

1.7 Effects of Monotheism on Life

Before we move to the implications of those attributes in our daily lives, let's first make some clarifications. When we read western literature concerning Islam, we find the idea of simplicity in the Islamic creed. Sometimes they relegate the Islamic creed as being too simplistic; for simple-minded nomadic people and cannot aspire to compete or come up to the level of other esoteric creeds that we find in other faiths and religions. What do you have to say about this?

Even when the term simplistic is not used, it is clearly insinuated. I've seen many written work by non-Muslims and so many films and T.V. programs produced that start with statements discussing the simplicity of Islam. They'd begin by saying things like 'Oh Islam is so simple. There is only one God.' And then they'd move on to talk of the five pillars of Islam for example. So just in one sentence quick sentence they've insinuated very obviously that somehow Islam is simplistic in the sense of being simple. Therefore equating simple with simplistic and superficial.

By the same token people, also, sometimes get the impression that complicated is sophisticated or more profound whereas we know that the simplest facts could be made very complex. You could include all kinds of philosophical and theological riddles into something that's very straightforward and very simple. This makes it complex but not necessarily sophisticated or true. This is the difficulty with the terminology that is being used.

I would say that the most profound truths are the ones that combine both simplicity and depth and yet are not simplistic. Indeed the most manifest example of this is our discussions in the last few sessions on the aspect of monotheism and the aspect of absolute oneness of the Creator. We have seen that on one level, if you explain to a very simple person (perhaps even uneducated and unsophisticated) the concept of one Creator and that the whole universe is created by one God and one Authority it is palatable and acceptable by this person. He can understand that.

On the other hand, we have seen also that we have spent six complete programs this being the seventh, that deal specifically with that single concept of monotheism and we haven't even delved into great depth. We

tried to give examples from the Qur'an of what the real dimensions and meaning of this monotheism really is. We have seen in our discussions that on one level the discussion is appealing to even the most scientific mind. Especially when we discuss the various signs of God's oneness in our creation, in the ecological balance, in the cosmos and the creation of the whole universe. In that sense, I'm saying that a very profound truth could be simple on one level and still have depth for those who prefer to go more into the dimensions and understand what this really means.

In fact, I would say that the kind of insinuation that is made normally from these writings and programs is not only by the words used but also by the way these programs or films are produced or the way the pictures are shown. You get an uneducated person in flowing robes riding on a camel and he looks almost like a savage and tie it somehow with this understanding of monotheism. What is even more tricky and something we should be really careful about is that some scholars fall into the error of saying that monotheism in Islam is good and profound but only relative to its time. That is compared to the idol worship that was rampant at the time when the prophet Mohammed was alive and so monotheism was better and an improvement at the time.

I'm glad we clarified that before we move on to the last topic on monotheism. Some say that the discussion on the Islamic creed in depth is futile. Is it practical? Does it have any impact on our daily life?

It may sound like a theological or philosophical type of argument but when you delve more into depth on this you find that not only the concept of monotheism but each of the basic divine attributes that we have discussed does have a practical relevance and implication in the day to day life of various individuals. It is manifest in our life and in the life of the believers both on the individual and the collective levels.

Maybe we should be a little bit more specific on that and take some of the attributes that we talked about and discuss the implications of each one of them individually. Lets talk of the most important one: the oneness. What implications does it have?

When discussing the oneness of Allah this in itself provides a base for humanity to unite. That is talking about one common Lord of the

universe. The whole issue of religious, racial or any other prejudice that stems from the mindset of 'your God vs. my God' no longer has a place because we're talking about the God of the entire universe- the whole of humanity. It follows from this, also, that since you have one Lord then you also have one humanity.

The oneness of Allah also leads to the oneness of humanity and this understanding of the oneness of humanity is also a very profound basis in removing all the artificial barriers of racial, tribal and any other sense of superiority and all other false methods that people have devised to distinguish between one group of the creatures of Allah and the others.

It follows, also, from both of them (the oneness of Allah and the oneness of humanity) that you end with the oneness of divine revelation. By this we mean that all the messages, the divine revelations that was received by all prophets throughout history is similar to links in a constant and continuous chain of revelations. The prophets should be viewed by their followers not as competitors trying to get the most followers but rather as those who are carrying the same basic message of goodness and submission to the will of God. At the same time they should be viewed as completing and complementing what each prophet before them had done. As we said this all culminated in the message of Prophet Mohammed as the last of those prophets. The prophets should be viewed as brothers and so their followers should try to look upon one another as brothers as well.

