was unfair between his two wives will have an asymmetrical body. A beggar will have parts of his face missing. And so on. Allah says,

“We mete out death among you, and We are not to be outrun, that We may transfigure you and make you what you know not.” (Qur’an, 56:60-61)

GATHERING AND WAITING

The Day of Judgment is also called the Day of Assembly; on it, all of humankind, jinn, animals, and angels are assembled. Allah Most High says,

“That is a Day whereon mankind will be gathered together, and that is a Day when all will be present.” (Qur’an, 11:103)

And,

“Woe to the repudiators on that day! This is the Day of Decision, We have brought you and the men of old together. If now you have any wit, outwit Me. Woe to the repudiators on that day!” (Qur’an, 77:37-40)

The place of the gathering will not be the earth we see and live upon now, as that

earth will have been destroyed, but it will be a different plain of expansive, flat land. Allah says,

“On the Day when the earth will be changed to another earth and so will the heavens, and they [creatures] will appear before Allah, the One, the Irresistible.”
(Qur’an, 14:48)

And,

“They will ask you about the mountains (on the Day). Say, ‘My Lord will break them into scattered dust and leave it as an empty plain wherein you see neither curve nor ruggedness. On that day, they follow the summoner who does not deceive, and the voices are hushed before the Beneficent, and you will hear only a faint murmur.’” (Qur’an, 20:105-108)

People will stand and wait for the judgment to begin, and that period will feel lengthy. Allah says,

“The angels and the spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years.” (Qur’an, 70:4)

After standing, sweating, and waiting, people will feel impatient for the judgment to begin. They will implore each other to ask Allah to bring the judgment, but none will be able to ask Him except His final messenger, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). That intercession is a unique distinction of the Prophet Muhammad, and it may be due to his special blessing of having been forgiven in advance of the Day of Judgment, his past and future sins, as Allah mentions,

“So that Allah forgives your sin which is past and that which is to come, and perfects His favor on you and guide you to the right path.” (Qur’an, 48:2)

The Intercession of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

On the Day of Judgment, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) will intercede between Allah Most High and creation, asking Allah to begin the judgment. Allah mentions the subject of intercession several times in the Qur’an, emphasizing that intercession is by His permission alone. Allah says,

*“On that Day, no intercession avails save his unto whom the Beneficent has given permission, and whose He accepts.”
(Qur’an, 20:109)*

We learn about the Prophet Muhammad's intercession from a lengthy statement in his teachings, which reads,

“I will be the chief of all the people on the Day of Resurrection. Do you know how Allah will gather all the first and the last (people) in one level place where an observer will be able to see (all) of them and they will be able to hear the announcer, and the sun will come near to them. Some people will say: ‘Don’t you see, in what condition you are and the state to which you have reached? Why don’t you look for a person who can intercede for you with your Lord?’ Some people will say: ‘Appeal to your father, Adam.’ They will go to him and say: ‘O Adam! You are the father of all mankind, and Allah created you with His Own Hands, and ordered the angels to

prostrate for you, and made you live in Paradise. Will you not intercede for us with your Lord? Don't you see in what (miserable) state we are, and to what condition we have reached?' On that Adam will reply, 'My Lord is so angry as He has never been before and will never be in the future; (besides), He forbade me (to eat from) the tree, but I disobeyed (Him), (I am worried about) myself! Myself! Go to somebody else; go to Noah.' They will go to Noah and say: 'O Noah! You are the first amongst the messengers of Allah to the people of the earth, and Allah named you a thankful slave. Don't you see in what a (miserable) state we are and to what condition we have reached? Will you not intercede for us with your Lord?' Noah will reply: 'Today my Lord has become so angry as He had never been before and will never be in

the future. Myself! Myself! Go to the Prophet (Muhammad).’ The people will come to me, and I will prostrate myself underneath Allah’s Throne. Then I will be addressed: ‘O Muhammad! Raise your head; intercede, for your intercession will be accepted; and ask (for anything), for you will be given.’” (Bukhari)

RECORDS, ACCOUNT, & SCALES

The judgment on the Last Day, the Day of Resurrection, is by Allah’s justice and mercy. Allah will recompense people’s deeds in a merciful way, as He says,

“Whoever performs a good deed shall have ten times the like thereof to his credit, while whoever does an evil deed shall have only the recompense of the like thereof, and they will not be wronged.” (Qur’an, 6:160)

Allah Most High has deemed that there should be written records, a process of accounting, and a fair scale.

Allah mentions people's records, saying,

“On that Day, you will be exposed; not a secret of you will be hidden. Then, as for him who is given his record in his right hand, he will say, ‘Take, read my book! Surely, I knew that I would have to meet my reckoning.’ Then, he will be in a blissful state in a high Garden, whereof the clusters are in easy reach. (And it will be said unto those therein), ‘Eat and drink at ease for that which you sent on before you in past days.’ But as for him who is given his record in his left hand, he will say, ‘Oh, would that I had never been given my book, and did not know my reckoning! Oh, would that it had been death! My wealth has not availed me; my

power is gone from me.” (Qur’an, 69:18-29)

Allah Most High mentions the scales of the Day of Judgment, saying,

“And We set up just balances on the Day or Resurrection, so that no soul is dealt with unjustly in anything. Though it be the weight of a mustard seed, We bring it. And We suffice for reckoners.” (Qur’an, 21:47)

