

Monotheism

1.1 Monotheism- Source of Knowledge about God

Review of Intro and Terms

There are five basic points that should be remembered. First, is that it is a mistake to assume that every Muslim is an Arab. Not every Muslim is an Arab and not every Arab is a Muslim. To even tie Islam to the Middle East is also a misconception. The Muslim population is close to one billion in all countries and places in the world. Arabs are actually a small minority among the Muslims.

The second main point covers the notion of religion as understood by Muslims. It is not just a matter that is restricted to the basic rituals or religious observations but rather an all-encompassing notion. Religion is a way of life that includes the social, economic and political aspects of life and it's all integrated.

The third point that was discussed is the meaning of the term *Islam* itself. It is an attributive title. It is not just a name that is derived from the name of a person, a place, or locality. It is a name that carries within itself the meaning of Islam. The word Islam means, in Arabic, to achieve inner and outer peace as well as peace in the community and the world at large by submitting oneself to the Will of God and the obedience of His command. Within this kind of basic definition of Islam, following the path of God, we said that all prophets, throughout history actually preached the same kind of basic Islam and that it was simply fulfilled and completed with the advent of prophet Mohammed. We concluded not only that Mohammedanism is a mistaken and offensive name for Islam but the fact that all the prophets were brothers, preaching for the same God, and those who sincerely follow them are also regarded as following the same basic path of Islam.

The fourth point went over the definition of a Muslim. Based on the definition of Islam we can say that a Muslim is one who commits his self to live in accordance with the teachings, commands, and guidance of God as derived from the revelation. Being a Muslim is not just a title that someone can claim or pay lip service to. A true Muslim is one who actively follows the path of Islam.

The fifth and final point covered in the last lecture that may have some bearing in the coming lecture is this universal outlook of Islam towards prophets and towards followers of other faiths would provide a very good foundation, a very good beginning, to remove or demolish the barriers of fanaticism, prejudice and stereotypes which are sometimes propagated by mistaken sources which prevents the Islamic faith in its true perspective. This should provide, hopefully, more cooperation between the various people following different prophets (who are all considered Muslims in Islam) for the good of all.

1.1 Source of Knowledge about God

God in Islam: His attributes and His essence

Host: The first philosophical issue that is raised is how does a man with his limited capabilities come to know God? To be specific we are concerned with the concept of *knowing*- how does he *know* God? What strategies are used in the knowledge and what forces are used to reach the full knowledge of God in Islam?

Response by Jamal Badawi:

We do not really have to venture far to get basic insightful knowledge and information not only about God but also concerning other things. The human being is created with a natural pure disposition to realize his Creator. I'm not talking about science or about prophets or revelations.

Even on a very fundamental level we find that throughout history there is a very strange phenomena that people of different backgrounds, living in so many different parts of the world at different points in time, have always had this strong urge within themselves to look and to yearn for the Creator. They see that there is some power, a magnificent and merciful power that is sometimes interpreted in a mistaken way by materializing that in

some form or other (i.e. idols). The basic yearning has always been there. Even in places where there is no recorded history of a particular prophet there, people have yearned for a Creator. That's what I'm referring to as an innate nature. The Arabic term is 'fitra'. Fitra literally translates to: something that one is created with or created in accordance with: this innate nature.

An example of this is a verse in the Qur'an says, "So set thy face steadily and truly to the natural faith." (30:30) Notice the term here "natural faith." It's not some concocted doctrine. Natural faith is established by God. God's handiwork according to the person he has made mankind. No change in the creation of God that is the standard religion but most among mankind don't understand. The Qur'an relates the story of prophet Abraham when his people deviated from the worship of God. He simply addresses them by saying, "Is there any doubt about God?" In other words he's not arguing or trying to provide equations or different kinds of approaches.

If you really think about it, honestly, is there any doubt about the existence or presence of God instinctively even or innately? The other thing that is quite observable is that it has been shown over and over again that even atheists, those who reject God, at some time or other when they are in real difficulty remember God. You might have seen the writings about what happened to people during the second World War, for example, where an atheist who doesn't believe in God or a person who just doesn't believe period has a problem with his parachute would say, "Oh my God!" Why would he remember that now? That shows there's something even despite of themselves that causes them to turn to this supreme power.

