

## Lesson 12: The Infinite Power of God

The infinite power of God has no clearer proof than that furnished by the study and examination of the phenomena of the created universe and the multiple forms and colorations of nature that can never be fully described.

When we look at God's creation we find ourselves confronted with so vast an energy that no limit can be imagined for it. A look at creation and the millions of truths secreted in the wonders of nature and the depths of man's own being provides the clearest indication of the scale of the power of the One Who has created it, for the rich and complex order of being admits of no other explanation.

It is God's incomparable power that compels man to bow humbly before the Creator of this great scheme. There is no word to express the dimensions of His power; that unique essence has much power that whenever He wills a thing to come into existence, it suffices for the command "**Be!**" to issue forth from Him and the object addressed will be. The Qur'an says:

***"When He wills a certain thing, He commands it 'Be!' and it is" (36:82)***

The law expounded in this verse is the best indicator of His limitless power and manifestation of His boundless power and splendor. It negates any limit that might be set on God's power and proclaims the inadequacy of all criteria and measures when confronted with this divine law.

The champions of the natural sciences, the men of the laboratory, despite all the advances they have achieved, have not yet gained complete knowledge of the inner secrets of a single one among the numerous and varied beings of the created universe. Nonetheless, the partial and defective knowledge that man has acquired concerning a few of the beings that exist in this world is enough for him to realize with all his being that the great power that has created such variety and abundance in the universe must be infinite.

Consider the range of His creation: tiny creatures and monstrous beasts with strange appearances both dwelling in the depths of the ocean; delicate and melodious birds with multicolored wings, the beauty of which skilled artists imitate as an adornment to their craft; stars that shine in the heavens and the sun

that rises and sets; the dawn and the moonlight; the planets, galaxies and nebula each of which sometimes contains at its heart millions of great shining stars giddy in their apparent infinitude.

Does not a creation such as this, awe inspiring in its splendor, indicate the infinite power of its Maker? Can one disregard the power of a Creator Who imparts such variety to life and made distinct, finite forms of it appear in all this vast range of phenomena?

Now, given the fact that all these captivating forms of creation ultimately arise from the atom, the question of being cannot be explained except by reference to a guiding and infinite power. It is He Who impels all things toward the assumption of life-giving form and possesses the power and intelligence to plan and design this vast and precise scheme.

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Large and small, difficult and easy, are properties pertaining to finite beings; in the infinite realm of God's essence and attributes, there is no question of great and little, much and few. Impotence and inability are caused by the finiteness of the energy at the disposal of an agent, by the existence of an obstacle on his path, or by the absence of means and instruments; they are inconceivable in the case of an infinite power.

The Qur'an says:

***"Nothing in the heavens or on earth can induce weakness or impotence in God; indeed, God is all-knowing and all-powerful." (35:44)***

Although God is capable of doing all things, He has created the world according to a precise and specific scheme in the framework of which a set role has been assigned to certain phenomena in the origination of others.

Those phenomena are completely and unquestioningly subordinate to His command while fulfilling that role and never rebelling against His orders in the slightest. The Qur'an says:

***"The sun, the moon and the stars are all at His command. Be aware that creation belongs only to God; it is His penetrating command that in its exalted purity creates the world and all it contains." (7:54)***

Strictly speaking, no creature in the scheme of the universe can be a manifestation of power or have any share in His will and command, for just as God has no partner in His essence, so, too, He has no partner in His agenthood. Just as all creatures in the world lack independence in their essence and are dependent on Him, they also lack it in producing acts and effects.

Every agent and cause derives the essence of its being from God and also its power to act and produce an effect. Whenever He wills and necessitates it, the order that encloses all beings abandons its role, for

that order is itself subordinate to His will, precious and firm though it may be.

The Creator Who has assigned a particular effect to every factor and cause is able to neutralize and suspend that effect at any instant. Just as one command brought the order of the universe into existence, another command robs phenomena of their customary effect. Thus, the Qur'an says:

***"They said, 'Burn Abraham and thus us render help unto your gods, if you are men of action.' We commanded the fire, 'be cool for Abraham and harm him not.' They sought a stratagem against him, but We made them the losers." (21:68-69)***

Although the powerful attraction exerted by the sun and the earth prevails over a vast space, both bodies are subordinate to His will. As soon as He gives a little bird the necessary power, the bird is able to resist the pull of the earth and take flight. The Qur'an says:

***"Do they not look at the birds in the heavens and see how the skies have been subjugated to them? It is God alone Who keeps them aloft, and in this there is an evident sign of God's power for the people of faith." (16:79)***

Whatever phenomenon may be imagined to exist in the world of being finds its needs for sustenance and life met by the Creator. Therefore, whatever power and capacity is found in the scheme of creation must necessarily go back to the infinite power of God.