We find that in a very practical sense the oneness of God provides a very strong foundation to unify humanity in its entirety. Sometimes, as humans, we fail to harness this potential because of the various biases, prejudices and brainwashing that we have because of various individual, social or institutional pressures on us. But the potential is there in this single concept of oneness.

Let's move to the second attribute, which is the uniqueness of the Creator. In the sense that Allah is the sole creator, does this have any implications?

By believing that God is the sole creator of everything that is in this universe, any animate or inanimate object, it follows that the true believer does not see anything in this universe as totally strange to him. There are things that we may not understand but the universe is never something that should be feared. A Muslim should never use the terms

'conquest of nature' or 'subduing nature' because it's as if you're in a struggle with an enemy that is nature. Muslims should never look at it as this because nature is the creation of Allah.

Once we realize that God is *the* Creator then we conclude that there must be a specific purpose and wisdom behind creating us on this earth. We are not just created here to live and die. That most definitely is not the purpose. There must be a more noble mission and that is the most basic distinction between human beings on one hand and other living organisms or animals or birds or other types of creation on the other hand. This is beautifully depicted in one passage in the Qur'an, "Those who reject God will enjoy this world and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode." (47, 12) That's the crux of the matter. By knowing and realizing the attributes and creations of Allah then we ask ourselves: Why are we created and what mission are we supposed to fulfill?

What of the attribute of knowledge and wisdom? When we say that Allah is All-knowledgeable, All-Wise and All-omniscient does this have any implications?

In regards to knowledge and wisdom, both have very practical implications. First of all, when a believer realizes that all his deeds and actions on this earth are watched, that God is watching over what he's doing (and as we said last time even our inner thoughts are known to the Creator) it helps infiltrate the quality of taqwa or piety or more correctly God-consciousness in his actions. It causes automatic self- policing. You don't have to have someone watch over you or tell you what to do because after all you have in direct contact and under direct observation of the Creator. This quality is not a theoretical quality. It's a very essential quality to build any healthy community or society.

The other aspect that follows from that is that the believers' view of morality or moral standards would be more lofty than how many view them. That is to say many people would accept moral values but would only do so in a utilitarian sense. That is the concept of having to set certain standards because it's good for themselves, for their own businesses, and or causes social approval. It's useful to look at it this way but that's not all because a more lofty level of looking at morality is to tie it directly with the knowledge of God. This instills the view of following these standards because God knows them, if they cheat people; if they use the pretense of morality just to acquire the admiration of other

people then they can cheat all those people but cannot cheat God Himself. This culminates sincerity deeds, words, and thoughts.

If you take the question of wisdom also as one absolute attribute of the creator we find that it also relates to the acceptance of God's command and direction and guidance as the ultimate source because one must believe that God is the ultimate infallible source of knowledge and the ultimate law-giver. Once we inculcate in ourselves this mindset then we take God and his commands as the arbitrator to judge in anything as we as human beings differ on. It gives a kind of stability to the laws and differences we have just in the same sense as the constitution, which provides stability in which various flexible laws can be devised.

Let's move to another attribute and that is the attribute of forgiveness. When we say that God is forgiving what kind of implications should we see in that attribute?

I think it is very essential. Even though the concept of sin might sound like a theological argument, it isn't really because it relates to the whole psychology of the individual and how he or she understands the world around them. I would say, first of all, that this concept of God as the ultimate source of forgiveness should liberate the human mind from the stigma and the shackles that results from the concept of Original Sin, for example, where the sin is inherited. As we said this is contrary to the justice of God to have that stigma or curse put on the descendants of Adam and Eve because of the mistakes Adam and Eve had committed.

By accepting that the authority of forgiveness lies exclusively in the hands of God, the human mind is also liberated from any superstition or strange ideas about how to remit for those sins committed. As we indicated earlier, the Islamic way of remission is sincerity, stopping what was being done that was wrong and immoral, and turning back to God in repentance and sincerity.

It also avoids the tendency that humans have in deifying other human beings in the hopes that those might take care of their sins. As we mentioned before, this tendency was not specific to one case or other. There have been so many cases throughout history where people were believed to be deities or manifestations or incarnations of deities. Even though those individuals themselves have emphatically denied this and never claimed that they were anything more than sincere human beings.

Additionally, it removes and discourages the exploitation of people in the name of religion. Once you start on a path of intermediary or intercession between man and God, even when we're talking about great prophets as intercessors, then someone would claim that 'I am the intercessor to the intercessor' and so a chain would develop and that would raise, as occurred in history, the exploitation of people in the name of religion.