And,

“The Calamity! What is the Calamity! Ah, what will convey to you what the Calamity is! A Day wherein mankind will be like thickly scattered moths, and the mountains will become as carded wool. Then, as for him whose scales are heavy,

he will live a pleasant life. But as for him whose scales are light, the bereft and hungry one is his mother¹⁴. Ah, what will convey to you what she is! Raging Fire.”
(Qur’an, 101:1-11)

And,

“The weighing on that day is true. As for those whose scale is heavy, they are the successful. And as for those whose scale is light, they are those who lose their souls because they disbelieved in Our revelations.” (Qur’an, 7:8-9)

The weightiest deed in the scales of one’s good is the statement, “La ilaha illa Allah/ There is nothing worthy of worship but Allah.” The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) related that Prophet Noah (may Allah’s peace and

¹⁴. “Mother” here means home, place of belonging.

blessings be upon him) said to his son, “I advise you to say La Ilaha Illa Allah because indeed if the seven heavens and the seven earths were to be placed on one side of the scale and La ilaha illa Allah was to be on the other side La ilaha illa Allah will outweigh them. And if the seven heavens and the seven earths were like a solid ring La ilaha illa Allah can sever it,” (Bukhari).

Being called to account for one’s deeds means Allah would question the person. For example, Allah says,

*“Verily, the hearing and the sight and the heart—each of these will be questioned.”
(Qur’an, 17:36)*

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said,

“A servant of Allah will remain standing on the Day of Judgment until he is questioned about his life—how he spent it—and about his knowledge—how he utilized it—and about his wealth—where he acquired it and how he spent it—and about his body—how he used it,” (Tirmidhi). If Allah calls us to account in full for all our deeds, good and bad, then no one will be spared His punishment. However, Allah’s mercy is His promise to believers, and He says,

“We accept the best of what they do and overlook their evil deeds. (They are) among the owners of the Garden. This is the true promise which they were promised.” (Qur’an, 46:16)

Accounting for one’s life to the One Who created it is an awesome spiritual and moral motivation. We as Muslims perform

our daily business and interact with others in our life under the mantle of hope and fear in that meeting with Allah Most High. We know that He sees and hears us and knows us intimately now, in the present, and we want His love and acceptance now; yet, we surely become forgetful and lured into worldly or mundane concerns. In returning to remembrance of Him, we are cognizant of the chance our lifetime gives us to come back to Him before the ultimate meeting with Him and the account for every moment of our lives.

DRAGGING TO HELL OF DISBELIEVERS

After being called to account, the guilty who earned the punishment of Hellfire with their deeds and faithlessness will

be dragged into Hell, where they will be tormented to varying degrees and in various manners in accordance with their sins. Allah says,

“But as for him who is given his record in his left hand, he will say, ‘Oh, would that I had not been given my book and did not know my reckoning! Oh, would that it had been death! My wealth has not availed me, and my power is gone from me.’ (It will be said) ‘Take him and fetter him, and then expose him to the Hellfire, and then insert him in a chain the length of seventy cubits. Lo! He used not to believe in Allah, the Tremendous.’” (Qur’an, 69:25-33)

And,

“And, by your Lord, verily We shall assemble them and the devils, then We shall bring them, crouching, around Hell.

Then We shall pluck out from every sect whichever of them was most stubborn in rebellion to the Beneficent. And surely We are best aware of those most worthy to be burned therein.” (Qur’an, 19:68-70)

THE POOL OF “KAWTHAR” FOR BELIEVERS

The thirst of the devout followers of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) will be slaked at the fountain of Al-Kawthar on the Day of Judgment. Allah says,

“Verily, We have given you Al-Kawthar. So pray to your Lord and offer sacrifice. Surely, whoever hates you (Muhammad) is cut off.” (Qur’an, 108:1-3)

“Kawthar” may be translated as “abundance”.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained the meaning of this verse of the Qur’an. He asked his companions, “Do you know what is Al-Kawthar?” They replied, “Allah and His Messenger know best.” He said, “It is a river that my Lord, the Mighty and Majestic, has promised me and it has abundant goodness. It is a fountain where my nation will come on the Day of Judgment. Its containers are as numerous as the stars in the sky. Then a servant of Allah from among them will be prevented from it, and I will say, ‘O Lord! Verily, he is from my followers.’ Then Allah will say, ‘You do not know what he innovated after you,’” (Bukhari & Muslim).

We ask Allah Most High to make us among those devoted believers who will enjoy the bounty of the fountain of Al-Kawthar on the Day of Resurrection.

THE BRIDGE OF BELIEVERS

Believers will pass over a bridge over Hellfire, which is called the “Sirat” in Arabic. It will be lined with thorns, representing sinful deeds, and those thorns will snare and pull down people who engaged in those sins during their lifetime in the world. Some people will cross the Sirat easily and quickly, others will drudge along slowly and painstakingly—both in accordance with their spiritual rank and dedication. Allah says,

“There is not one of you but shall approach it. That is a fixed ordinance of your Lord. Then We will rescue those who kept from evil and leave the evil-doers crouching there.” (Qur’an, 19:71-72)

And,

“Rivalry in worldly increase distracts you until you come to the graves. Nay, but you will come to know! Nay, but you will come to know! Nay, would that you knew (now) with sure knowledge! For you will behold Hellfire. Again, you will behold it with sure vision. Then, on that day, you will be asked concerning the pleasure (you indulged in).” (Qur’an, 102:1-8)

People who fail to cross the bridge and fall into Hellfire will later enter Heaven, but they will suffer punishment of their sins first.

