

## Lesson 10: The Conditions for an Ideal Object of Worship

The Lord of the World, as presented in the Qur'an, possesses all the necessary conditions of an ideal object of worship. He is the creator of love and all forms of beauty, the originator of all forms of power and energy. He is a vast ocean on the slightest ripple of whose surface the swimmer of the intellect is tossed around like a plaything.

It is He Who preserves the heavens from falling and the earth from collapsing. If, for an instant, He closes His eye of mercy or avert, it from this world, the whole of the universe will perish and hurtle toward non being in the form of dust. The existence and survival of every atom in the universe is, therefore, dependent on Him.

It is He Who bestows all bounties and all felicities, Who owns us and may freely dispose of us. When He commands and an order goes forth, as soon as He says, "*Be!*," a creature comes into being.

Truth and reality derive their substance from His essence, and freedom, justice, and other virtues and perfections derive from the rays of His attributes. To take flight towards Him, seek to draw near to His glorious threshold, is to attain all conceivable desire at the highest degree. Who ever gives his heart to God, gains an affectionate companion and a loving friend; the one who relies upon Him has placed his hope on a firm foundation, while the one who attaches his heart to other-than God is a prey to illusion and builds a foundation on wind.

He Who is aware of the slightest motion that takes place any-where in creation can also determine for us a path leading to happiness and lay down a way of life and a system of human relations that conforms to the norms He has established in the order of creation. He is, after all, aware of our true interests, and it is even His right alone to lay down a path for us as the logical outcome and natural consequence of His divinity. To act in accordance with the program He lays down is the only certain guarantee for our ascent toward Him.

How is it possible that man should be so enamored of truth and justice that he is ready to sacrifice his life for their sake, unless he is aware of their source and origin?

If a being is worthy of worship, it cannot be anyone other than the Creator Who is the axis of all being. No thing and no person has such a rank as to deserve the praise and service of man. All values other than God lack absoluteness and primacy and do not subsist in and of themselves; they are relative and serve only as a means for the attainment of degrees higher than themselves.

The primary qualities that elicit man's worship are being the bestower of all bounties and being aware of all the possibilities, needs, capacities and energies contained in man's body and soul. These qualities belong exclusively to God; all beings stand in need of and rely upon that being Who is existent by virtue of His own essence. The caravan of existence is constantly moving toward Him by means of His aid, and His commands descend unceasingly of every speck in the universe.

Absolute submission and worship belong, then, exclusively to His Most Sacred Essence. His glorious presence, uninterrupted by a single moment of absence, is felt at the heart of each atom of being. All things other than God resemble us in that impotence and deficiency prevail over them.

They are, therefore, unworthy of our submission and are not worthy of usurping sovereignty over any part of God's realm, which is the whole broad plain of existence. Man, too, is too noble and valuable a being to be subjected and humbled by anything other than God.

In the whole broad plain of being, it is God alone Who deserves man's praise. Man must grant to his love of God, to his efforts to draw near to Him and earn His pleasure, precedence over all other beings and objects of love. This will result in the ennobling of man and, the augmenting of his value, for man is but a small drop and if not united with the ocean, he will be swept away by the storm of corruption, dried up by the burning sun of chaos.

Man gains his true personality and becomes eternal when he attaches himself to that effulgent source, when God gives meaning to his world and becomes the interpreter of all the events of his life. It is in this sense that men's worlds may be either broad and expansive or narrow and constricting.

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, peace be upon him, says, in discussing the weaknesses of man and his limited capacities: "How strange and remarkable is the affair of man! If he becomes hopeful with regard to a certain desire, greed will render him abject; desire will lead to greed, and greed will destroy him. If he falls prey to hopelessness, grief and sorrow will kill him. If he attains happiness and good fortune, he will fail to preserve them. If he falls prey to terror and fear, they will reduce him to utter confusion."

