

# God and His Attributes

## Lesson 3: God's Inherent and Relational Attributes



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# God's Inherent Attributes

- **God's inherent attributes** الصفات الذاتية are the attributes we can understand just by studying God, without looking at His relation to anything
- Theologians have listed the inherent attributes of God.
- Last week we spoke about God's Oneness.

# God's Inherent Attributes

- 2. Knowledge العلم

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

*“Know: that God knows everything” Quran 2:231*

# God's Inherent Attributes

- Defining knowledge: the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association
- Knowledge is of two types:
  - Acquired knowledge العلم الحصيلي
  - Presential knowledge العلم الحضورى

# God's Inherent Attributes

ولا يَعزُبُ عَنْهُ عَدَدُ قَطْرِ الْمَاءِ ، وَلَا نَجْمِ السَّمَاءِ ، وَلَا سَوَافِي الرِّيحِ فِي  
الهِوَاءِ ، وَلَا دَبِيبِ النَّمْلِ عَلَى الصِّفَا ، وَلَا مَقِيلِ الذَّرِّ فِي اللَّيْلَةِ  
الظُّلْمَاءِ ، يَعْلَمُ مَسَاقِطَ الْأُورَاقِ ، وَخَفِيَّ طَرَفِ الْأَحْدَاقِ

“The number of droplets of water, or of stars in the sky, or of gusts of wind in the air are not unknown to Him, and neither is the crawling of ants on rocks, nor the settling place of tiny ants in the darkness of the night. He knows the spots where leaves fall and the subtle movement of the pupils of the eyes.”- Imam Ali

# God's Inherent Attributes

لَمْ يَزَلْ عَالِمًا بِمَا يَكُونُ، فَعِلْمُهُ بِهِ قَبْلَ كَوْنِهِ كَعِلْمِهِ بِهِ بَعْدَ كَوْنِهِ

“He always knows what is to be, such that His knowledge of it before its coming into being is the same as His knowledge after its coming into being.” – Imam al-Baqir

# God's Inherent Attributes

- **3. Power** القدرة

قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

- *“God has power over all things” Quran 2:259*

# God's Inherent Attributes

الإمامُ عليٌّ عليه السلام - لما قيل له : هل يقدرُ ربُّكَ علي أن يدخل  
الدنيا في بيضةٍ - : إنَّ اللهَ تبارك وتعالى لا ينسبُ إلى العجزِ ، والذي  
سألني لا يكون

Imam Ali was once asked, 'Can your Lord fit the world into an egg?' to which he replied, 'Verily Allah, Mighty and Exalted, cannot be attributed with incapacity, but that which you are asking cannot ever be.'



# God's Inherent Attributes

- God has power over all “things”
- God does not have power over that which is inherently impossible, not because of any limitation in His power, but because the proposition has no reality.

# God's Inherent Attributes

- 4. Life الحياة

وتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْحَيِّ الَّذِي لَا يَمُوتُ

- *“Put your trust in the Living who does not die”*  
*Quran 25:58*

# God's inherent Attributes

كَانَ اللَّهُ حَيًّا بِلاَ حَيَاةٍ حَادِثَةٍ ... بَلْ حَيٌّ لِنَفْسِهِ

“God is Omnipresent without any external source of life ... rather He lives through Himself [is Self-existent].” - Imam al-Kadhimi

# God's Inherent Attributes

- God is Living, but not in the biological sense
- He did not acquire life from another being, nor is His life followed by death.
- He is the giver of all Life

# God's Inherent Attributes

- We cannot know more about his essence than these basic inherent attributes

تَفَكَّرُوا فِي خَلْقِ اللَّهِ ، وَلَا تَفَكَّرُوا فِي اللَّهِ فَتَهْلِكُوا

‘Ponder over the creation of God, but do not ponder about God Himself [His essence] lest you be ruined.’- The Holy Prophet (saw)

# God's Inherent Attributes

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالتَّفَكُّرَ فِي اللَّهِ ؛ فَإِنَّ التَّفَكُّرَ فِي اللَّهِ لَا يَزِيدُ إِلَّا تَيْهًا ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
عَزَّوَجَلَّ لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَا يُوصَفُ بِمِقْدَارٍ

“Beware of pondering about [the essence of] God, for verily pondering about God only increases one's bewilderment. Verily God, Mighty and Exalted, cannot be perceived by the sights or described by any type of criteria and measurement.” - Imam al-Sadiq