THE PLAIN OF RETRIBUTION BETWEEN BELIEVERS

Before they enter the gardens, believers will come to a place where each person who was wronged by another will have his or her retribution. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Allah will definitely enforce settlement of all the dues to those entitled to receive them on the Day of Judgment; even the wrong done to a hornless goat by a horned goat will be redressed,” (Muslim). After inflicting retribution, the believers will enter Heaven through its gates. Believers will not enter Paradise with any hatred between them. Allah says,

“And We remove whatever rancor may be in their hearts.” (Qur’an, 7:43)

The Entrance through Gates of Paradise of Believers

Paradise is gated by several gates, each of which has a name, and people enter the heavenly abode through the door associated with their good deeds. For example, there is a gate called “Rayyan” which is for people who fasted for the sake of Allah Most High.

Dwellers of Paradise are welcomed into it by greetings of peace. Allah says,

“But ah! Thou soul at peace! Return to your Lord, content in His good pleasure! Enter thou among My bondmen! Enter My garden!” (Qur’an, 89:27-30)

And,

“And those who keep their duty to their Lord are driven unto the Garden in troops till, when they reach it, and the gates thereof are opened, and the warders thereof say to them, ‘Peace be unto you! You are good, so enter to dwell therein.’ They say, ‘Praise be to Allah, Who has fulfilled His promise to us and has made us inherit the land, sojourning in the Garden where we will! So bounteous is the wage of workers.’ And you (Muhammad) see the angels thronging round the Throne, hymning the praises of their Lord. And they are judged aright. And it is said, ‘Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds!’” (Qur’an, 39:73-75)

And,

“Such as persevere in seeking their Lord’s countenance and are regular in prayer and spend of that which We bestow upon them secretly and openly, and overcome evil with good. Theirs will be the sequel of the Home, Gardens of Eden which they enter, along with all who do right of their fathers and their helpmates and their seed. The angels enter unto them from every gate, (saying), ‘Peace be unto you because you persevered.’” (Qur’an, 8:22-24)

And,

“Lo! Those who believe and do good works, their Lord guides them by their faith. Rivers will flow beneath them in the Gardens of Delight. Their prayer therein will be, ‘Glory to Thee, O Allah!’ and their

greeting therein will be, ‘Peace!’ and the conclusion of their prayer will be, ‘Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds!’” (Qur’an, 10:10)

And,

“Their salutation on the day when they shall meet Him will be, ‘Peace!’ and He has prepared for them a goodly recompense.” (Qur’an, 33:44)

Heaven and Hell

The final reality of life after death, after the grave and its foreshadowing, after the turmoil of the Day of Judgment, when all people and jinn have taken their places for eternity, the home of the hereafter is dichotomous: bliss in Heaven or torture in Hell. Heaven is full of love, pleasure, ease,

and tranquility. The highest reward in Heaven is being in Allah's pleasure, being close to Him, and finally seeing Him. Hell, on the other hand, is rank with mutual hatred, humiliation, pain, and dejection from God's grace and acceptance.

Descriptions of Heaven and Hellfire in the Qur'an and Sunnah are numerous and often finely detailed. It is worth attention to note that Allah Most High mentions Hellfire in relation to people's sins and not as an isolated threat irrespective of one's choices, while Heaven is mentioned sometimes in relation to belief and good deeds but moreover in relation to Allah's mercy. For example, Allah mentions Hellfire's boiling heat and paralyzing cold, then says,

“Recompense proportioned (to their evil deeds).” (Qur’an, 78:26)

Yet in the same chapter, He mentions Heaven’s vineyards and companions and purity of conversation, then says,

“Requital from your Lord—a gift in payment. Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, the Beneficent; with Whom none can converse.” (Qur’an, 78:36-37)

Additionally, Allah Most High couples descriptions of Hellfire with mentions of Paradise, inspiring not only fear but hope, so that the reader of the Qur’an feels a balanced sort of God-consciousness, becoming God-fearing in his or her actions without despairing of God’s tremendous mercy.

An example of the Qur'anic style of reminding its reading both of the potential punishment and pleasures of the hereafter, in graphic detail, can be found in the following verses, wherein Allah the Beneficent says,

“Assuredly, the Day of Decision is the term of all of them, a day when friend cannot avail friend, nor can they be helped, save him on whom Allah has mercy. Lo! He is the Mighty, the Merciful. Lo! The tree of Zaqqum is the food of the sinner, like molten brass, it seethes in their bellies as the seething of boiling water. (It will be said) ‘Take him and drag him to the midst of Hell, then pour upon his head the torment of boiling water. Taste! Lo! You used to be mighty, noble! Lo! This is that which you used to doubt!’ Lo! Those who keep their duty will be in a secure place amid gardens and water-springs,

attired in silk and silk embroidery, facing one another. Even so, and We shall wed them to fair ones with wide lovely eyes. They call therein for every fruit in safety. They taste not death therein, save the first death. And He has saved them from the doom of Hell, a bounty from your Lord. That is the supreme triumph. And We have made (this Scripture) easy in your language (O Muhammad) only that they may heed. Wait then. Lo! They too are waiting.” (Qur’an, 44:40-59)

Here, Allah warns us in graphic terms, mentioning the tree of “Zaqqum” and boiling water poured onto sufferers’ heads. He further blames the denizens of Hell on account of their previous arrogance which led them to demur when offered faith. However, Allah Most High immediately follows this warning with a description of Heaven, its safety, gardens, springs, silk

clothing, companionship, beauty, fruits, and immortality. Allah says that this is a bounty from Him, rather than pointing at the inhabitants' deeds. He then reminds us of His guidance, offering us a choice to heed His warning and embrace His mercy. How many more descriptions of Paradise! About four times as many details of Heaven are offered in this passage as compared to descriptors of torments in Hell. Surely, Allah wants us to hope in His mercy, though we should keep in mind and also believe fully in the reality of His wrath.