Many of us in our own human experience sometimes become ill [or know someone who is ill] and is really suffering or in pain and says something to the effect, "Oh if I'm just cured, I'll try to be better! I'll be good!" But of course once we get over that we forget our promise.

That's why the Qur'an analyzes this weakness in human nature. For example, in one verse it says, basically, that when people go on ships and then there's a problem and the ship is about to sink

suddenly those on board remember and they pray to God to save them. But once they get to shore, they forget. This is the kind of indirect proof from our nature, as humans, that we know God.

Finally, another thing that can be relevant here is derived also from the Qur'an. The Qur'an tells us that beyond this basic knowledge of the existence of the Creator, that a person is inspired with the basic knowledge of right and wrong. One passage in the Qur'an says that God has fashioned the soul and He inspired into it the fundamental knowledge of right and wrong. (91:7-8) This knowledge of course could be perverted through the influence of personal reasons or other social pressure.

So human being, by his or her nature and in his or her purity, recognizes some of these points. And these, to me, are quite legitimate sources of information. It is not scientific in a sense that you can put it in a test tube, but it is so common and so one can not really overlook it.

Host: Does the instinctive way of knowing God contradict the intellect? Some may say that the intellect is the enemy of faith or a challenge of faith. Some may believe that faith requires that one close one's mind; doesn't think but instead just accepts things because he is incapable of understanding.

Reply by Jamal Badawi:

I don't think that there are any contradictions not only with intellect but in general. All human faculties such as the senses including also the intellect are part and parcel of the whole process of seeking the truth. None of these by themselves will be sufficient, but on a whole they are not really in contradiction. In fact I would say, even more positively, that from a Muslim point of view one of the main things that make the human being distinct, one of the basic blessings that he is given by God to make him different from animals since animals can think as well, is intellect. So the intellect is a God given gift or blessing. How could we interpret that as a challenge or antithesis of faith? This doesn't really stand.

On the other hand, we can also say that the use of intellect and the human faculties in general could be in themselves a source of knowledge, a source of reinforcing the faith and making sure that the person is on the right track. Even in the areas of beliefs, where most people would say that belief is not something you can apply normal human reasoning to. Yes, human reasoning may fall short of it but it is not useless.

In fact, the Qur'an even addresses people who did not use their minds and in many of the passages in the Qur'an the appeal is made for us to utilize our minds if we use it in the right way. Again by preserving our basic innate nature, we would be able to discover the truth. The matter of belief is not just a dogmatic presentation where you should not think about it and only accept it by faith. Intellect could also be a strong foundation for a firmer type of faith.

The way I classify my understanding of this area is that the Qur'an implores the human being to search for truth, to search for knowledge of and about God on three basic interrelated levels. [Those three levels are] by looking into oneself, by looking into the environment in which one is living, and by looking into the social universe- the cosmos if you will- as a whole.

On the personal or individual level, one doesn't have to venture far to realize that God does exist. Just look into yourself, you don't have to be a scientist but if you are then you'll appreciate more the construction of the body; how it is made up of many cells. One cell becomes a cell for sight and the other for hearing; it's amazing. How does the brain operate? The circulatory system? The digestive system? The nervous system? Such coordination and beauty [is shown through their functioning]. This shows that these things didn't come to be in a haphazard way, there must have been a deliberate design behind them. So if you want to find God then look into yourself. The Qur'an says, *Wa fee anfusiqum afala yubsiroon*, which translates to "By looking into yourselves, you will find evidence to the presence and powers of God."

In another verse it even says, "Do they not reflect in their own minds?" (30:8) In fact, if one really divorces himself from any prejudice caused by social pressures one way or the other, or the worship of science as the ultimate thing, if one utilizes science in the proper way, you wouldn't have to look at the body as a whole, just start analyzing one single organ and see how it works. Like some scientists would tell you that in order to duplicate the digestive system you'd need a huge laboratory and still it wouldn't operate as efficiently as a naturally created organ would such as the stomach. We have acids in our stomachs that can erode metal but it doesn't hurt us. How could that be haphazard? If one aspect of that was developed by chance would everything else falling in line and falling together also happen by chance?

