

Lesson 10: The Divine Unity in Lordship

Rubḥbiyyah or Lordship is one of the Attributes of Perfection of God. *Rubḥbiyyah* is derived from the word *rabb* and lexicographically an infinite (*maḥdar*) which means *tarbiyyah* (nurture) but it is most frequently used in the sense of the doer of action (*ism fʿil*) meaning ‘nurturer’. This word, in the latter sense, is exclusively and absolutely applied to God, but it is also applied sometimes to other than God, as in the words *rabb al-dār* (head of the house), *rabb al-firdaws* (doyen of the paradise), etc. [1](#)

The word *tadbīr* (management) in the sense of *rubḥbiyyah* (lordship) has been used a lot in Qur’anic verses and traditions (*aḥādīth*). *Tadbīr* means to put a thing next to another thing in a particular order and arrangement in such a way that the intended purpose of each of them could be attained.

For example, managing (*tadbīr*) home affairs is to put each thing in its suitable place so that it could be used in the most appropriate manner without wasting anything. Managing the affairs of the universe means to create a particular order among the creatures in such a way that every creature could attain its desired perfection.

This kind of management is a specific management which pertains to every phenomenon but the general management in relation to the entire universe is to let such an order govern the universe so that the world of creation could reach its ultimate goal which is the return to God and the emergence of the hereafter. [2](#)

Cosmic and Legislative Lordship

What has been discussed so far pertains to the cosmic (*takwīnī*) Lordship and management of the universe, but with respect to some creatures, legislative (*tashrīʿī*) lordship and management are also raised, and this pertains to the creatures which, in addition to the instinctive guidance, also possess rational guidance.

For this reason, they have also rational responsibility but since their reason is not that perfect and that capable in every aspect, they are also in need of legislative guidance which has been provided by the prophets of God (‘a) and the heavenly religion. This subject constitutes the foundation of prophethood

(*nubuwwah*) and heavenly codes of law. Therefore, one of the manifestations of Lordship is the legislative one.

Lordship in This World and the Hereafter

The scope of Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) is not limited to this world as it also extends to the Hereafter, and the issues such as forgiveness and expiation of sins, permission to intercede (*shafā'ah*) and granting it and others related to the Hereafter are also among the myriad manifestations of Lordship.

Hence, Lordship or Management (*tadbīr*) has numerous manifestations and expressions, some of which are related to this world while others pertain to the next world. Some concern the cosmic realm while others are relevant to the legislative domain, and the concomitance of the principle of the Divine Unity in Lordship is that all these manifestations and expressions [of Lordship] emanate from Him and Him alone. Of course, this exclusivity is related to the Independent and Essential Lordship and not to lordship *per se*, for the Holy Qur'an has also acknowledged indirect lordships emanating from God and affirmed the causes and intermediaries in the management of the universe. It has even sworn by the managers of the affairs of the universe:

﴿فَالْمُدِيرَاتِ أُمْرًا﴾

“By those who direct the affairs [of creatures]!”³

The Proofs of the Divine Unity in Lordship

1. The concomitance between management (*tadbīr*) and creation (*khalqiyyah*)

In terms of meaning and implication, management and creation are two different things, just as in terms of applicability regarding the human artifacts they can also be distinguished from each other. That is, it is possible for a person to cause something to exist and for another person to manage it, but this state of affairs is impossible with respect to the creation and management of the universe, for management of all phenomena in the universe cannot persist and be sustained except through creation.

For instance, managing the plant is done in such a way that it is constantly provided with air, heat and other elements of subsistence and the process of life's growth continues. In reality, they are manifestations of the Divine creation which is reflected in the law of nature. As such, the Holy Qur'an has mentioned creation and management together. We shall mention here some examples of such verses:

﴿أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

“Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.”⁴

﴿ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى ﴾

“Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.”⁵

﴿ سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى * الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى * وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى ﴾

“Celebrate the Name of your Lord, the Most Exalted, who created and proportioned, who determined and guided.”⁶

2. Harmony and concordance in the creation and management

Harmony and concordance in the natural phenomena is something indisputable from the perspective of casual observations and scientific studies. On the other hand, the involvement of two independent entities in the creation and management of the universe necessitates chaos and disorder in the order of nature. In view of these two premises, it can be proved that the manager and controller of the universe is One. The following holy verse supports this argument:

﴿ لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا ﴾

“Had there been gods in them other than Allah, they would surely have fallen apart.”⁷

Hisham ibn al-Akham asked Imam al-Qadi (‘a) about the proof of the Oneness of God. The Imam (‘a) replied, thus:

إِتِّصَالُ التَّدْبِيرِ وَتَمَامُ الصُّنْعِ.