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, peace be upon him, him, says in a sermon reproduced in the Nahj al Balaghah: "O God, we cannot penetrate the depths of Your splendor and majesty. We know only that You are living and self-subsistent, that You are exempt from eating and sleeping. No mind can perceive You and no eye can see You. But You see all eyes, You know the life span of all things, and You are all-powerful.

Although we have perceived nothing of Your creation, we are astounded by Your power and praise You mightily. That which is hidden from us and our eyes cannot see and our mind and intelligence cannot attain, which is concealed from us by veils of the unseen, is much greater than what we can see .."<sup>1</sup>

When man decides to build something, for example, a hospital, he assembles the necessary tools and pieces of equipment that do not have any essential relationship with each other, and, then, connects them with each other by means of a series of artificial relationships in order to reach his goal.

In order to create such artificial relationships, he makes use of different forces and object that he finds to be already existing. His work and activity are a part of the system of creation; they are not properly speaking creative activity, but only a form of motion that takes place within existing objects. Divine creation forms a quite different category from the production of artificial relationships between unrelated objects.

God originates things with all their properties, forces and energies and characteristics. When we say that

God is all-powerful, we must be aware that His power relates only to things that are possible. Things that are rationally impossible are entirely outside the sphere of His power, and to use the word "power" or "capacity" in connection with things that are impossible is incorrect and meaningless.

Although the power of God is, indeed, unlimited, the receptive capacity of things and their ability to serve as locus for the manifestation of divine power must be taken into consideration. The implementation of God's will is intertwined with the relations between cause and effect, with the complex network of reasons and causes.

In order for a thing to become the object of the divine will, it must not be impossible and must, in its essence, possess receptive capacity; divine will is accomplished by means of the receptivity of things. It is true that the divine effulgence is infinite and constantly overflowing, but the ground destined to receive it may be defective and unable to absorb the infinite share that superabundant source offers it.

The ocean is an immensely abundant source of water, but a tanker has only a limited capacity to take on its water; in fact, only a minute amount of that water can be loaded onto a tanker. Clearly enough, what is finite and limited in this case is the capacity of the tanker, not the water in the ocean.

Someone once asked 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, upon whom be peace, "Is your Lord able to fit the whole world into a hen's egg?" He answered: "God Almighty is, indeed, able to do anything, but what you ask is something impossible." So although God's sacred essence is utterly free of all impotence and inability, it is meaningless and irrational to ask whether God can do something inherently impossible."[2](#)

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One whose heart beats with the love of God and flows over with belief in the Creator of all being will never be discouraged lonely and hopeless even in the midst of the most complex difficulties. Whatever deed he undertakes he does so in the consciousness of being in the protective shade of a supreme power that can make him triumph over all difficulties.

A man who is aware of God and knows that he enjoys His support can resist and endure all kinds of hardship. Difficulties are for him like foam on swift vanishing foam on the face of the waters. The fire that burns within him becomes ever brighter and he emerges stronger than ever from the crucible of hardship.

Throughout the toils he endures, he is comforted and strengthened by God's kindness and favor, and it is this that forms the true motor of his activity. Failure does not block his path and cause him to surrender; instead, with sincere intention and diligent effort, he continues his strivings until final victory.

He understands well that his efforts cannot remain fruitless and that victory goes to the deserving. Whenever He wills, God takes the hand of the fallen and the oppressed who have no refuge other than Him and raises them up to the apex of power. Sometimes, too, He rubs in the dust of humiliation and

disaster the noses of the powerful and arrogant oppressors who believe only in violence and the logic of force and treat men as if they were worthless.

How many arrogant tyrants have been cast down by disaster in the course of human history, sinking and vanishing in a tempest of shame!

The story of God's messengers represents in itself a complete and ideal model of human values. We all know how the messengers stood alone against the oppressive forces of their day in order to guide men to salvation, reform their society, and inculcate lofty values in them. In doing so, they lit the first spark that ultimately destroyed polytheism

The response aroused by their beliefs caused such a positive tumult that they were able to change the face and direction of history. They laid the foundations of monotheistic worship and established the principles of virtue in the most comprehensive way. Who can deny the role played by their devotion and faith in the untiring struggle they waged? How far can will power alone take man, and how much can it enable him to endure and sacrifice?

A cursory review of the proud history of the Prophets' lives enables us all to behold, in the most vivid fashion possible, the sincerity and devotion they displayed, their mercy and forbearance, and their intense desire to guide and reform men. The fundamental secret of their success was the fact they never thought of themselves for a single instant; they sincerely renounced their own beings, making them a gift to God's cause. God then responded by bestowing immortality and everlasting fame on them.

1. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 159.

2. Bihar al-Anwar, IV, p. 143.

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