If abundant safety is granted him, he will become negligent. If his blessings are restored to him, he will become arrogant and rebellious. If he is stricken with misfortune, sorrow and grief will disgrace him. If he acquires wealth, he will become overweening. If poverty lays hold of him, he will be plunged in misery. If

he is weakened by hunger, he will be unable to rise from the ground. If he eats to excess, the pressure of his stomach will discomfort him. So all deficiency in the life of man is harmful, and all excess leads to corruption and ruin."[1](#)

Generally speaking, justice, nobility, virtue and other qualities that earn respect and praise must either be illusionary and imaginary, or we must consider these values as real and necessary, based on the perceptions of conscience and instinct. In the latter case, we ought humbly to submit to that universal existence and absolute perfection which flows over with virtue, life and power, and from which all values derive.

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When we look into the matter carefully, we see that all the countless beings that exist in the world, as well as the love and aspirations that are rooted in the depths of our being, all converge at one point, all revert to one source—God. The very essence and reality of the world is identical with its connection, relation and attachment to God.

Being re-ascends by a different route to the point where it began and from which it descended, and that point alone is worthy of man's love and devotion. Once man discovers this point, he becomes so enamored of its absolute beauty and perfection that he forgets all else.

We see that all phenomena have emerged from non-being into a state of being, and that throughout the period of their existence, whether short or long, they are dependent on a source external to themselves for aid and sustenance; they are marked indelibly with subordination and lack of autonomy.

If the ideal object of worship we seek and toward which we are attempting to advance were unaware of the pains we suffer and the nature of the world; if it were unable to satisfy our desires and longings, being replete with impotence and deficiency just like ourselves and belonging to the same category as us, it could not possibly be our final aim and ultimate object or possess absolute value.

When we seek the fulfillment of a wish by means of our worship, it is God alone Who can respond by meeting our needs. The Qur'an says:

**"Those whom you call upon other than God are servants like yourselves (i.e., they have no power of themselves)." (7: 194)**

The Commander of the Faithful, upon whom be peace, while supplicating his Lord in the mosque of Kufa, said:

O my Master, O my Master! You are God the Great and I am your wretched and insignificant slave. Who can show mercy to His insignificant slave but God the Great? O Master of mine, O Master of mine! You are strong and powerful, I am weak and impotent; other than one strong and powerful, who can show mercy to the weak?

O Master of mine, O Master of mine! You it is Who bestows generosity on the beggar, and I stand as a beggar at your threshold. Who will show mercy to the beggar other than the generous and the munificent one?

O Master of mine, O master of mine! You are eternal existence and I am a creature destined to perish. Who will have mercy on one destined to perish other than the eternal, everlasting essence?

O Master of mine, O Master of mine! You are the guide Who points out the way, and I am lost and bewildered. Who will take pity on the lost and bewildered if not the guide Who points out the way?

O Master of mine, O Master of mine! Have mercy upon me by Your infinite mercy; accept and be satisfied with me in Your generosity, favor and kindness, O God, possessor of generosity, favor and kindness, and in Your all-embracing mercy, O most merciful of the merciful!"[2](#)

Thus, to show reverence to other-than God, to orient oneself to other than His pure essence, is in no way justifiable; apart from God, nothing can have the slightest effect on our true destiny. If an object of worship deserves man's devotion and love and is capable of lifting him to the peaks of felicity, that object of worship must be free of all deficiency and inadequacy.

Its eternal rays must touch all creatures with sustenance and life, and its beauty must cause every possessor of insight to kneel down in front of it. Possessing infinite power, it quenches the burning thirst of our spirits, and gaining knowledge of it, is nothing other than attaining the ultimate source of our true nature.

If we choose an object of love and worship other than God, it may have certain capacities and be able to fulfill our desires up to a point, but once we reach that point, it will no longer be an object of love and worship for us. It will no longer be able to arouse and attract us; it will, on the contrary, cause us to stagnate.

For not only will it not satisfy our instinctive desire to worship, it will prevent us from reflecting on any higher value and imprison us in a narrow circle, in such a way that we no longer have any motive to advance or ascend.