Let's move on to beyond ourselves, to find further evidence, the Qur'an also implores people to consider and to think. Take one aspect that many people think about today as very fashionable, like the ecological balance for example. Many people would take that as very clear evidence again that there is a design in this universe; vegetation as it relates to animal life and to human life; and the various atmospheric layers that we have. Everything is put together to sustain human life. If you look into the Qur'an, you find this mentioned. In one verse, in the Qur'an, it says *Wa khalaqa qula shayin qadarahu taqdeera*. "God created everything in exact proportion." (16:25) This is a very important term "in exact proportion" it's not just that He created but that there is a deliberate design behind putting all of these things together.

Another verse in the Qur'an, for example, translates to say, "Glory be to God who created in pairs all things that the earth produces, as well as their own (human) kind and (other) things which they have no knowledge." (36:36)

In another verse, when people look at the whole scheme of creation, it says, "Were they created from nothing or are they themselves the creators?" No one claims that he's created from nothing nor can he claim that he is the creator [of the heavens and earth]. Then the verse continues, "Or did they create the heavens and earth?" No one claims that. Then it says, "Nay but they see not." (52: 35-36) So the science is there. It's whether we apply it in the right place and in the proper way or not that makes the difference.

Finally, if you move into what I would call the third circle, not just looking into ourselves or the environment around us but looking into the whole cosmic order, again there is a design. The planets. The solar system. The way everything is coordinated. The distance between the sun and the earth, which if decreased may burn everything and if increased everything would freeze. This is all deliberate. The succession of day and night, the circulation or changes of seasons, which has very important relevance to the lives of the people, to vegetation, and to animal life; all of these beautiful things that we are in awe at in the universe, we look at them with great admiration, definitely show that there is a design behind them and as is obvious any design needs a designer or creator it.

One verse in the Qur'an implores us in particular to this area and says, "Have they not reflected on the domain of the heavens and earth and what God created therein?"

In another verse it also says, in the general sense of the meaning: in the creation of the heavens and earth and in the succession of day and night there are certainly signs for those who reflect. Those who remember God while standing, sitting, and laying down and ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying: Our Lord you have not created this in vain. Glory be to You. Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire. (3: 190-191)

The Qur'an repeats this giving examples even of how I said earlier in the area of belief, which mostly we'll take as dogmas, like the utilization of the human senses that the Qur'an uses, "Didn't they see...", "Didn't they hear...", "Didn't they think...", "Didn't they reflect..." all of these are integrated and regarded as a valuable source of knowledge.

Host: Is there any contradiction, again, between the concept of using one's own intellect to arrive at a pure and correct knowledge of truth and the essence of God and the way, in which we are all familiar with, which is that of revelations? [Do] revelations [walk side by side] on that path [the coming of personal conclusions] or is it contradictory to it?

Jamal Badawi:

From the Muslim's point of view, there is no problem whatsoever with this because even though we said that the human innate nature, the pure nature and source of information or pondering in the universe, is a source of knowledge, it is useful but it is not perfect. The fact that it's not perfect again does not make it useless.

There are a number of reasons that make us in need, as humans, for additional guidance through direct revelation. For example, the pure human disposition, or fitra as I called it; this human feeling, or natural disposition, could also be perverted under pressure and under indoctrination of one side or the other which might make it not really operating in the proper direction. That's why you find many people following so many different cults. They say, oh that's great I found 'the way'. Well why did you? [They reply] I feel good.

Of course feeling good is one criteria but it's not the whole criteria. One could be feeling very good but for the wrong reasons or on the wrong path. Therefore, there is still some shortcoming in this.

In talking about the senses and the intellect or knowledge, I think anyone, even a person who does not believe in God, would admit readily that our senses are limited. Our perceptions are limited. Our sight, hearing, etc- we know that. Also, we know that our perceptions could also be deceived or they can deceive us. If you put a spoon in a glass of water, it looks crooked. A very well known phenomenon is of people traveling in the desert or in hot areas and would see in front of them a lake or a puddle of water- the mirage- but it actually does not exist. At the time it's seen it is a reality to the person seeing it. So our perception is very useful, but it still falls short of getting to know everything.

On the other hand, science is fine. Science can resolve many issues and problems that are purely scientific- that are purely technical. Science can tell you for sure how to use technology for example to

communicate sounds and pictures; this can be determined fully by science. However, there are many aspects in lives of people that are beyond science also. There is the moral aspect, there are the ethical standards, and there is the application of the fundamental principle of good and bad. As we said the [principle of good and bad] is instinctive but still needs some modifications and limitations. And we know throughout history that people have always had differences as to what exactly defines the proper ethical or moral standards. In order to resolve that problem, there must be a higher authority, God, Himself, telling us and providing us with stable standards of ethics and morality within which you can interpret various details.