LESSON 8

Pillar 6—Belief in Predestination

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Understand core Islamic beliefs concerning predestination;
- Articulate the three principles underscoring predestination.

Pillar 6—Belief in Predestination

The concept of predestination in Islam is premised on God's absolute knowledge and power, and it entails three core beliefs: 1) Allah knows everything, past, present and future; 2) Events are written beforehand in a Record with Him; 3) Allah created everything and He has absolute power over His creation so that things occur through His will. Predestination does not exonerate individuals from their evil-doing; rather, humankind is responsible for how they react to the destiny handed to them.

1—Allah Knows Everything

Allah's absolute power and knowledge over what He created is logical as well as a revealed fact. It makes sense that

the one who designed and constructed a thing would understand it and possess fullest knowledge about it. This is true of humankind. As Allah created them, He is best informed about them. Allah says,

“And keep your opinion secret or proclaim it. Surely, He is Knower of all that is in the breasts. Should not He who created know?” (Qur’an, 67:14)

Allah describes His interwoven creation, power and knowledge over the universe, saying,

“His is the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth; He quickens and He gives death; and He is able to do all things. He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; and He is the Knower of all things. He is the One Who created

the heavens and the earth in six periods, then He mounted the Throne. He knows all that enters the earth and all that emerges therefrom, and all that comes down from the sky and all that ascends therein; and He is with you wheresoever you may be. And Allah is Seer of what you do. His is the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and unto Allah all things are brought back. He causes the night to pass into the day, and He causes the day to pass into the night, and He is Knower of all that is I the breasts.” (Qur’an, 57:2-6)

God knows even the minutest and most intimate details of His creation, as He declares in the verse,

“The Knower of the unseen! Not an atom’s weight or less than that or greater, escapes Him in the heavens or the earth, but it is in a clear Record.” (Qur’an, 34:3)

And,

“And with Him are the keys of the invisible. None but He knows them. And He knows what is in the land and the sea. Not a leaf falls but He knows it, not a grain amid the darkness of the earth, nothing wet or dry, but it is in a clear Record.”
(Qur’an, 6:59)

2—Events are Written in a Record with Allah

Allah Most High deemed that all events of the universe be written beforehand. The first creation was a pen, and it wrote whatever would happen for the rest of eternity. Allah says,

“Nothing of disaster befalls in the earth or in yourselves but it is in a Book before We bring it into being—Lo! That is easy for Allah. (That is so) in order that you do not grieve for the sake of something that escaped you nor exult in what you are given. Allah loves not the prideful boasters.” (Qur’an, 57:22-23)

And,

“And surely, it is in the Mother of the Book with Us, indeed sublime, decisive.” (Qur’an, 43:4)

And,

“And We have kept all things in a clear register.” (Qur’an, 36:12)

3—Events Occur through Allah’s Will

Allah’s control over the creation is a fact He points out over and over again in the Qur’an. For instance, He says,

“Have they not seen the birds overhead spreading out their wings and folding them? Nothing upholds them except the Beneficent. Lo! He is Seer of all things.”
(Qur’an, 67:19)

And,

“Or who is the one who can provide for you if He withholds His providence? Nay, but they are set in pride and forwardness.” (Qur’an, 67:21)

And,

*“Say, ‘Have you thought if all your water were to disappear into the earth, who could bring you gushing water?’”
(Qur’an, 67:30)*

And,

*“Have you observed the water that you drink? Is it you who shed it from the raincloud, or are We the shedder? If We willed, verily we could make it bitter. Why, then, do you not give thanks?”
(Qur’an, 56:69-70)*

And,

*“Why then, when the soul comes up to the throat, and you are at that moment looking, and We are nearer unto him than you are, but you do not see—why then, if you are not in bondage (to Us) do you not force it back, if you are truthful?”
(Qur’an, 56:83-87)*

The Islamic concept of predestination or fate, called “Qadar” in Arabic, acknowledges God’s supremacy. It is easy to believe and accept that Allah—Who created the universe—knows and has power over all things. It is equally clear that people have choices and face the consequences of their personal decisions both in this world and even more so in the hereafter. Reconciling these two realities is the point of confusion for many students of Islamic creed.

To address predestination in relation to humankind and our free choice, we must remember that there are many aspects of human existence that a person has absolutely no control over. We do not choose to be born, nor where or when we are born. We do not choose our own forms

and figures, powers and limitations. We cannot choose our own lifespans or what calamities befall us during our lives, such as disease, war, conflict with others, etc. We do not freely select the talents and aptitudes we possess, nor the social rank we are born into, nor the family and social support given to us during our lifetime. Yet there are many things we do choose, directly or indirectly. In short, although we do not choose our possibilities, we certainly choose from them. Allah rewards or punishes people in accordance with their willful choices. He challenges them with the events and circumstances that are not in their control.

LESSON 9

Nullifiers of Faith in Islam

Objectives:

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- Discuss spiritual consequences of corrupt belief, disbelief, and polytheism;
- Define disbelief and polytheism;
- List commonplace actions that constitute disbelief or polytheism, according to Islamic belief;
- Appreciate how excessive materialism, showing off in religious devotion and immoderate pursuit of worldly gratification endanger faith.

