

Lesson 2: Experiment beyond the physical senses

Whenever we see a beautiful building of great splendour and design, we can easily understand that its architect, master builder and mason was each one an expert in his own craft, and we discover, from observing such a well-proportioned building, the knowledge and science of its builder.

Similarly, by looking at a car, an airplane, a computer or any other well-designed artifact, we are invariably guided to well-informed and knowledgeable inventors, discoverers and manufacturers, and we are made aware of their skill and learning. In none of these instances it is necessary to actually see the constructor of the building or other factor with our own eyes to testify to his existence. What is more, when observing all these things, it is not with any of our external senses that we perceive his knowledge and skill.

But, nevertheless, we believe in his science and knowledge. Why do we come up with such belief? Because that same orderliness which we perceived in the artifacts, forces us to recognize the knowledge of their constructors. And from this we reach to the conclusion that it, in no case, is necessary that something for whose existence we find enough evidence should be visible or tangible.

How many facts are there which are not perceptible to our external senses, but we through paying care and attention to the effects they produce become aware of their existence. For every wise man understands, without exercising too much attention, that there can be no effect without a cause, nothing orderly without wise and knowledgeable designer.

With a view to this fact we can divide the creatures in this world into two categories:

1. There are things, which are evident to one or more of the five senses. We observe visible things with the eyes, we hear sounds with the ears, and we become aware of pleasant and unpleasant smells, bitter and sweet tastes, hot and cold, rough and smooth by our nose, our tongue, and the skin of our body.
2. There are other things which are not perceived by any one of the five senses, but whose existence we

can deduce by considering their effects. These facts are not all of one kind, some are material and some are non-material (i.e., they are without material limits or properties). In the following a few of them are mentioned.

a. One example is electricity. We can never, merely by looking at two wires, one of which is electrified, determine which of them has an electric current. We can only discover the existence of this current from the effect of the electricity, e.g. a lamp being lit. Electricity is something, which exists although our eyes cannot, directly, see it.

b. Another example is gravitation. If you let go off the book, which you now have in your hand, it will fall to the ground, i.e. the ground will pull the book towards itself. This power is something, which we do not directly perceive through our senses. Gravitation is again one of those things which is not visible, but of whose existence we feel sure through observing the falling of bodies – which is its result.

c. One more example is magnetism. We place a magnet beside a piece of iron. Externally there is nothing except what we see, but when the iron is pulled towards the magnet we understand that in the space around the magnet the phenomenon of magnetism exists.

d. Invisible radiation is another case. If we shine white sunlight through a prism we see on the other side of the crystal six colors (the spectrum), which are: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. On this side of red and beyond violet no more colors are visible. However scientists have discovered that in the place where the eyes see no more light, further 'colors' exist which have heating and chemical properties. These 'lights' are called infrared and ultra-violet.

In the year 1800 AD. a physicist and astronomer called Herschel thought of the idea of researching into whether radiation existed beyond what the eye can see. He gradually altered the position of a thermometer placed on a screen on which the six-coloured spectrum (from red to violet) was projected, and exposed it to the various colours, measuring the heating effect of each of them. When he got beyond the red, he discovered that the thermometer indicated greater heat from this. He then became certain of the existence of invisible radiation – called infrared radiation – which produced more heat than visible light, and this same heat, which is a result of the radiation, convinced people of the existence of infrared radiation.

At the same time, another scientist called Wollaston placed a quantity of the chemical compound silver chloride beyond the violet end of the spectrum. Contrary to his expectation, he discovered that in the place where light did not reach the eye there was a factor, which caused the silver chloride to darken. Later still, scientists found out that the changing of the colour of the skin on exposure to sunlight was due to the chemical influence of this radiation.

