

Lesson 9: The Unity of God in Creation

To create or originate is one of the attributes of God. This attribute is necessitated by arguments to prove the existence of God, for the purport of those arguments is that God is the Origin and Cause of causes of all creatures. All beings, therefore, are His creation and construction. Now, the discussion is that God has no partner in the act of creation and there is no Creator of the universe other than Him.

Reason and the Divine Unity in Creation

Reason clearly testifies to the Oneness of the Creator and Originator of the universe, for as dictated by the arguments proving the existence of God – particularly the argument of possibility and necessity – all beings are contingents, effects and creatures of the Necessary Being (God) and as demanded by the arguments of the Essential Unity of God, the Necessary Being by essence is One, and thus, the Creator and Originator of the universe is no other than God.

The Qur'an and the Divine Unity in Creation

In many verses, the Holy Qur'an has emphasized the Oneness of God in creating the universe. For example, it has stated:

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ﴾

“Say, ‘Allah is the creator of all things, and He is the One, the All-paramount’.”^{[1](#)}

﴿اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ﴾

“Allah is creator of all things, and He watches over all things.”^{[2](#)}

﴿ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ﴾

“That is Allah, your Lord, the creator of all things, there is no god except Him.”³

﴿ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ ﴾

“Is there any creator other than Allah?”⁴

﴿ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى ﴾

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

Traditions and the Divine Unity in Creation

The traditions (*ahādīth*) also stipulate and emphasize the Divine Unity in creation. In this regard, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) has said [about the creation of ant]:

لَمْ يَشْرَكَهُ فِي فِطْرَتِهَا فَاطِرٌ، وَلَمْ يُعِنْهُ عَلَى خَلْقِهَا قَادِرٌ.

“No other originator took part with Him in its origination and no one having power assisted Him in its creation.”⁶

The Imām (‘a) has also said:

وَلَا شَرِيكَ أَعَانَهُ عَلَى ابْتِدَاعِ عَجَائِبِ الْأُمُورِ.

“And He is without any partner who might have assisted Him in creating wonderful things.”⁷

Similar points are also mentioned in many other traditions.

The Interpretation of the Divine Unity in Creation

Muslims schools of thought have consensus of opinion on the Divine Unity in creation, but in interpreting it three viewpoints have been put forth.

1. Imāmiyyah Theologians and Muslims Theosophers

According to them, what is meant by the exclusiveness of God in creating is that there is no essential and independent Creator or Originator except God, but they do not deny natural and supranatural causes and factors. In their view, the angels perform specific activities just as the human being is the

performer of his own activities, and natural causes have also their own particular effects but none of them is an essentially independent agent or cause.

This theory – apart from being concomitant with rational laws and affirmed by the senses and experience – can clearly be deduced from verses of the Qur'an, for in many verses the Qur'an has pointed out the contribution of supernatural causes in the emergence of some natural events as well as the human agency.

2. 'Ash'irah

According to them, the act of creation is directly or indirectly exclusive to God, and in the world of creation, there is no agent or cause except God and those regarded as natural causes or factors are called "God's practice" (*'adat Allah*).

That is, it has been God's precedent (*sunnat Allah*) that, for instance, there is heat following the existence of fire and following the rising of the sun, the horizon becomes bright. Yet, there is no real or cosmic relationship between the causes and the originators of existence. Even the human being is not the agent of his actions; the human actions are also part of the Action of God.

3. Mu'tazilah

They have acknowledged natural causes and factors but they do not regard the human being's voluntary actions as God's creation (*makhlūq*); they rather consider them as solely human actions. For this reason, they are called *mufawwi'ah*; that is, those who believe that the human being's actions have been delegated (*tafwīḍ*) to him.

Examination and Criticism

None of the last two theories is correct. Apart from being in conflict with rational (*'aql*) and textual (*naql*) proofs regarding the natural causes and factors as well as the human agency (*fī'iliyyah*), the first view necessitates human compulsion (*jabr*), and compulsion in actions are inconsistent with the concepts of duty, retribution and reward.

The theory of *mufawwi'ah* is also at loggerheads with the Divine Unity in creation and the universality of the Divine Power. The source of mistake of both groups is in supposing that the natural causes or human actions are within the level of God's agency and causality (*sababiyyah*).

This is so while such an interpretation of the natural and supernatural causes and factors is not correct. Their relationship with the agency and causality of God is a vertical one; that is, God is the Independent (*mustaqil*) and Essential (*bi 'dh-dhāt*) Agent while they are agents and causes that are dependent (*ghayr mustaqil*) and subordinated (*musakhkhar*) by God.

For this reason, in the Holy Qur'an an action may sometimes be attributed to God and at other times the

attribution is to natural and supernatural causes. For instance, it says regarding the following verse:

﴿اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا﴾

“God takes the souls at the time of their death.”⁸

It also says:

﴿قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

“Say, ‘You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you. Then you will be brought back to your Lord.’”⁹

And it thus says regarding the movement of clouds:

﴿أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ﴾

“Have you not regarded that Allah drives the clouds, then He omposes them?”¹⁰

And the Qur’an also says:

﴿اللَّهُ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَّاحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا﴾

“It is Allah who sends the winds. Then they raise a cloud.”¹¹

The Dualists and the Misgiving of Evils

In the history of religions and sects, there is mention about the dualists who believe in two creators, viz. the creator of good and the creator of evils. The creator of good is called *Yazdān* (Light) and the creator of evils *Ahrimān* (Darkness).

The source of this incorrect doctrine is their assumption that evils are part of the reality of existence and against good, and since God (*Yazdān*) is Pure Good, it is impossible for Him to be the origin of evils. For this reason, there must be another source and originator of evils.