Beliefs and actions that contradict correct creed ruin a person's good deeds by destroying the platform of faith upon which all goodness depends. Allah says,

“Those who believe and do not obscure their belief with wrongdoing, theirs is safety and they are rightly guided.”
(Qur'an, 6:82)

It is therefore necessary to present not only pillars of belief but also nullifiers of faith in Islam. Any part and all forms of polytheism, belief in religions or creeds in contradiction to Islam, or disbelief in Islam—in jest or in earnest, in public or in secret, in part or in full—destroy a person's faith just as knocking out the pillars of a building would cause the whole structure to collapse. Some acts of polytheism or disbelief are obvious while others are more

subtle. If a person learns that he or she has been engaging in an act of polytheism of disbelief, he or she is obliged to repent. Indeed, Allah is the One Who Accepts Repentance, the Relenting, the Merciful.

Disbelief

Rejecting any part of Islam or believing that anything in contradiction to Islam is superior to it is disbelief in Islam, called “kufur” in Arabic. Disbelief takes a person out of the fold of Islam and renders him or her a non-Muslim. Disbelief may take several forms, including:

- 1) Ridiculing any part of Islam; Allah says,

“Say, ‘Was it Allah and His messenger that you were mocking? Make no excuse,

you have certainly disbelieved after your belief.” (Qur’an, 9:65-66)

- 2) Disbelieving in an assertion uttered in the Qur’an or by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); Allah says,

“And as for the one who does not believe in Allah and His messenger—lo! We have prepared a flame for disbelievers.” (Qur’an, 48:13)

- 3) Rejecting clear cut rulings in Islam; Allah says,

“It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have passed judgment over a matter, that they should afterward decide otherwise in their affairs. And whoever rebels against Allah

and His Messenger has certainly strayed into manifest error.” (Qur’an, 33:36)

And,

“But nay, by your Lord, they will not believe until they make you (Muhammad) judge of what is in dispute between them and find within themselves no dislike of that which you decide, and submit with full submission.” (Qur’an, 4:65)

And,

“Whoever does not judge by what Allah revealed, such are disbelievers.” (Qur’an, 5:44)

- 4) Hating any part of Islam, or preferring something outside of Islam to something within it; Allah says,

“That is because they hate that which Allah has revealed, so He makes their actions fruitless.” (Qur’an, 47:9)

And,

“And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted of him and in the hereafter he will be among the losers.” (Qur’an, 3:85)

- 5) Banning together in political alliance with disbelievers against Muslims in order to oppress people of faith is also considered a form of disbelief in the message of Islam, and such an action groups the person among the disbelievers rather than those of faith. Allah Most High says,

“If any among you takes them as allies, then surely he is one of them. Verily, Allah does not guide the unjust.” (5:51)

Inability or laziness in applying Islamic rulings, or difficulty in comprehending assertions made in the Qur’an and Sunnah, do NOT signify disbelief; rather, it is deliberate rejection, ridicule, or political opposition which signifies disbelief.

Polytheism

Worshipping anything other than Allah eradicates the pure monotheism of Islamic faith. This includes saint worship, idolatry, worship of angels or prophets, and any other form of polytheism. Allah says,

“O mankind! Worship your Lord, Who has created you and those before you, so that you may ward off (evil); Who has appointed the earth a resting place for you, and the sky a canopy; and causes water to pour down from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you. And do not set up rivals to Allah when you know (better).” (Qur’an, 2:21-22)

Polytheism—called “shirk” in Arabic—takes various expressions, including:

- 1) Attributing names, powers or virtues possessed solely by God to other than Him;
- 2) Believing there is ordinance and sustenance over the universe outside Allah’s lordship; Allah says,

“Say, ‘Shall I choose for a protecting friend other than Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth who feeds and is never fed?’ Say, ‘I am ordered to be the first to surrender.’ And do not be among the idolaters.” (Qur’an, 6:14)

And,

“Say, ‘Shall I seek another than Allah for Lord, when He is Lord of all things?’” (Qur’an, 6:164)

- 3)** Believing in and following laws in contradiction to the laws of Allah; Allah says,

“Is it the judgment of the time of ignorance they seek? Who is better than Allah for judgment to a people who have certainty (in their belief)?” (Qur’an, 5:50)

- 4) Offering devotional worship to other than Allah, such as prayer, supplication, sacrifice, fasting, pilgrimage, etc. Allah Most High says,

“Say, ‘As for me, my Lord has guided me to a straight path, a right religion, in the community of Abraham, the upright, and he was not an idolater.’ Say, ‘Verily, my prayer and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds. He has no partner. This am I commanded, and I am the first of those who surrender.’” (Qur’an, 6:161-163)

And,

“And eat not that whereon Allah’s name has not been mentioned for surely it is abomination. Lo! The devils inspire their minions to dispute with you. But if you obey them, you will in truth be idolaters.” (Qur’an, 6:121)

And,

“And indeed individuals among humankind used to invoke the protection of individuals of the Jinn, so they increased them in revolt (against Allah).” (Qur’an, 72:6)

Scholars have further divided polytheistic acts into three categories: major polytheism, minor polytheism, and hidden polytheism. Major polytheism takes a person out of the fold of Islam and renders him or her a non-Muslim, while minor or hidden polytheism are considered sinful but fall short of actually abrogating the person’s submission to God. An example of major polytheism may be slaughtering a stock animal in the name of anything but God. An example of minor

polytheism may be swearing by other than God, for example, saying, “By George!”