Finally, and perhaps this is in my mind the most important reason, is that we know that knowledge is not only limited to science or books or perception. We know that there are certain aspects of knowledge, legitimate knowledge, which does not lend itself to any of those tools. For example, take the knowledge of the unseen. What happened in the past before history was recorded? If you wanted to get any information on that there is no recorded history. Or at least there is dispute about the recorded history. Revelation can tell you what, for example, the stories of previous prophets and what they said and what their message was.

There are issues that no matter how much you use your mind you will not be able to arrive at a final conclusion. An example of that would be the knowledge about God. You can't feel the presence of God. You can feel the attributes of God but you can't have full knowledge without having a prophet or messenger in receiving that revelation from God and the communication from Him to us. So, in essence, I don't see contradiction. Actually, they all supplement each other. They have to be simply used in the proper context.

Host: Now back to God in Islam, do Muslims in general have a special term or a special name for God or do they just use the word God?

Jamal Badawi:

The proper terminology used, in Islam, for God is "Allah." There are a number of reasons for having a special word for God. First of all, the term "Allah" means, in Arabic, the one and only universal God or Creator and Provider of the universe. Notice here I am emphasizing "the one and only." So a Muslim would not simply say, "There is one God." That would not be as accurate or as strong an expression as saying 'the one and only God'.

The main point to be emphasized here is that, unfortunately many of the writings that are found in various libraries in the West, which are not written from a Muslim standpoint or how Muslims understand Islam, depict Allah as if He is some type of a tribal Arabian God or even the 'God of Muslims'. For example, they'd say Mohammed worshiped *his* Allah. Or Muslims worship Allah. Even if they use the term Allah they put it in such a way that leaves the reader or audience with the impression that maybe it is not exactly the same God.

The reason for considering the term Allah as more accurate, is that Allah is not only just a meaning of God it is also a personal name for God, both a reference to God and His personal name. This is beautiful in a sense. You don't just say God but you can also say Lord but when you say Allah you're invoking the name, the personal name, of God. It establishes a personal touch or a pull between the human being and the creator.

The other thing, which I consider also relevant, is that the term Allah, in Arabic, is not subject to plurality. For example, in English you can say God and you can also say gods. In Arabic there is nothing that is equivalent to [the English term] Gods, nothing whatsoever. In other words, there is no Allahs for example. This emphasizes the purity of Islamic monotheism.

A third reason, which is quite interesting as well, the term Allah does not lend itself to any gender. In other words, there is no female or male gender for the term Allah. In English you can have god and goddess. In Arabic, this simply doesn't exist, which shows that the term Allah is a lot more accurate than using the term God even if you are using a capital G. At least it is relatively more accurate in conveying the true nature of the Supreme Creator.

1.2 Monotheism- Analysis of Creedal Formula

Summary of previous lecture "Source of Knowledge about God"

There were two points that were discussed in the previous lecture. The first dealt with the basic sources of knowledge about God or about beliefs in general. The second was the Islamic term for God.

The first issue is the one we spent the most time and focus on. According to Islam, there are three basic sources of knowledge: fitra or the innate pure nature [of the person], the use of the human faculties, and the revelation. On the question of fitra, in Arabic, which like I said translates to, roughly, the pure universal natural disposition of the human. This is the kind of 'built in' spirituality that is inherent with the creation of the human. A person has this basic nature of recognizing the presence of God, of also having the basic distinction between good and evil, and also the feeling to turn to God at the time of need, distress, or danger.

Secondly, we discussed the use of human faculties as a source of knowledge, which includes both the senses as well as the intellectual. We have given various examples from the Qur'an that shows that in Islam there is no contradiction between faith and reason. In fact, reason and the use of intellect could be very strong tools to strengthen and inculcate faith in the human being.

Then we discussed various quotations from the Qur'an where it implores people to look into and within themselves, like the functioning of the human body and like looking into the environment and see the delicate ecological balance. [The Qur'an also implores people to] look into the entire universe and its creation. We said that this kind of coordinated and balanced system of creation, according to Islam, is the most profound evidence of the existence of God and the most obvious manifestation of his divine attributes.

