

Lesson 1: Why Should We Know God?

The question being posed in the context of the ideological discussions about God is this: why should we know God? What is the factor that prompts man to delve into the existence of God? What is the benefit of doing so? What is the harm of not paying attention to it? Two questions, therefore, must be examined here:

1. What is the factor or factors that prompt man to delve into the existence of God?
2. What is the benefit he may get in knowing God and having faith in Him?

In reply to the first question, Muslim theologians have given answers which we shall examine here.

1. The Need for Preventing Serious Losses

No intelligent person will ever doubt the necessity for preventing serious harms. The rule of “the necessity for preventing harm” is considered one of the most enduring principles in human life, and centuries of experience in human life affirm its endurance. Whenever the loss or harm is more serious, the said principle becomes more decisive and conspicuous. In this case, the probability of harm is already enough for man to think of ways to prevent loss.

On the other hand, throughout history, there had been outstanding personalities called prophets and Divine leaders who have emerged, talked about the existence of God, the Divine laws and decrees, and rewards and punishments in the Hereafter, and called upon the people to believe in those doctrines and they themselves were sincerely devoted to the religion while faithfully abiding by their words. If ever from their words and actions there is no certainty about the existence of God, religion and Divine order, the probability of their existence becomes stronger.

It is evident that if such probability is correct, not paying attention to it means incurring extremely great and miserable loss. As such, reason dictates and instinct decrees that one must not be indifferent toward this probability but rather one must discuss and investigate it. On this basis, discussion and study about the existence of God and the heavenly religion becomes essential and definite. As a marginal note to

this reason, Muḥaqqiq Baḥrīnī writes:

إِنَّ دَفْعَ الضَّرَرِ الْمَظْنُونِ الَّذِي يُلْحَقُ بِسَبَبِ الْجَهْلِ بِمَعْرِفَةِ اللَّهِ وَاجِبٌ عَقْلًا، وَوُجُوبُ دَفْعِ ذَلِكَ الضَّرَرِ مُسْتَلْزِمٌ
لِوُجُوبِ الْمَعْرِفَةِ.

“To avoid probable harm as a result of not having knowledge of God is compulsory according to the dictate of reason, and the compulsoriness of avoiding this harm necessitates the compulsoriness of knowing God.”¹

2. The Need for Gratefulness to the Benefactor

According to reason, thanking one’s benefactor is a desirable and essential act, and refusing to do so is undesirable and abominable. On the other hand, man enjoys enormous bounties in his worldly life. Although the non-existence of the Bestower or Giver of these bounties is possible, His existence is also possible. The second possibility, therefore, must be taken seriously and one must discuss about the existence or non-existence of a Benefactor, so that if ever He exists, gratitude must be expressed to Him.

In this regard, Muḥaqqiq Baḥrīnī said:

إِنَّ الْعَاقِلَ إِذَا فَكَّرَ فِي خَلْقِهِ وَجَدَ آثَارَ النِّعْمَةِ عَلَيْهِ ظَاهِرَةً، وَقَدْ تَقَرَّرَ فِي عَقْلِهِ وَوُجُوبُ شُكْرِ الْمُنْعِمِ، فَيَجِبُ عَلَيْهِ
شُكْرُهُ، فَيَجِبُ إِذَنْ مَعْرِفَتُهُ.

“If a wise man reflects on His creation, he will find in himself signs of bounty, and the compulsoriness of thanking the Benefactor is consistent with the dictate of his reason and so he must thank the Benefactor. Therefore, knowing Him is obligatory.”²

3. Sense of Curiosity

Sense of curiosity is one of the powerful human senses. Searching and discussing about the cause [or causes] of events and phenomena are among the clear manifestations of this innate feeling. According to the dictate of this innate tendency, man asks about the causes and reasons for every happening he witnesses.

This innate feeling stimulates him to search for the cause or causes of the totality of happenings in the universe. Just as each of the natural or unnatural events and phenomena has a cause or causes, does the totality of the events and phenomena in the universe have also a metaphysical cause or causes? From this perspective, delving into the existence of a Creator of the universe is a response to an innate need and feeling, i.e. the nature of knowing the cause.

In this regard, ‘Allāmah ‘Abdullāh ‘Abdullāh said:

“If we do not regard the affirmation of this subject as innate in man (although it is), the essence of the discussion of the Creator of the universe is innate in man because he sees the universe as a whole, observing it as a single unit. And he wants to understand whether or not the cause which can be affirmed through his natural instinct about every phenomenon in the universe can also be affirmed about the universe as a whole.”³

The Benefits of Knowing God

In reply to the second question, it is worthwhile to note the following points:

Firstly, once the discussion is about rational and instinctive investigations, to ask about its benefit is not allowed because such a discussion is the benefit itself. The human being lives in a world whose beginning, end and origin he is not aware of. Naturally, he likes to know its beginning, end and origin. This knowledge in itself, apart from any other benefit it has, is desirable for him. It is not necessary for every scientific or theoretical issue to have definitely scientific benefit.

Secondly, belief and faith in God is one of the most useful and essential beliefs of the human being in life. From the individual perspective, belief and faith in God gives peace of mind and tranquility of the heart as well as nourishes moral virtues, and collectively, it guarantees the implementation of law and justice and the observance of the rights of one another.⁴

Knowledge of God as the Fountainhead of All Knowledge

At the conclusion of this lesson, we shall quote some sayings of the infallible Imāms (‘a) in which knowing God has been regarded as the fountainhead of all knowledge:

1. One day, a man came to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ), requesting for the most astonishing of knowledge (*gharīb al-‘ilm*). The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) asked him, “What do you think is the fountainhead of all knowledge (*ra’s al-‘ilm*) such that you are asking for the most astonishing of them?” The man replied, “What is the fountainhead of knowledge [by the way]?” The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said, “That is to know God as He deserves it.”⁵

2. Imām ‘Alī (‘a) said about the station of knowing God:

مَعْرِفَةُ اللَّهِ أَعْلَى الْمَعَارِفِ.

“Knowledge of Allah is the highest level of knowledge.”⁶

3. Imām al-Ḥadiq (‘a) said:

إِنَّ أَفْضَلَ الْفَرَائِضِ وَأَوْجِبَهَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ مَعْرِفَةُ الرَّبِّ وَالْإِقْرَارُ لَهُ بِالْعُبُودِيَّةِ.

“The most superior of all obligations and commandments is to know God and acknowledge Him through servitude [to Him].”

Review Questions

1. Write the first factor that prompts man to delve into the existence of God.
2. State the relationship between the need for being grateful to the Beneficent God and the obligation of knowing Him.
3. State the role of the human nature (*fiṭrah*) in knowing God.
4. Enumerate the benefits of knowing God.
5. Write the saying of the Prophet (ﷺ) about knowledge as the fountainhead of all knowledge.

¹ Ibn Maytham Baṣṣārī, Qawā'id al-Marām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām, p. 28.

² Ibid., p. 29.

³ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-ʿAbdī, Uṣūl-e Falsafeh wa Rawish-e Realism (The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism), vol. 5, p. 4.

⁴ Ibid., p. 8 (footnote).

⁵ Shaykh al-ʿAdīq, Al-Tawḥīd, section (bāb) 40, ʿadith 5.

⁶ Ghurar al-ʿIkām wa Durar al-Kalām, p. 81.

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