Specific Acts of Disbelief and Polytheism

Some examples of polytheism or disbelief in God’s divine names and attributes would be:

- Calling a person one of God’s glorious titles, such as “Lord of the World” or “Most Beneficent” or “King of Kings”;
- Exaggerating in praising people or objects, such as saying something is as beautiful as God Himself;
- Excessive veneration of people, such as believing that a prophet or pious person holds the keys to the unseen or can save a person with whom Allah is in wrath;

- Comparing Allah's attributes to human attributes (called anthropomorphism in philosophy), such as saying Allah's face looks like a human face, or other likenesses not revealed by Allah Most High;
- Negating Allah's revealed names or attributes, for example saying that Allah has no essence and is only a metaphorical existence;
- Claiming that Allah is the comprehensive composite of all existence (called pantheism in philosophy), for example saying He is inside us or that His essence flows through creation;
- Believing that a person knows the unseen future, such as a fortune-teller, whether he or she uses palm reading, tea leaves, cards, communication with

jinn or any other method;

- Believing that anything or anyone determines a person's fate other than God, such as astrologists who “read” the stars believing that their constellations arrange events in the universe;
- Believing that one's birth season, month, or year is determinant of his or her future, personality, compatibility with others, etc., as believed by astrologists and people who follow horoscopes;
- Giving credence or any semblance of credence to fortune tellers, astrologists, or sorcerers by engaging with them in any way, be it approaching them in person with questions, listening to their speeches, reading their publications, etc., whether this is distributed freely or by payment, in earnest or in jest.

Some examples of polytheism or disbelief in God's lordship and His divine right to decree law would be:

- Believing that other laws are superior to God's laws, more universal, or more applicable to modern times;
- Ascribing to creeds other than the creed of Islam, such as calling oneself Marxist, Communist, Ba'thist, etc.;
- Saying that all religions are the same, while clearly some contradict others, and Allah made Islam the path to Him and decreed that mankind worship Him in the manner He revealed to His messengers and not in any haphazard fashion;
- Believing that the order of the universe is not under Allah's command and Lordship, by for example saying that

“nature” is self-sustaining and self-ordered;

- Negating a law of God, be it prohibitory or commanding, by denying its validity or calling it unjust.

Some examples of polytheism or disbelief in worship due only to God would be:

- Believing that other forms of worship besides the worship prescribed in Islam are superior in spirituality;
- Negating prescribed forms of worship, for example by saying that Allah does not need anyone’s prayer and therefore giving up prayer to Him or claiming that the movements and postures in prayer are nonsensical and therefore praying

in a different position, or changing one's Ramadan fast into a mere diet plan claiming that one fulfills the purpose and does not need to perform the prescribed method;

- Praying to a saint for blessing in one's life;
- Dedicating one's fasting, pilgrimage, or sacrifice to other than Allah Most High;
- Making pilgrimage to holy sites other than those sanctioned in Islam (i.e. Makkah, Madinah, and Jerusalem);
- Visiting graves of saints to reap benefits and blessings from their presence;
- Pronouncing the name of other than Allah over animals at the time of slaughter for meat;
- Using the jinn to work sorcery, which

generally requires paying homage to them in worship or committing some act of disbelief or sacrilege;

- Employing the services of a sorcerer, in jest or in earnest;
- Calling upon the jinn for protection or favors by seeking refuge with them or performing devotional acts;
- Swearing by other than Allah, for example the expression, “by George!”;
- Directing positions of prayer to other than Allah, for example by prostrating to another person or bowing to another person, as is common in some oriental cultures and martial arts;
- Performing pious acts in order to impress other people, earn a religious reputation, or show off.

Performing pious deeds for the sake of worldly recognition and showing off, a form of polytheism called “riyaa” in Arabic, is described specifically by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as a “hidden polytheism” because it is so subtle that a person may not be fully aware of his or her corrupted motivations. Due to its subtlety, there is a specific supplication to seek refuge with Allah from committing such an act, and that is to say, “O Allah! I seek refuge in You from committing polytheism knowingly, and I seek Your forgiveness for polytheism that I commit unknowingly,” three times.

Among the subtle forms of polytheism which a person may encounter in life, materialism and self-gratification are

commonplace. Allah Most High decries those who worship their desires. Allah says,

“Have you seen the one who makes his desire his god?” (Qur’an, 45:23)

The verse may describe a hedonistic person who immoderately pursues self-gratification in this world. It may also be true of a person who holds his or her own opinion in higher esteem than revealed guidance. Loving something more than God is another possible form of polytheism. Allah says,

“Yet of mankind are some who take for themselves (objects of worship set as) rivals to Allah, loving them with a love due to Allah. Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah. Oh, that those who do evil had but known, when

they behold the doom, that power belongs wholly to Allah, and that Allah is severe in punishment.” (Qur’an, 2:165)

The object of love may be a person, an object, or money in general. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) warned us against excessive materialism, as it may resemble worshipping something other than Allah Most High. Indeed, he cursed what he called, “the slave of the Dinar¹⁵”. The Prophet said, “Perish the slave of the Dinar, Dirham, Qatifa (thick soft cloth), and Khamisa (a garment), for if he is given, he is pleased; otherwise he is dissatisfied,” (Bukhari). If all of a person’s happiness is vested in material possessions, then he or she is in danger of corrupting his or her faith with that excessive love for stuff.

15. “Dinar” and “Dirham” were monetary currencies of exchange in Arabia at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

We seek refuge in Allah Most High from earning His wrath by any of the doors of polytheism or disbelief, as this is the most severe of sins and garners the most severe of punishments in the hereafter. May Allah raise our knowledge and adherence to Islam and make us among the righteous!