If the object we choose to worship and love be inferior to us, it can never cause us to ascend and refine our beings. Our inclination to it will, on the contrary, drag us down to decline, and we will, then, be like the needle of a compass which is diverted from the pole under the influence of a completely alien magnetic field. The result will be total loss of direction; eternal misery will become man's inevitable destiny.

## **Worship, Man's Loftiest of Expression of Gratitude**

An object of worship can give direction to man's motion and light up his darkness with its brightness

when it is able to give him ideals, is endowed with a positive and elevated existence, is the cause of effects, and is the very essence of stability and permanence. Then, the object of worship produces inner effects in man and guides him in his thought and his actions. It facilitates for the essence of man, that part of him nurtured by the divine wisdom, its search for perfection.

Any effort or motion on the part of man to choose a false direction for himself, to take the wrong path in life, will result in his alienation from himself, his loss of all content, and the distortion of his personality.

Man cannot possibly come to know himself correctly if he has separated himself from his Creator. To forget God means to forget oneself, to be oblivious to the universal purposes of human life and the world that surrounds one, and to be unable to reflect on any form of higher values.

Just as attachment to other-than-God alienates man from himself and transforms him into a kind of moving biological machine, so, too, does reliance on God and supplication at His threshold draw mono-dimensional man, lacking all spiritual life, up from the oceanic depths of neglect, revive him and restore him to himself.

Through worshipping God, the spiritual capacities and celestial forces in man are nourished. Man comes to understand the lowliness of his worthless material, hopes and desires and to see the deficiencies and weaknesses without his own being. In short, he comes to see himself as he is.

To be aware of God and take flight toward the invisible source of all being illuminates and vivifies the heart. It is utterly pleasurable, a pleasure that cannot be compared to the pleasures of the three dimensional material world. It is through orienting oneself to that abstract, non material reality that thoughts become lofty and values transformed.

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, peace be upon him, discusses the wonderful effect of awareness of God on men's hearts as follows: "The Almighty Creator has made awareness of Him the means for purifying the heart. It is through the awareness of God that deaf hearts begin to hear, blind hearts begin to see, and rebellious hearts become soft and tractable."<sup>3</sup>

He says, too: "O Lord! You are, the best companion for those who love You and the best source of remedy for all who place reliance upon You. You observe them in their inner states and outer doings and are aware of the depths of their hearts. You know the extent of their insight and knowledge, and their secrets are manifest to You. Their hearts tremble in separation from You, and if solitude causes them fear and unease, the awareness of You comforts them, and if hardship and difficulty assail them, You alone are their refuge."<sup>4</sup>

Imam Sajjad, upon whom be peace, that paragon of purity and justice who had an unbreakable bond with his Lord, demonstrates to us in his supplicatory prayers the highest expression of love.

This was a sacred love that had inflamed all of his being, and although his spirit was sorely pressed by

the mortal sorrow of separation, the powerful wing of love enabled him to soar up into the limitless heavens. With indescribable sincerity and humility, he thus prayed at the threshold of God, the Eternal: "O Lord! I have migrated to Your forgiveness and set out to Your mercy. I ardently desire Your pardon and rely on Your generosity, for there is naught in my conduct to make me worthy of forgiveness, and Your kindness is my only hope. "

"O God, send me forth on the best path and grant that I die as a believer in Your religion and be resurrected as a believer in Your religion. "

"O Lord Whom I worship! O You whose aid the sinners supplicate through Your mercy! O you in the remembrance of Whose generosity the wretched seek refuge! O You in fear of whom the wrongdoers bitterly weep!"

"O source of tranquility for the heart of those banished in fear from their homes! O consoler of those who sorrow with broken hearts! O succorer of the lonely, helper of the rejected and needy! I am that servant who responded obediently when You commanded men to call on you. "

"O Lord! Here I am prostrate in the dust at Your threshold. O God, if You show mercy to whomever calls upon You in supplication, then let me be earnest in my supplications, or if You forgive whomever weeps in Your presence, then let me hasten to weep. "

"O God, do not make hopeless the one who finds no giver but You; do not thrust me away with the hand of rejection now that I stand here at Your threshold."[5](#)

Anyone who wishes to understand the profound meaning of supplication must realize that rational explanation and logical deduction are incapable of yielding a deep understanding of questions touching on spiritual illumination.