“The cohesion of the management and the harmony of creation [is the proof of the Oneness of God].”⁸

The Imam (‘a) then recited the holy verse quoted above.

Human Being’s Deviation Relative to the Divine Unity in Lordship

It can be inferred from a study of the history of religions that many deviations have been made relative to the Divine Unity (*tawhid*) in Lordship (*rububiyyah*) – be it cosmic or legislative Lordship. The Holy Qur’an which is the most reliable source in this regard has mentioned examples of polytheism in Lordship. Among them are the verses which give the account of Prophet Ibrahim’s (Abraham) (‘a) debate with the polytheists of his time. It can be deduced from the said verses that they believed in the

lordship of the sun and the moon.[9](#)

Prophet Yūsuf (Joseph) (‘a) is also quoted in the Qur’an, addressing his two companions in prison, thus:

﴿ يَا صَاحِبِي السِّجْنِ أَرَبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ ﴾

“O my prison mates! Are different masters better, or Allah, the One, the All-paramount?”[10](#)

And Pharaoh is also quoted to have said, thus:

﴿ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى ﴾

“I am your exalted lord!”[11](#)

It also says about the polytheists during the time of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ):

﴿ وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِهَةً لِيَكُونُوا لَهُمْ عِزًّا ﴾

“They have taken gods besides Allah that they may be a [source of] might to them.”[12](#)

Based on historical accounts, the polytheists used to regard their idols as different manifestations of the natural forces, worshipping them in a bid to benefit from these forces or to be immune from the threat and danger they brought. For instance, *Ba’l* was supposed to be the embodiment of soul, fountains and underground water sources. Worship of the *jinn* was also prevalent among them and they usually took refuge in the goddess of the *jinn* in horrifying deserts.[13](#)

The same point can also be deduced from an account of the beginning of idol-worship in the Arabian Peninsula, for in one of his travels to Sham,[14](#) ‘Amr ibn Laḥm observed that the people there used to worship idols. He asked them about their motive in worshipping idols. They told him that they were doing so with the aim of seeking the idols’ help in solving their problems. ‘Amr was convinced of their practice and brought idols with him upon his return to Makkah. He then named one of these idols as *Hubal* and put it on top of the *Ka’bah* and called upon the people to worship it.[15](#)

It is worth mentioning that it is pointed out in some verses of the Qur’an that the polytheists during the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) only believed in God’s Lordship and Management of the universe,[16](#) but in view of the earlier quoted verses and historical evidences, it must be said that the management of the entire universe and the important and basic issues of Lordship was considered exclusive to God. On issues, however, like victory, success and warding off undesirable things related to the individual and social life, they only believed in the lordship of gods and goddesses, and thus, they were polytheists.[17](#)

The Divine Unity in Legislation

One of the manifestations and expressions of the Divine Unity in Lordship is Oneness in legislation and law-making. The Holy Qur'an says:

﴿إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ﴾

“Sovereignty belongs only to Allah. He has commanded you to worship none except Him.”¹⁸

Since legislation and determining the duties of individuals is a kind of guardianship (*wilāyah*) on them and interference in their affairs and that the guardianship and involvement in the affairs of the universe (including the human beings and others) is exclusive to God on the basis of the Divine Unity in Lordship, no one except Him has the right of legislation and determining the rights and duties of others. On the other hand, what shall be enacted as laws in the legislative houses are actually declarations of the practical and executive ways of realizing the Divine laws and decrees.

For this reason, these laws must be harmonious with the Islamic laws and decrees without any conflict with them; otherwise, they shall be devoid of legitimacy.

The Divine Unity in Sovereignty

The right of sovereignty is primarily and essentially exclusive to God, for sovereignty is a kind of guardianship and management which is peculiar to God alone. On the other hand, governance is one of the social needs of the human being and its realization depends on his sovereignty and domination.