*Glory be to You, O Allah,
and praise is due to You!
I testify that there
is nothing worthy
of worship but You!
I seek Your forgiveness,
and I repent unto You!*

Appendix A

Allah's Names, Derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah¹⁶

- 1) Allah
- 2) The Taker
- 3) The God
- 4) The First
- 5) The Last
- 6) The Most Generous
- 7) The Most High
- 8) The Greatest
- 9) The Most Immense
- 10) The Almighty
- 11) The Most Knowing
- 12) The Most Wise (Al-Ahkam)
- 13) The Most Powerful
- 14) The Nearest
- 15) The Eternal (Al-Abad)
- 16) Time (Al-Amad)
- 17) The One
- 18) The Most Merciful
- 19) The Wisest of the Wise (Ahkam ul-Hakimeen)
- 20) Swiftest in Reckoning
- 21) The Best of Creators
- 22) Deserving of Fear and Obedience
- 23) Lord of Forgiveness
- 24) The Originator (Al-Bari)
- 25) The Originator (Al-Badee')

16. This list is taken from the scholarly work of Shaykh Umar al-Ashqar, "The Names and Attributes of Allah, According to the Doctrine of Ahl-us-Sunnah wal Jama'ah", (p. 74-83).

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| 26) The Originator
(Al-Fatir) | 40) The Compeller |
| 27) The Benign | 41) The Gatherer |
| 28) The Imminent (Al-
Batin) | 42) The Sublime |
| 29) The Munificent | 43) The Maker |
| 30) The Resurrector | 44) The Magnanimous |
| 31) The Eternal
(Al-Baqee) | 45) The Beautiful |
| 32) The Proof | 46) The Forbearing |
| 33) The Executor of
His Command | 47) The Wise
(Al-Hakeem) |
| 34) The Heedful | 48) The Living |
| 35) The All-Seeing | 49) The Preserver |
| 36) The Apparent | 50) The Praiseworthy |
| 37) The Relenting | 51) The Truth |
| 38) The Firm
(Al-Thabit) | 52) The Arbiter |
| 39) The Firm
(Al-Mateen) | 53) The Guardian |
| | 54) The Gracious |
| | 55) The Reckoner
(Al-Haasib) |
| | 56) The Reckoner
(Al-Haseeb) |

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| 57) The Reckoner
(Al-Muhsee) | 71) The Best of Those
Who Show Mercy |
| 58) The Compassionate | 72) The Best Guardian |
| 59) The Judge | 73) The Best Forgiver |
| 60) The Creator
(Al-Khaliq) | 74) The Best and Most
Lasting |
| 61) The Excellent in
Creating
(Al-Khallaq) | 75) The Everlasting |
| 62) The Creator
(Al-Mubadi') | 76) Time (Ad-Dahr) |
| 63) The All-Cognizant | 77) The Caller |
| 64) The One Who
Lowers | 78) The Defender |
| 65) The Best of
Plotters | 79) The One Who
Judges
after Reckoning |
| 66) The Best Provider | 80) The Averter |
| 67) The Best Helper | 81) Possessor of
Majesty and
Honor |
| 68) The Best Judge | 82) Possessor of Favor |
| 69) The Best Inheritor | 83) Possessor of
Strength |
| 70) The Best of Those
Who Send Down | 84) Possessor of
Bounty |

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| <p>85) Possessor of Mercy</p> <p>86) Lord of the Throne</p> <p>87) Possessor of Punishment</p> <p>88) Lord of the Ways of Ascent</p> <p>89) Possessor of Total Power</p> <p>90) Possessor of Sovereignty</p> <p>91) Possessor of Pride</p> <p>92) Possessor of Grandeur</p> <p>93) The Beneficent</p> <p>94) The Merciful</p> <p>95) The Provider (Ar-Razzaq)</p> <p>96) The Elevated</p> | <p>97) The Most Kind</p> <p>98) The Lord (Ar-Rabb)</p> <p>99) The One Who Raises</p> <p>100) The Discerning</p> <p>101) The Pleasure</p> <p>102) The Bestower of Guidance</p> <p>103) The Fourth of Three¹⁷</p> <p>104) The Gentle</p> <p>105) Elevator of Ranks</p> <p>106) The One Who Causes Growth</p> <p>107) Bestower of Peace</p> <p>108) The All-Hearing</p> <p>109) The One Who Precedes</p> |
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17. Meaning, if there are three, He is the fourth with them. One could also say that if there are two, He is the third, and so on.

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| 110) Quick in
Punishment | 123) Severe in
Punishment
(Shadeed ul-
Mihaal) |
| 111) Quick in
Reckoning | 124) Thing |
| 112) The Perfect
(Al-Subbuh) | 125) The Eternally
Besought of All |
| 113) The Enraged | 126) The Patient |
| 114) The Master | 127) The Truthful |
| 115) The Perfect
(Al-Saleem) | 128) The One Who
Causes Harm |
| 116) The Sixth of Five | 129) The Good |
| 117) The Appreciative | 130) The Healer |
| 118) The Rewarding | 131) The Pure |
| 119) The Witness | 132) The Evident |
| 120) The Intercessor | 133) The Mighty |
| 121) The One Who
Cures | 134) The Knower |
| 122) Severe in
Punishment
(Shadeed ul-Iqaab) | 135) The Aware |
| | 136) The All-Knower |
| | 137) The High |

