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Life

Scholars of divinities have agreed that life is one of His Attributes, and that “al-Hayy”, the Living, is one of His Names, the most Praised One. But applying this name to Him, Glory to Him, depends on how much one understands this “life”, and how it can be applied to the One Who brought forth existence.

We say that undoubtedly, every human being makes a distinction between the living existent and the non-living (dead) existent, realizing that life is the opposite of death. Yet, despite this general knowledge, nobody can realize the truth about life in living existents.

Life is the most obvious of conditions, yet it is the most difficult to comprehend, the most complex to define.

For this reason, scholars’ opinions about explaining its reality have differed, and they have gone sundry ways. Yet according to the opinion of sciences of nature, the following conditions are part of what they describe:

1. Attracting and Thrusting

2. Growing and Maturing

3. Reproducing and Multiplying

4. Acting and Reacting

This definition of life points out to life’s effects, it does not explain its reality. These are effects shared by living members. Despite all of this, we see the vast distance between plant life and human life. The living plant includes the above-stated four characteristics, but life in animals adds to them sense and feeling, and this additional perfection, which is represented in sensing and feeling, does not make animals a testimony that differs from life. Rather, it renders it a more perfecting testimony for it.

Also, there is a life that is higher and more honorable which is: In addition to the five characteristics, the

living being has the attribute of the sense of knowledge, reason and logic.[1] Thereupon, the four characteristics make up a measure common among all levels of nature even though each level has its own qualities that distinguish it from others.

It must be known that naturalists have stated this definition. They were satisfied with it because they had no goal other than pointing out to the life that falls within the scope of their researches. As for the life that exists outside the world of nature, it was not submitted to them as they were busy researching nature.

Defining Life in Another Way

Undoubtedly, plant life is different from animal life. So are all high levels of life. But this does not render this word, life, a common term having multiple meanings. Rather, it is a common immaterial term applied in one meaning to all levels but through the process of development and completion.

Let us explain the above by saying that material life in plants, animals and humans, since the latter are animals, too, undertakes two functions.

First: Action and impression, influencing and being influenced, up to the end of the list that targets the four characteristics mentioned by naturalists, as we have explained. We can apply the term “activity” to this characteristic.

Second: Sense and realization lie in the simple meaning they convey. There is no doubt that it applies to all sorts of natural life, including plants. Naturalists have discovered the existence of sense in plants in general, and that primitive man knew about its existence in some of them, such as date trees and others. It is to this matter that we use the term “realization”.

The result is that what straightens life in nature, in its different levels, is activity and realization in their various degrees and complementing levels, and that it is not right to apply the term “life” to plants and animals except through development. This is due to the vast distance between both norms of life. What is absolutely correct to use in one sense is the process of development through eliminating shortcomings and impurities that are present in both plants and animals.

On this basis, it is accurate to use the term “life” to humans as humans, not as animals. The correction to the use of this term is the development process on which (life) stands. Otherwise, how can human life be measured by a lower type of life? Where is the action expected of rational life in man compared to the action of botanical and animal life? How can you compare man’s realization of whole matters and mathematical laws with the sense of plants and the feeling of animals?

Yet despite this vast distance between both lives, we find ourselves describing life as life, applying the term “living” in the same sense to all of them. The one and the same meaning is only due to the existent being “active” and “realizing,” but his action and realization suit every level of life.

Briefly, the criterion for natural life is action and realization, and it is preserved in all levels but is continuously developing and perfecting. If it is right to use the term “life” in the same sense to all these various degrees, let it be right to apply to supreme living existents but in a perfect way.

Allah, Praise belongs to Him, is Living in the sense this word conveys, but it is “life” that suits His most supreme status by eliminating what is added or deleted, by taking the pith, the essence, the in-depth meaning. He, Praise belongs to Him, is Living in the sense He is a doer, He realizes. If you will, you can say that He is “effective”, and you can say that He “realizes” but not similarly to the way possible existents realize.