# God's Inherent Attributes

الإمام زين العابدين عليه السلام - في الدعاء - : عَجَزَتِ الْعُقُولُ عَنْ  
إِدْرَاكَ كُنْهِ جَمَالِكَ ، وَانْحَسَرَتِ الْأَبْصَارُ دُونَ النَّظَرِ إِلَى سَبْحَاتِ  
وَجْهِكَ ، وَلَمْ تَجْعَلْ لِلْخَلْقِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى مَعْرِفَتِكَ إِلَّا بِالْعَجْزِ عَنْ مَعْرِفَتِكَ

“The intellects are incapable of fathoming the essence of Your Beauty, the sights are restricted to looking at other than the splendor of Your Face, and You have not set aside any means for Your creation to get to know You except through their complete incapacity of knowing You.”- Imam al-Sajjad

# God's Inherent Attributes

- We assign these attributes to Him minus any aspect of imperfection they may connote:
  - since he has no imperfection
  - nothing is like him



# God's Relational Attributes

- **God's relational attributes** الصفات الفعلية are the attributes we can understand only after analyzing God's relation to His creatures. For instance, He is not a "creator" until He has made something, though He does have the knowledge and power to create before He creates.

# God's Relational Attributes

- Divine Policies (God's *sunnahs*)-policies by which God governs His dealings with His creatures
- Let us first examine these Divine policies as they apply to the temporal world (*dunya*)

# God's Relational Attributes

- Overview of policies
  - God creates,
  - God sustains,
  - God guides,
  - God destroys all His creatures in the temporal world

# God's Relational Attributes

- **Policies toward inanimate creatures**
  - He creates them

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

*“He gives everything its existence and then guides it.” Quran 20:50*

# God's Relational Attributes

– He sustains them

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمْسِكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِن زَالَتَا إِنْ  
أَمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ

*“God protects the heavens and the earth from destruction. If they were set to be destroyed, no one could hold back their destruction except him.” Quran 35:41*

# God's Relational Attributes

– He guides them to fulfill their purpose

الَّذِي أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

*“He gives everything its existence and then guides it.” Quran 20:50*

# God's Relational Attributes

- What is the major purpose of inanimate creatures?
  - To exalt God

تَسْبِيحٌ لَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ  
بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

*“The seven heavens, the earth, and whoever resides therein exalt him. Every single thing exalts God and praises him as he deserves, however, you do not comprehend their exaltation.” Quran 17:44*

# God's Relational Attributes

- What is the major purpose of inanimate creatures?
  - to serve humanity

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْفَلَكَ لِتَجْرِيَ فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْأَنْهَارَ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ دَائِبِينَ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ

*“And he subjugated ships for you so that they sail at sea by his command, and he subjugated the rivers for you. He subjugated the sun and the moon for you, constant in their courses, and he subjugated for you the night and the day.” Quran 14:32-33*



# God's Relational Attributes

- He destroys them

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ

*[Remember] when the sun will be crumpled,  
when the stars will go dim, and the mountains  
will be made to move... Quran 81:1-3*

# God's Relational Attributes

- **Policies toward irrational creatures (like plants and animals)**

- He creates them

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَابَّةٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى بَطْنِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى رِجْلَيْنِ  
وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى أَرْبَعٍ يَخْلُقُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

*“God created every animal from water (or semen).*

*Among them are those that slither on their bellies, and among them are those that walk on two legs, and among them are those that walk on four.” Quran 24:45*

# God's Relational Attributes

- He sustains them

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا

*“Upon God is the sustenance of every animal on earth.” Quran 11:6*

# God's Relational Attributes

- He guides them

وَأَوْحَىٰ رَبُّكَ إِلَى النَّحْلِ أَنْ اتَّخِذِي مِنَ الْجِبَالِ بُيُوتًا وَمِنَ الشَّجَرِ وَمِمَّا  
يَعْرِشُونَ

*“Your Lord communicated to the honeybee saying, “Make your homes in the mountains, trees, and structures they have erected.*

*Quran16:68*

# God's Relational Attributes

- He destroys them

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

*“Everything shall perish except for Him.” Quran  
28:88*

# God's Relational Attributes

- **Divine policies towards rational beings (angels, jinn, and humans)**
  - He created us
    - As a species when He created Adam

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ

*“He began the creation of humankind from clay.” Quran 32:7*

# God's Relational Attributes

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ  
وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً

*“O People! Fear your Lord who created you [as a species] from one being and created, from that being, a mate for him and spread forth, from those two beings, many men and women” Quran 4:1*

# God's Relational Attributes

- Individually through reproduction

• وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ طِينٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ  
ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا  
فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ

*“We created man from an extract [derived] from clay. Then we made him into a drop of [seminal] fluid [lodged] in a secure place. Then we made the drop of fluid into a clinging mass. Then we made the clinging mass into a fleshy tissue. Then we made the fleshy tissue into bones. Then we clothed the bones in flesh. Then we made him into another creature. So exalted is God, the best of creators!” Quran 23:12-14*



# God's Relational Attributes

- He sustains us
  - He provides for all of our needs
    - Sustenance

– اللهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ

*“God is the one who provides sustenance for whom e wishes and withholds [from whom he wishes].” Quran 13:26*

وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي وَيَسْقِينِ

*“the one who feeds me and gives me drink.” Quran 26:79*

# God's Relational Attributes

–Health

وَإِذَا مَرِضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ

*“When I fall sick, He is the one who cures me.”*

*Quran 26:80*

- Shelter

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ بُيُوتِكُمْ سَكَنًا

*“It is God who has made your homes as a place of rest for you.” Quran 16:80*

# God's Relational Attributes

## – Clothing

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي سَوْءَاتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا

*“O Children of Adam! We have sent down for you clothes to cover your nakedness and for adornment...” Quran 7:26*

# God's Relational Attributes

– A spouse

– وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا

*“Among his signs is that he has created mates for you from your own kind, so that you may find tranquility in them.” Quran 30:21*

# God's Relational Attributes

## – Children

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً

*“God made mates for you from your own kind and made for you, from your mates, children and grandchildren..” Quran 16:72*

# God's Relational Attributes

– Sleep

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا

*“Did we not make sleep for you to rest?”*

# God's Relational Attributes

- Mechanism of sustenance: How does God determine how to apportion sustenance?
  - He provides according to need

وَلَوْ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ الرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِ لَبَغَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَكِنْ نُنزِّلُ بِقَدَرٍ مَّا يَشَاءُ

*“Were God to give provision for his servants freely, they would wreak havoc on earth. Rather, he sends down in precise measure whatever he wishes.” Quran 42:27*

# God's Relational Attributes

- He guarantees sustenance
  - Imam Ali says: “For everything that lives, there is sustenance”
  - Imam Ali says: “His dependents are his creatures. He has guaranteed their sustenance and apportioned it.



# God's Relational Attributes

- His guarantee is contingent upon certain things:
  - that we seek our sustenance. Imam 'Alī says, “Seek your sustenance, for it is guaranteed for the seeker”
  - that we do our duty whatever that may be. Imām al-'Askarī says, “Let [the pursuit of] sustenance, which is guaranteed, not distract you from [fulfilling] an act that is incumbent upon you”

# God's Relational Attributes

- Why are some people given less than they need, less than they want, or more than they know what to do with?
  - If someone gets less than they need, it is either because they are not fulfilling the prerequisites or someone else is blocking their sustenance from reaching them. The oppressor will be punished, and the oppressed will be compensated.

# God's Relational Attributes

- If someone has less than they want, or more than they know what to do with, it is either a trial, a punishment, or what is in their best interest

# God's Relational Attributes

- How can I change what is apportioned to me?
  - some of God's decrees are contingent on our choices
  - depending on my choices, I could change my sustenance, my lifespan, my health, etc.
  - these changes in God's decree are called *badā'*

# God's Relational Attributes

- **He guides us to the truth**
  - 1. by means of the intellect
    - Imam al-Kadhimi: “O Hishām! God has two pieces of evidence against people: [one is] manifest and [the other is] hidden. That which is manifest is his messengers, prophets, and imams. That which is hidden is the [people's] intellect

# God's Relational Attributes

– 2. by means of prophets

رَسُولًا مَّبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ لَعَلَّ يَكُونُ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى اللَّهِ حُجَّةٌ  
بَعْدَ الرُّسُلِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

- *We sent messengers as bearers of glad-tidings and as warners so that people would not have any proof against God. (4:165)*

# God's Relational Attributes

- 3. by creating circumstances conducive to acceptance of the truth

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ  
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَضَرَّعُونَ

*We sent [messengers] to people before you, and then we seized them with hardship in hopes that they would become humble. (6:42)*

# God's Relational Attributes

- 4. by reacting to our choice to heed guidance or reject it. God reinforces us on whichever path we choose

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا  
لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَى لَهَا  
سَعِيهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَئِكَ كَانَ سَعِيهِمْ مَشْكُورًا كَلَّا نَمُدُّ  
هُؤُلَاءِ وَهَؤُلَاءِ مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مُحْظُورًا



# God's Relational Attributes

*If anyone wants this temporal life, We hasten to him therein what We please for whomever We please, then we consign him to hell; he shall enter it despised, driven away.*

*And if anyone wants the hereafter and strives for it as he ought to strive and he is a believer their striving shall be accepted.*

*Each group do We aid: these as well as those out of the bounty of your Lord. For the bounty of your Lord is not limited. (17:18-20)*

# God's Relational Attributes

- He takes our life

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

*“every soul shall taste death” 29:57*