The Noble Qur'an describes the conduct and way of life of the unbelievers and materialists as follows:

***"The deeds of those who are unbelievers are like a mirage in a flat and waterless desert. A thirsty man will imagine them to be water and hasten toward them, but when he reaches them, he will find no water. "(24:39)***

***God and His Messengers summon mankind to the truth; other than God, all claims are baseless and vain, for they are unable to meet any of man's needs. One who relies upon them will be like the one who dipped his hand in a well to drink from it but found his hand could not reach the water. The unbelievers summon men only to misguidance. (13:14)***

***The dwelling of those who choose other than God as friends and protectors is like the dwelling of the spider; were the spider to know, the weakest of dwellings is his. (29:41)***

***The deeds of those who disbelieve in God are like ashes that are swept away by a strong wind;***

***they have no benefit from all their strivings. This is the path of misguidance, utterly distinct from the path of salvation. (14:18)***

The loftiest expression of thankfulness that man can make at the threshold of his true object of worship is supplication, the profession of love for His absolute perfection and devotion to it. This he does in harmony with all of creation, because all beings praise and glorify God.

The Qur'an says:

***"The seven heavens and the earth and all they contain praise God. There is no creature not engaged in the praise and magnification of its Lord, but you do not understand their praise. God Almighty is forbearing and most forgiving." (17:44)***

This worship and praise naturally do not bring God the slightest benefit, for He possesses all perfections to an infinite degree and neither the world nor man can add anything to Him or take anything away from Him. Is it at all conceivable that He would create man in order to benefit from his worship and praise?

On the contrary, it is man who, by gaining knowledge of the supreme being and worshipping Him in His sublimity, reaches his ultimate aim and true perfection.

Professor Ravaillet, celebrated philosopher and physicist, has the following to say about consciousness in the universe: "The new cosmology says that atoms and molecules know what they are doing; in the normal sense of the word, they have awareness of the tasks they perform and of the course of their lives. This consciousness of theirs is superior to the knowledge of the physicist, because all the physicist knows of an atom is that if it were not tangible and recognizable, no one would know anything about it."

"Bodies, motion, speed, the concepts of here and there, radiation, equilibrium, space, atmosphere, distance, together with many other things, all came into existence thanks to the atom. If the atom were not to exist, what would be the origin of all the remarkable phenomena of creation? There exists the same affinity between consciousness and body as there does between motion and motionlessness, or the positive and negative aspects of motion."

"Now, space, taken as a whole, is not blind. We demonstrated, if you remember, when examining the field of vision, that the eye is not the basic and determining factor. Since it is fixed at a given point on the globe, according to the limited circumstances of the human species and other terrestrial beings, it has a certain narrow physical field within which it operates.

But as for the space between the earth and the sun, between the sun and the galaxies, and between the galaxies and remote gigantic planets, where huge forces with tremendous range are engaged in exchanging energy, there an organ such as the eye of terrestrial creatures has no opportunity to show itself or demonstrate its effectiveness."

"But precisely for this reason we cannot believe that lack of consciousness and awareness prevail in that

field for the exchange of vast energies and forces ruled by the laws of attraction, equilibrium, motion, light and centrifugal force. Blindness does not exist in these wondrous phenomena, and even particles of light cannot be regarded as something akin to an illiterate mailman whose only job is to deliver messages he cannot read.<sup>6</sup>

- [1.](#) Shaykh al-Mufid, Irshad, p. 142.
  - [2.](#) Mafatih al-Jinan., p. 400.
  - [3.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 220.
  - [4.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 225.
  - [5.](#) Sahifa as-Sajjadiyah, pp. 163–198.
  - [6.](#) Dau Hazar Danishmand dar Justuju-yi Khuda-yi Buzurg, pp. 61 and 99.
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