It thus became certain that beyond violet light there was another radiation, which was invisible, and it was named ultra-violet.

e. One more example is inaudible sounds. There are many sounds, which we do not hear. These are called supersonic sounds, and we discover their existence by examining their effects; they are used in medicine and technology.

f. Intelligence is another case of such nature. All of us are aware of ourselves, i.e. we perceive that we exist, and we can also arrive at concepts in a gradual manner concerning matters outside ourselves which we explain by this kind of statement:

'I solved the most difficult mathematical problem.'

'I pondered a lot over such-and-such a theory until I came to the conclusion that it was correct.'

Also, man is aware of his own knowledge, i.e. he knows that he knows. Intelligence is not something visible or audible in the sense that man can see it with his eyes or hear it with his ears, but in fact, although it is intangible, everyone finds it in himself in addition to the powers of sight and hearing and the other external faculties. Other people cannot learn about my intelligence through the five senses. Instead they must deduce its existence from the effects it produces. For example, when a scientist is expounding on a problem, it becomes clear that he has understood it. Also, if we ask a scientist if he is familiar with mathematical problems or not, and he says that he is informed about them, we understand that he is aware of his own understanding and knowledge, i.e. he knows that he understands the problems of mathematics.^{[1](#)}

The Constructs of the Mind

People can construct in their own minds any form that they wish. For example they can build a tower similar to the Eiffel tower whose construction in the-external world required many years, a thousand sorts of different building materials and substances, and hundreds of workers: this can be built in the mind in an instant.

Maybe thousands of similar ones can be built, and it is possible to imagine in the mind things, which have no existence in the outside world at all. We may create a monster with many heads, hands and feet. It is clear that others cannot be informed directly of the creations of our minds, because they are not visible and audible, but they can discover their existence from their consequences or from our speech.

g. Consider love, hate and determination. Everyone has, on the one hand, a liking for some things and, on the other hand, an aversion to other things. Also, throughout his life he is in need of determination. For every task that he likes to do he determines to accomplish it and for every task that he does not like to do he leaves it on one side and determines not to do it.

No-one can understand directly the determinations of someone else and what he likes and what he does not like, unless from the effects and reactions to it, because love, hate and determination are not

visible, audible or tangible things which can be perceived through the external senses.

h. Consider life. A fine chicken, moving towards the water, falls into a pond, and, before we can rescue it, it dies. In the organization of the life of this animal at this very moment, what change has taken place, and between its present condition and one moment before when it had been alive, what difference is there that it no longer moves, plays or eats?

We must of necessity say that there is something, which exists, in the live chicken, which does not exist in the dead chicken. Life is not an object of the senses. We only perceive the effects of it, which are movement, feeding, etc., and from these effects we discover its existence.

The established scientific facts mentioned above make it thoroughly clear that over and above the beings, which we perceive with our sensory organs, there are also things which we do not directly perceive, but which we know about only because of the effects they produce.

Thus we draw the conclusion that it is not right for us to reject something, which we do not see only because it is not visible. Being invisible is different from not existing, and the way of discovering something is not confined to the eyes or other external senses. Reason can discover some of the things by means of the effects of those things, as we saw in the case of the existence of scientific facts that are known through their results, and which are not denied or doubted by any competent person.

This is not to say that God is similar to these facts. Because God is a truth higher than these, to which nothing is equal or comparable but it is to say that in the same way as we discover the existence of these things through their effects, we can discover the existence of God through His signs.

Thus those who observe only with their physical eyes, and deny the existence of God because they cannot see Him with these eyes, are blind as far as their eye of wisdom and contemplation is concerned. Since we know, by the dictates of wisdom, through the precise regulation of creation – which is one of the signs of God – that His existence can be discovered.

To these people perhaps the poet says, “Open thy heart's eye your soul to see, and what is invisible will be manifest to thee.”

In every creature there is the evidence of the existence of God.