In reply to them, the theosophers have argued that evil (*sharr*) is a matter of absence (*‘adam*) and its relation to good (*khayr*) is that of possession and non-possession, and not that of contradiction and contrast. Ignorance which is regarded as evil, for example, is not an existential matter; it is rather the absence of knowledge in something which is knowable; so is the case of poverty, illness, death and

other things considered evils.

This is also the case of evil in relation to undesirable natural happenings, fierce animals and biting creatures, for the existence of these things for themselves is not evil or undesirable; it is rather in comparison to other creatures that they are treated as harmful. For instance, the snake or scorpion is not evil or undesirable by itself; it is rather evil for the human beings and the like.

That is, its poison may lead to human illness or death and it is this illness or death which is evil, and death and illness have the nature of non-existence or absence. Illness means the absence of wellbeing while death means the absence of life. In the words of Mawlānā [Rāmī],¹²

زهرِ مار، آن مار را باشد حیات گرچه باشد آدمی را مر ممات

Snake-poison is life to the snake,

(But) it is death in relation to man. ¹³

It is evident that what is in need of the Creator or Originator is existence and not non-existence. Therefore, the world of creation is not in need of a creator other than God, and that which He creates is good and evils emanate from absences and non-existences, and they are not realities alongside the good.¹⁴

Reply to a Question

If evil has the nature of absence, how come that it becomes a source of suffering and trouble for the human being considering the fact that absence cannot be the origin of any effect?

The reply is that evil is the absence of possession and absolute absence; that is, the absence of a trait on something which it can ably and duly possess. For this reason, the human being suffers from lack of knowledge or sight but does not suffer from lacking a horn.¹⁵

The Divine Unity in Creation and the Problem of Ascribing Evils to God

The problem which is put forth here is that based on the principle of the Divine Unity in creation, it necessitates that undesirable things that happen to the human beings (and others) are attributed to God and this matter is in contradiction to the principle that God is free from undesirable acts. This problem leads to the Mu'tazilīs' belief in the notion of *tafwīḍ*,¹⁶ and on the Ash'arī's side, no acceptable way of solving this problem has also been presented.

In the school of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a), this problem has been solved by arguing that human actions can be studied from three perspectives:

1. From the perspective that these actions are part of the events and happenings of the world of creation, they are ascribed to God and no evil or wickedness finds its way into them, for reality or existence vis-à-vis absence or non-existence possesses the attribute of goodness and beauty. The Holy Qur'an thus says:

﴿الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ﴾

"[It is He] who perfected everything that He created." [17](#)

From the perspective of reality and existence, human actions are also a creation of God (and what is meant by 'good' here is cosmic (*takwīn*) and not moral goodness.)

2. From the perspective that they emanate from the human being's freewill and volition and are ascribed to him, they shall be described as morally good or bad. Honesty is good while lying is evil. Justice is desirable while injustice is undesirable.

This kind of good and evil stems from conformity or non-conformity of his actions to the rational laws and the religious commandments and prohibitions, and since the human willpower and resolution determines the said conformity or non-conformity, the said good and evil shall also be ascribed to the human being.

3. It is true that God has endowed the human being with the power and will to do good or bad, but on the other hand, through commandments and prohibitions, promises and threats, good tidings and warnings, He has encouraged him toward what is good and dissuaded him from what is evil. As such, it is more appropriate to ascribe the human being's good deeds to God and his wicked acts to himself.

Review Questions

1. What is the argument to prove the Oneness of God in creation?
2. Write down two Qur'anic verses and a tradition (*ḥadīth*) about the Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) in creation.
3. State the three theories presented about the Divine Unity in creation.
4. Write down the Ash'irah and Mu'tazilī theories about the Divine Unity in creation and state the proof of error of each of them.
5. Write down the problem of the dualists regarding evils along with the refutation to this notion.

6. State the problem and refutation to the non-existence of evil.

7. Write down the principle of Divine Unity in creation and the problem of ascribing evils to God along with a refutation to this notion.

1. Sūrat ar-Ra'd 13:16.

2. Sūrat al-Zumar 39:62.

3. Sūrat al-Ghāfir (or al-Mu'min) 40:62.

4. Sūrat Fāṭir (or al-Mal'ikah) 35:3.

5. Sūrat ʿAraf 20:50.

6. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 185.

7. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 91.

8. Sūrat al-Zumar 39:42.

9. Sūrat al-Sajdah 3:11.

10. Sūrat al-Nūr 24:43.

11. Sūrat al-Rūm 30:48.

12. Mawlāwī or Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–73): the greatest mystic poet in the Persian language and founder of the Mawlawiyyah order of dervishes ("The Whirling Dervishes"). He is famous for his lyrics and his didactic epic, Mathnawī-ye Ma'nawī (Spiritual Couplets). [Trans.]

13. Richard Nicholson (trans.), Mathnawī-ye Ma'nawī, Book Four, p. 13. [Trans.]

14. In this regard, ʿAkṣam Sabziwār has said:

الشرُّ أعدام فكم قد ضلَّ من يقول باليزدان، ثمَّ الأهرمن

Evil is non-existence, so how misguided they are

Who believe in Yazdān and Ahriman!

15. In this regard, ʿAkṣam Sabziwār has said:

وان عليك اعتاص تأثير العدم من سلب قرن منك من سلب النعم

If understanding the effect of 'absence' is difficult for you,

Distinguish your lack of a horn from the absence of favors.

16. Tafwīṭ: the belief that after creating all beings, God has left them to administer their own affairs and follow their own wills. In other words, it is the upholding of freewill [ikhtiyār] vis-à-vis predestination. [Trans.]

17. Sūrat al-Sajdah 32:7.

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