Example for Depicting Development in the Absolute

What we have stated about the reality of life, that after observing its levels, reason extracts a broad concept that applies to all of its forms, this is broadly applied. For example, the word “lamp” used to be used in the beginning to the burning twig, but it developed according to the development of civilization and sophistication, so it now is used to anything that is burnt by oil, gasoline, natural gas, and electricity, all in one and the same sense.

This is so because of the fact that such generalization is sound. The thing is evident by itself, showing itself to others, lighting what is around it. This reality, despite the difference in its levels, exists in all testimonies, and in the electrical lamp, in the most perfect way.

It is an illusion to explain the life of the Initiator of Life through the life that sees sense in plants, animals and man. It is also an illusion to imagine that His life is dependent on an action, a chemical or a physical reaction, etc. All these do not enter into the reality of life, although they have something to do with realizing some of its levels. Without these chemical or physical actions, life would become impossible in natural existents. But its existence in a particular level is not at all regarded as evidence in its impact on its reality.

Also, the lamp burning through the wick in many of its sections is not regarded as an evidence of the lamp’s reality although it is so with regard to some of its parts. We will then come up with this conclusion: What maintains life is that the Existent is knowledgeable, a doer, realizing and affecting, impacting and making others feel His impact, or you may express it however you please.

Evidence of His Being Living, Praise Belongs to Him

I do not think that you need, in order to describe Him as Living, evidence after you become familiar with two matters.

First: It has been proven with evidence that He, Praise belongs to Him, is Knowledgeable, Able, and this has already been discussed.

Second: The truth of life in supreme degrees is not beyond the One characterized by it who realizes, affects, knows and influences.

If these two matters are realized, the absolute result is that since He, Praise belongs to Him, is Knowledgeable, Able, realizes, effective, due to the fact that knowledge is inseparable from realization, and ability is inseparable from action, they are the same life during its development through the elimination of what is superfluous. For this reason, we see that men of wisdom derive evidence about His life by saying, "The Almighty is Living because it is impossible to say that someone is able and knowledgeable but is not living!"[2]

In fact, His life, Praise belongs to Him, is His being characterized by ability and knowledge, and you will come to know that all His Attributes, Praise belongs to Him, though they are different in their concepts, unite in being factual, providing evidence.

Add to the above the fact He, Praise belongs to Him, created living existents that realize and are effective; so, it is impossible for One Who grants perfection to be without perfection.

His Being Living in the Quran and Sunnah

Allah Almighty describes Himself in the Holy Quran as being living a life for which there is no death saying,

"…And put your trust in Him Who lives and does not die, and celebrate His praise" (***Qur'an, 25:58***).

The term "living" (*al-Hayy*) occurs in the Holy Quran as one of His Names five times. The most Exalted and Great says,

"Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the self-Subsisting, the Eternal. Neither slumber can seize Him nor sleep" (***Qur'an, 2:255***).

Imam Muhammad son of Ali al-Baqir, peace with both of them, has said, "Allah, Blessed and Exalted is He, was and there was nothing there with Him at all, a light in which there is no darkness, a truth in which there is no falsehood, knowledgeable who does not know ignorance, living who never dies, and so is He now, and so will He be forever."[3]

Imam Mousa son of Jafar, peace with them both, has said, "Allah, the one and only god, is always Living without 'how', a Living God without 'incidental life'; rather, He is Living on His own."[4]

So, like the rest of His attributes of perfection, His being Living is a must attribute not reached by nil, nor does it know depletion and termination, because these things collide with its being a must, a necessity, and they do not suit its status; what is pre-supposed is the opposite thereof.

1. This scientific, logical and rational realization is a development of the sense that exists in animal life.
2. Allama al-Hilli, Kashf al-Fawa'id fi Sharh Qawaid al-Aqaid, p. 46.
3. Al-Saduq, Tawhid, p. 141.
4. Ibid.

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