The outcome of these two principles is that some individuals are granted the right of sovereignty by God so as to assume the leadership in society and exercise the right of sovereignty by observing the rational and legislative principles and rules. There is no dispute that the prophets of God (‘a), in general, and the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), in particular, have enjoyed such a station.

From the Shā‘ah point of view, after the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) this station has been entrusted to his infallible successors, viz. the Imāms from the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), just as it was during the Period of Occultation (*ghaybah*), the just, pious and competent jurists (*fuqahā*) also have such a right. In other words, the system of government in Islam is founded on the concept of guardianship (*wilāyah*) and the guardianship of the prophets, the Imāms and the jurists is a manifestation and expression of it.¹⁹

We will deal again with this issue in the discussions on Imamate.

The Divine Unity in Obedience

The right to earn obedience (*i‘ā‘ah*) is primarily and essentially exclusive to God, for He is the Creator

and Master of the universe and the human beings. For this reason, obedience to God – so is servitude (*'ibādah*) to Him – is necessary for all beings. Meanwhile, God's bestowal of the right of sovereignty and leadership on specific individuals (the prophets and the like) necessitates that obedience to them is also essential for others; otherwise, their guardianship and leadership shall be void and useless in practice.

The way of reconciling the two is to argue that obedience to other than God *per se* is not obligatory on anyone, but obedience to those who are granted guardianship by God on the human beings is obligatory on others by the decree and commandment of God, as it is thus said:

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

“O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you.”²⁰

And it is also stated, thus:

﴿ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا لِيُطَاعَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ﴾

“We did not send any apostle but to be obeyed by Allah's leave.”²¹

It is worth mentioning that the manifestations and expressions of the Divine Unity in Lordship and Management are not limited to the abovementioned cases, and they are only mentioned because of their particular importance in the social life of the human beings.

Review Questions

1. State the meanings and types of lordship (*rubābiyyah*).
2. Is the Lordship of God limited only to this world? Explain why.
3. State the proofs of the Divine Unity in Lordship while taking into account the verses of the Holy Qur'an.
4. By taking into account the verses of the Holy Qur'an, explain human beings' deviation relative to the Divine Unity in Lordship.
5. Explain the Divine Unity in legislation.
6. Explain the Divine Unity in sovereignty.
7. Explain the Divine Unity in obedience while keeping in view of the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

- [1.](#) Riq̣hib al-If̣faḥṇ, Al-Mufraḍṭ, under the word rabb.
- [2.](#) Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ḥabībī, Al-Maḥẓ̣ṇ fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, vol. 11, pp. 289–290.
- [3.](#) Sūrat al-Naẓīʿṭ 79:5.
- [4.](#) Sūrat al-Aʿraf̣ 7:51.
- [5.](#) Sūrat al-Ḥāq̣q̣ 20:50.
- [6.](#) Sūrat al-Aʿlā 87:1–3.
- [7.](#) Sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ 21:22.
- [8.](#) Shaykh al-Ḥadīq, Al-Tawḥīd, section (bāb) 36, Ḥadīths 1–2.
- [9.](#) Sūrat al-Anʿām 6:76–78.
- [10.](#) Sūrat Yūsuf 12:39.
- [11.](#) Sūrat al-Naẓīʿṭ 79:24.
- [12.](#) Sūrat Maryam 19:81.
- [13.](#) Jihān dar ʿAḡr-e Biʿthah (The World during the Prophet’s Mission), p. 21.
- [14.](#) Shām: the land that included today’s Syria, Lebanon and parts of Jordan and Palestine up until five centuries ago.
[Trans.]
- [15.](#) Ibn Hishām, Al-Sūrat al-Nabawīyyah, vol. 1, p. 79.
- [16.](#) Sūrat Yūnus 10:31; Sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt 29:63; Sūrat al-Muʾminīn 23:86–89.
- [17.](#) Sayyid Muḥsin Amīn, Kashf al-Irtiyāb, p. 170.
- [18.](#) Sūrat Yūsuf 12:39.
- [19.](#) For further information, see the book Dīn wa Dawlat (Religion and Government) by the author.
- [20.](#) Sūrat al-Nisāʾ 4:59.
- [21.](#) Sūrat al-Nisāʾ 4:64.

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