There were cases, throughout history, where people took the power unto themselves to grant forgiveness to people. You'd have to pay a certain amount of money and you get a document that says that your sins have been forgiven. Islam insists that forgiveness only lies in the hands of Allah. That is one of the reasons why, in a way, Islam doesn't accept the concept of priesthood as it is looked upon in the west. You can be a religious scholar but not a priest in the terminological sense.

Finally, the belief in the forgiveness of Allah as the final authority, leads the person to gain a sense of responsibility and accountability. You do not depend on the mindset that someone else will be taking care of your sins. No, you are accountable, individually, before God and as such you have this sense of trying your best in following His command.

An example of this, from the Qur'an, is, "It, the Day of Judgment, will be the Day when no soul shall have power to do anything for another: For the command, that Day, will be wholly with God." (82:19) All of these are very relevant issues, as I said, and they all tie back to the concept of God as The Forgiver alone, with no intercession and no intermediary.

Let's move now to mercy. What kinds of implications does the attribute of mercy have?

You could say that mercy relates to forgiveness, but we'll add a few more points. Mercy also relates to inculcating the attitude of gratefulness to God. That is we don't take all the blessings and bounties that God has given us for granted. We know that they are manifestations of His mercy. Even the glass of water that we drink, even the smell of fresh air that is around us, we should always remember and think that these are all manifestations of the mercy of Allah.

It, also, gives the person the feeling of assurance that there is One who cares for me. I could be sinful, I could be bad, but still there is One who

cares and loves me and has mercy on me. And He's not anyone He's The One. So that gives a warm feeling of identification with God.

In case the person faces and problems or difficulties in his life, he should never feel broken hearted or feel despair because, as the Qur'an says, one should never despair from the mercy of Allah. In fact, the Qur'an says, "Despair not of the Mercy of Allah. for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (39: 53)

"No one despairs of God's soothing mercy except those who have no faith." (12: 87)

The Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, said, "I wonder about the affairs of the true believer; whatever happens to him is good. If something good happens to him he thanks God and he gets rewarded for that. If something difficult befalls him, he again thanks Allah and has patience and perseverance and, also, gets rewarded."

Let's move to the omniscience of Allah, the absolute will and power of Allah. In what sense should this attribute affect us personally?

By realizing that all power belongs only in the hands of God, removes any servitude to any other human being; servitude that we might have to other people because we have hope that they may benefit us. The Qur'an says the benefit only comes from Allah and not other human being.

It, also, removes this servitude towards other human beings in a sense of fear for themselves. That is why we find prophets and other deeply religious individuals throughout history have been standing in the face of all adversity with great deal of courage in saying the truth, not to satisfy anyone but only because the truth must be said.

It removes the excessive or undue anxiety that people might have about what is happening to them or what will happen to them. The Qur'an says that nothing will happen to us but what God has destined us to go through. No one will live for one moment more or less than what has been decided for him.

Furthermore, it causes us to be more humble, realizing that all power is in the hands of God and so whatever we have by way of wealth, position, or whatever we should be humble because we know that God can take it all away at any moment. Therefore, we don't exploit people. We don't use

this power or wealth or influence for our own benefit. We realize that there is a purpose to serve by having all this.

Even in the area of political life and government. We realize again that ultimate authority lies with God and as such all other human beings are equal in His sight and their affair should be decided by mutual consultation.

We had made it a point, last session, to eliminate the misconception rampant in western literature as to the remoteness of Allah to humans. We said that closeness to mankind is a very important attribute of Allah. Could we end this discussion by giving the implications of this closeness of Allah?

Aside from the various passages in the Qur'an, which I quoted before saying God is closer to man than his jugular vein, that God is close to anyone who prays to Him, and that in Islam there are no intermediaries between humans and God and so in the five daily prayers you pray and communicate directly with God. This is the most noble, close, and direct personal relationship that you could have with the Creator.

In addition to this, this kind of experience or concept gives the person the chance to have the spiritual experience of direct contact with God that would inevitably lead to the feeling of peace of mind and peace of heart, which is the most valuable thing that anyone could attain in this life. Big car and big houses and lots of money and jobs with high salary are all superficial. The real value in life is to obtain this inner peace in the heart and mind.

To conclude, the Qur'an says:

"Whoever believes in Allah, Allah guides his heart aright." (64:11)

"Allah is the Protector of those who have faith: He will lead them from the depths of darkness into light. Of those who reject faith their patrons are the evil ones: they will lead them from light into the depths of darkness." (2:257)

"It is He Who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the Believers, that they may add faith to their faith" (48:4)

“Those who believe and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of God- Lo in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction”