

CONCEPT OF GOD, HIS ONENESS AND HIS DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

Introduction: Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (p) lived 1,400 years ago, during the advent of Islam in Arabia. He was a cousin of Prophet Muhammad (s), the Messenger of God. He was privileged to have the Prophet raise him in his own household and teach him. Additionally, he was a scholar of the Arabic language and had deep knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an.

The following is a collection of his various sermons and discourses on the concept of God. The sermons were delivered over several years. The excerpts are presented here in an abridged and topical format in modern English and rephrased where necessary. It is hoped that the reader will find this presentation enjoyable as well as enlightening.

His Praising and Glorifying God:

Praise is due to God, Whose worth cannot be described by the describer, Whose bounties cannot be counted by enumerators, and Whose claim cannot be fulfilled by those who attempt to do so. The height of intellectual courage cannot appreciate Him, and the depths of understanding cannot reach Him. For His description no limit has been laid down, no eulogy exists, no time is ordained, and no duration is fixed.

(Sermon 1)

Exalted is God, Whom the limits of endeavors cannot reach and intelligence cannot find. He is the First (having no beginning), having no limits, lest He would be confined within those limits. Nor does He have an end, such that He could cease (to exist).

(Sermon 93)

Praise be to God, Who is praised by all His creation, Whose hosts are overpowering, and Whose Exaltation is High. I praise Him for His successive favors and His abundant gifts. His forbearance is great, so that He forgives, and He is just in His decisions. He has knowledge of the present and the past. He designed the creation with knowledge, and brought it into existence with His unlimited capacity, without need for learning, without following any previous example, without committing any mistake, and without any help.

(Sermon 190)

Oneness and Uniqueness of God:

The foremost (duty) in religion is the acknowledgment of God; the perfection of acknowledging Him is to bear witness to Him; the perfection of bearing witness to Him is to believe in His Oneness; the perfection of believing in His Oneness is to regard Him as pure; and the perfection of regarding Him as pure is to deny Him attributes, because every attribute is a proof that it is different from that to which it is attributed, and everything to which something is attributed is different from the attribute.

Thus, whoever attempts a description of God creates His like; and whoever creates His like regards Him as two; and whoever regards Him as two recognizes parts for Him; and whoever recognizes parts for Him mistook Him; and whoever mistook Him faulted Him; and whoever faulted Him admitted limitations for Him; and whoever admitted limitations for Him enumerated Him (i.e., denied His oneness and uniqueness).

Whoever said, "In what is He?" held that He is confined; and whoever said, "On what is He?" held He is not on something else. He is a being, but not through the phenomenon of coming into existence. He exists, but not by coming out of nonexistence. He is near to everything, but not in physical proximity. He is distinct from everything, but not separated (by distance). He acts, but without the need of movement or need of instruments. He is One, such that there is none with whom He may keep company or none whose company He may miss.

(Sermon 1)

He who assigns to Him (different) states does not believe in His Oneness; or he who likens Him (to any of His creation) has not grasped His reality. He who pictures Him in his imagination has meant (someone) other than Him. He works but not with the help of tools. He assigns measures but not with the need of deliberation. He is rich but not through acquisition (of wealth).

(Sermon 185)

He is One, but not in a numerical sense. He is everlasting, without a limit. He exists, but without support. He is big, but not in a physical sense. He is big in position and great in authority.

(Sermon 184)

Praise be to God, Who is not rich by withholding bounties, and Whose munificence and generosity do not make (Him) poor. Everyone who gives, loses (to that extent), except Him. He obliges through beneficial bounties and plentiful gifts. The whole creation is dependent on Him (for sustenance). He has guaranteed their livelihood and ordained their sustenance. He has prepared the way (to success) for those who turn to Him and those who seek what is with Him. He generously grants the requests and bestows bounties freely even when not requested. He is the First, such that nothing existed prior to Him. He is the Last, such that nothing will

remain other than Him. He prevents the eyes from seeing or perceiving Him. (Passage of) time does not affect Him whatsoever, nor cause any change in Him. He is not in one particular place, to require Him to move (to another place).

He is so powerful that, when imagination shoots its arrows to comprehend the extent of His power, when the mind tries to reach Him in the depths of His realm, when the hearts long to grasp the realities of His attributes, and when intellect attempts to secure knowledge about His Being, crossing the pitfalls of the unknown, they would all be turned back. They would return defeated, acknowledging that the reality of His essence cannot be grasped.

(Sermon 90)

If He (God) gives away all that the mines of the earth contain, the treasures in the mountains, the gold, the silver, pearls, and coral from the oceans, it would not affect His munificence, nor diminish what He possesses. He has such treasures and bounties, which will not decrease by providing for the demands of the creatures. He is such a generous being, Whom giving to the beseechers does not diminish (His bounties), nor does the persistent asking of beseechers makes Him frugal (tightfisted).

(Sermon 90)

God is aware of the calls of the beasts in the forests, the sins that people commit in privacy, the movement of the fish in the depths of ocean, and the rising of the water by tempestuous winds.

(Sermon 197)

Had they pondered over the greatness of His power and the vastness of His bounties, they would have returned to the right path (of acknowledging Him as God) and would fear the punishment (for rejecting Him), but hearts are afflicted and eyes are closed. Do they not see the tiny creatures He brought into existence, how He strengthened their bodily functions, gave them hearing, sight, made their body parts, and their tiny and delicate bodies?

(Sermon 184)

He is not preoccupied by (attending to) any matter. The passage of time does not bring any change in Him, He is not confined to any one place, and the tongues are unable to describe Him. The number of drops of water (in the ocean), the number of stars in the sky, or the (whereabouts of the) currents of winds are known to Him; so are the movements of ants on the rocks, or the resting place of grubs in the dark night. He possesses the knowledge of the place where the leaves fall, and He is aware of the stealthy movements of the eyes.

(Sermon 177)

God Did Not Give Birth to a Son, nor was He Born of Anyone:

He does not have a form, and thus there is no possibility of any change whatsoever. He did not beget, such that He would be considered to have been begotten. In that case, He would be subject to limitations. He is too exalted to have a son. He is too sublime to have consorts. Human imagination, perception, and senses cannot reach His essence. One cannot assign Him a numerical quantity. He is beyond understanding and beyond imagination. He does not pass from one state to another. Passage of nights and days do not cause Him to age. Light and darkness do not affect Him.

(Sermon 185)

God's Mercy, Forgiveness, and Bounties:

Praise is due to God in Whose Mercy no one loses hope, of Whose Bounty no one is deprived, in Whose Forgiveness, no one is overlooked, and for Whose worship no one is too great. His Mercy never ceases and His Bounty is never exhausted.

(Sermon 45)

Know, O creatures of God, that He has not created you for nothing, and has not left you (completely) free. He knows the extent of His favors and the amount of His bounties to you. Therefore, ask Him for success and for the attainment of your desires. Beseech Him and invoke His generosity. No curtain hides you from Him, nor is any door (of communication) closed between you and Him. He is present at every place, at all times, and in every moment. He is (at all times) with every human and jinn¹ kind. Giving does not cause diminution of His bounties.

(Sermon 194)

About God's Eternity:

I stand witness that there is no god but God; He is One, and He has no partner; He is the First, such that nothing existed before Him; He is the Last (Eternal), such that there is no End to His existence. Division or splitting into parts of His entity is not possible. Hearts cannot comprehend His nature. Eyes cannot envision Him.

(Sermon 84)

About His Might, Greatness, Sublimity, and Omniscience:

Praise be to God, Who pervades all hidden affairs, and towards Whom all manifest things point. He cannot be seen by the eye of a seer, but the eye, which does not see Him, cannot deny Him, while the mind that proves His existence cannot perceive Him. He is so high in sublimity that nothing can be more sublime than He,

¹ Creatures made of fire, hidden from humans. Satan belongs to this type of being.

while in nearness, He is so near that no one can be nearer than He. However, his sublimity does not distance Him from anything of His creation, nor does His nearness bring them on an equal level to Him. He has not informed the (human) intellect about the extent of His qualities. Nevertheless, He has not prevented it from securing essential knowledge of Him. Therefore, He is such that all signs of existence bear proof of Him, until the denying mind also believes in Him. God is sublime beyond what is described by those who compare Him to things, or those who reject Him.

(Sermon 47)

He who assigns to Him (different) states does not believe in His Oneness; or he who likens Him (to any of His creation) has not grasped His reality. He who pictures Him in his imagination has meant (someone) other than Him. He works but not with the help of tools. He assigns measures but not with the need of deliberation. He is rich but not through acquisition (of wealth).

(Sermon 185)