A more precise point and a more important matter is that a study of the results of the Power of the Lord, in addition to that which guides us to His existence, demonstrates that since the entire world and all creatures are signs of Him, His sign is not confined to one special instance or locality. All and every phenomenon is one of His signs. He Himself is another reality to which none of the creatures of the world are equal or comparable. He is an unlimited being who possess all perfection and is free from all imperfections.

We therefore discover two things from the study of the signs of God:

1. The existence of the Creator of the universe, in which all things are His signs
2. That because His signs are without limit and are not specific to one time or place he is a Being unlimited and possessing every perfection, although we cannot perceive His reality.

Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah Khorasani, the servant of the eighth Imam (A.S.) said: A group of men were sitting with Imam Rida (A.S.) when one of those who denied the existence of God came in. The Imam (A.S.) said to him: 'If, as you say, there is no God, no Messenger, no Reckoning and no Book of records (which there surely is), will our prayer, fasting, zakat and faith be to our detriment?'

The man did not reply (i.e. his reply was no).

The Imam continued: 'But if, as we maintain, God exists, religion exists, the Resurrection and the Day of Retribution exist (and they surely do), are you destined to misfortune and win?' (It is clear that, by the dictates of reason, everyone, even on the basis of a mere possibility that beyond this world another world exists should act according to the commandments of religion so that misfortune and ruin do not overtake him.)

The man asked: 'The God in whom you believe, what is He like and where is He?'

The Imam said: "Your question is mistaken. God is not such as to be in a place; He created space. He is not such as to have quality. He created qualities. So He cannot be known in this way. God is not perceptible to any one of five senses and it is not possible to compare Him.

The man said: "If he is not perceptible to any one of the senses then He is nothing."

The Imam replied: 'Woe is you! (How small is your capacity for thinking). Since your senses are not able to perceive Him, you deny His Lordship. But we for the very same reason that we cannot perceive Him are certain that only He is our Lord and no one else. The man said, "Tell me when has God existed?"

The Imam said, 'You tell me when God has not been so that I can tell you when He has been, (i.e. God existed before time and He created time.)'.

He said, "What is the evidence for the existence of God?"

Imam Rida replied: 'When I reflect upon my body I realize that I cannot add anything to its length or width. Nor subtract from it. Similarly I cannot choose to be happy or unhappy. For example, I may try very hard to get better from an illness, but I do not succeed). From this evidence and also from noticing the regulation of the sun and the stars the heaven and the earth and the orderliness of the whole universe, I understand that my body and this world of creatures have a Creator and a Lord who is Knowing and able)'.[2](#)

The Main points:

- There are two kinds of beings.
- There is the kind that is perceivable by the physical senses.
- There is the kind of beings that are not perceivable by the physical senses.
- Allah is the Supreme Being and human physical sense does not have the ability to perceive Him.

Questions

1. What do we discover from the beauty of certain artifacts?
2. What would draw our attention to the designer and the engineer?
3. Is our understanding of these things by our external senses?
4. Why do we believe in the existence of the engineer and the designer?
5. How do we come up with two categories of objects of our perception?
6. Which objects fall under the second category?
7. How do we learn the objects 1–6 exists?
8. Where, how, and by whom was infrared radiation discovered?
9. Where, how, and by whom was ultra violet radiation discovered?
10. How do we learn about supersonic sounds?
11. How do we learn about our intelligence?
12. Can our imagination be perceived by the five senses?
13. What can we build in our minds?
14. Can our will and decision be perceived by the five senses?
15. Can love or hate be perceived by any of the five senses?
16. Can our senses perceive life? How?
17. What do the above scientific examples establish?
18. Why should we not reject the things the five senses do not sense?
19. In what do we learn about the existence of God?

20. What should we say to those who do not except the existence beyond the five senses?
21. What is the basic idea written about the sign of God?
22. Can establish other evidence of the existence of God besides those mentioned in the text?

- [1.](#) Understanding Light by Tanonbaum, Spillman.
- [2.](#) Usul al-kafi part one, pag. 78 (abridged version).

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