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| 138) The Immense | 152) Cleaver of the Dawn |
| 139) Justice | 153) The Doer of Whatever He Wills |
| 140) The Just | 154) The Doer |
| 141) The One Who Pardons | 155) The Tempter |
| 142) The Enemy of the Disbelievers | 156) The Unique |
| 143) The Source | 157) The Opener |
| 144) The Forgiving | 158) The Judge |
| 145) The Oft-Forgiving | 159) The Existent (Al-Qa'im) |
| 146) The Forgiver of Sin | 160) The Existent (Al-Mawjud) |
| 147) The Most Forgiving | 161) The Existent (Al-Kaa'in) |
| 148) The Triumphant | 162) The Custodian |
| 149) The Self-Sufficient | 163) The Provider (Al-Qayyaam) |
| 150) The Jealous | 164) The Subduer |
| 151) The Splitter of the Seed and Fruit Stone | 165) The Irresistible |

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| <p>166) The Holy</p> <p>167) The Near</p> <p>168) The Sustainer</p> <p>169) The Able</p> <p>170) The Potent</p> <p>171) The One
Who Accepts
Repentance</p> <p>172) The Judge</p> <p>173) The All-Powerful</p> <p>174) The Established
(Al-Qadeem)</p> <p>175) The Distributor</p> <p>176) The Destroyer</p> <p>177) The Constrictor</p> <p>178) The Great</p> <p>179) The One Whose
Help is Sought
(Al-Mustaghath)</p> | <p>180) The One Whose
Aid is Sought
(Al-Musta'an)</p> <p>181) The Generous</p> <p>182) The Guarantor</p> <p>183) The Sufficient</p> <p>184) The Writer</p> <p>185) The Remover of
Harm</p> <p>186) The Subtle</p> <p>187) The Owner</p> <p>188) The King</p> <p>189) The One with
Whom Refuge is
Sought</p> <p>190) The One Whose
Protection
is Sought</p> <p>191) The Sovereign
Lord</p> |
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- 192) The Guardian
(Al-Mu'min)
- 193) The Guardian
(Al-Muhaymin)
- 194) The Sanctuary
- 195) The Proud
- 196) The Fashioner
- 197) The All-
Encompassing
- 198) The Protecting
Friend
- 199) The Responsive
- 200) The Overseer
- 201) The Glorious
- 202) The Effacer
- 203) The Clear
- 204) The Omnipotent
- 205) The One Who
Gives Life
- 206) The Stabilizer
- 207) The One Who
Causes Death
- 208) The Most High
- 209) The Appraiser
- 210) The One Who
Listens
- 211) The Giver
- 212) The Supporter
- 213) The Helper (Al-
Mareeth)
- 214) The Helper (Al-
Nasir)
- 215) The One to Whom
Repentance is
Made
- 216) The Regulator
- 217) The Bestower of
Favor
- 218) The Bestower of
Bounty

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| 219) | The Defender | 233) | The Honorer |
| 220) | The Radiant | 234) | The Abaser |
| 221) | The Benefactor | 235) | The Granter of
Success |
| 222) | The Enricher | 236) | The Producer |
| 223) | The One Who
Spreads | 237) | The Reproducer |
| 224) | The Price Setter | 238) | The Illustrious |
| 225) | The Glorified | 239) | The Advancer |
| 226) | The Charitable
(Al-Muhsin) | 240) | The Expediter |
| 227) | The Charitable
(Al-Mahasin) | 241) | The Retarder |
| 228) | The Speaker | 242) | The Equitable |
| 229) | The One Who
Dictates | 243) | The Endower |
| 230) | The Maintainer | 244) | The Withholder |
| 231) | The Increaser | 245) | The Revered |
| 232) | The One Who
Brings into
Existence | 246) | The Enabler |
| | | 247) | The Strong |
| | | 248) | The Warner |
| | | 249) | The Sender |
| | | 250) | The Expander |
| | | 251) | The Feared |

- 252) The Desirer
- 253) The Loving
(Al-Muhibb)
- 254) The Loving
(Al-Wadood)
- 255) The One Who
Hates
- 256) The One Who
Tests with Trials
- 257) The One Who
Causes Decay
- 258) The Dreaded
- 259) The Examiner
- 260) The Rewarded
(Al-Mutheeb)
- 261) The Creator
(Al-Munshi)
- 262) The One Who
Responds
- 263) The One Who
Takes Revenge
- 264) The Nourisher
- 265) The Refuge
(Al-Manjaa)
- 266) The Refuge
(Al-Muljaa')
- 267) The One Who
Gives to Drink
- 268) The Remembered
- 269) The Worshipped
One
- 270) The One Who
Perfects His Light
- 271) The Turner of
Hearts
- 272) The Humiliator of
the Disbelievers
- 273) The One Who
Brings the Living
from the Dead

- 274) The One Who Brings the Dead from the Living
- 275) The Savior
- 276) The One Who Grants Victory
- 277) The Light
- 278) The Self (Al-Nafs)
- 279) The Guide
- 280) The Vast
- 281) The Trustee
- 282) The Inheritor
- 283) The Protector (Al-Walee)
- 284) The Protector (Al-Waqee)
- 285) The One
- 286) The Whole (Al-Wajid)
- 287) The Governor
- 288) The Reliable
- 289) The Single

Appendix B

Qur'anic References on Stories of Prophets of God

Prophet Adam

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (2:30-39)

Prophet Noah

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (11:25-49)

Prophet Abraham

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (29:16-27)
- (21:51-70)
- (37:99-113)
- (2:124:129)

Prophet Lot

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (11:69-83)

Prophet Shu'ayb

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (11:84-95)

Prophet Joseph

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (12:1-101)

Prophet Jonah

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (37:139-148)

Prophet Moses

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (28:3-44)
- (7:103-156)

Prophet Solomon

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (27:15-44)

Prophet Jesus

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

- (19:16-36)
- (3:48-54)