We added, however, that these two resources of knowledge in themselves might not be sufficient without some divine guidance. [This is] because the pure and innate natural disposition may be clouded by personal weaknesses, social pressures, or other historical forces. Also, our human faculties and reasoning are at times limited. They are not absolute. We are not perfect. And at times they are fallible.

This leads us to conclude that humanity needs divine revelation. This is very important to resolve issues that human beings can never settle [and come to a universal agreement on] like what is ethical and moral. It can help, also, acquire the type or category of knowledge, which could never be obtained by the use of conventional scientific methods and these include the knowledge of the unseen, knowledge of the attributes of God, about the purpose of creation, about the nature of life after death.

The second issue we were discussing is concerning the basic term used in Islam to express God. We said that the Arabic term is Allah and this term means 'the one and only universal God to all humanity.' I'm trying to emphasize that we're not talking about two different things when we say Allah or God. We indicated even that the term Allah is more accurate as compared to the English term. The English term god is subject to being plural where one can say 'gods.' It is subject to the female gender when you say 'goddess.' Where as the term Allah, in Arabic, does not have an equivalent that is plural and takes neither gender.

1.2 Analysis of Creedal Formula

Concept of God in Islam Part 2

Host: Am I correct in understanding that Muslims, when referring to God- to Allah, are referring to the same deity as the Christians and Jews for instance?

Jamal Badawi:

Fundamentally yes [Muslims refer to the same God as do Christians and Jews]. Just like when a French man says 'un dieu' which is the French equivalent of the word God. I have never seen anyone say that when the Frenchman says 'dieu' that he's talking about the God of the French people. This is a very simple and logical rule. However, often times this rule is violated when writers, who are not thinking from a Muslim point of view, write about Islam, which is the most common literature in this country. This leaves the reader with the distinct impression that Allah is the God of the Muslims. Indeed this false impression and stereotype still persists until today.

The other day I was addressing high school students in Queen Elizabeth High School and I kept explaining what the word Allah

means and we talked about the same basic monotheistic concept of deity. After I finished, one student addressed me and asked me a question using "Your God." And I told him, "Brother, let's not talk about 'my God' and 'your God.' Let's talk about our God. The God of the entire humanity." This shows how persistent this kind of misconception is even until today.

Host: This raises an even more interesting point. What term do Christians and Jews, living in the Arab world where Arabic is the mother tongue, use for God?

Jamal Badawi

Well you'd be surprised that they use the exact same term as Muslims do, Allah. This is simply because Allah is the Arabic term for God. If you go, for example, to Lebanon, which has an approximate population of half Muslim and half Christian, you would not be able to distinguish [who is what]. If you hear people talking, you'll hear them say Allah. The Christian will be saying Allah and the Muslim will too. They are basically the same thing.

Of course it is quite possible that a Jew, Christian and Muslim may have some differences about specific interpretation or definition of divine attributes. They may have differences in accepting or rejecting certain types of doctrines, like the idea of chosen people or the idea of the trinity. There may be differences on such kinds of doctrines but on a whole, on the fundamental level, they are really talking about the basic thing; they are talking about the one and only transcendent, all powerful, all merciful creator and provider of the universe.

In reality, the concepts are the same.

Host: How can we reconcile ourselves with all the writers on Islamic studies that claim that Allah is not an Islamic term and that Allah existed as the name of a deity in the Arabian Peninsula years and years before Islam appeared?

Jamal Badawi:

I have already explained what the word Allah, in Arabic, means; the one and only creator. When a term has been perverted or used in a mistaken or erroneous way that does not change the reality (meaning) of it. In fact the name must be restored to its original use. This is one point. A very important point to bring up is that the pre-Islamic Arab knew nothing about monotheism. This is a common error and a common mistaken assumption that all they knew was idol worshiping.

This is a very common error because monotheism *was* known to the Arabs. Indeed, it was introduced centuries before Islam by prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. We know that prophet Abraham took his son Ishmael to Arabia and this is why Prophet Ishmael is regarded to as the Grandfather of the Arabs.

You can say that the Arabs did have some notion and understanding of monotheism. Possibly at one time or another they used the term Allah in the proper sense. The fact that they perverted the practice and forgot the true teaching of Abraham and Ishmael, as happens in many nations: a prophet comes and when he is gone the people deviate from his teaching introducing their own ideas.

This does not necessarily mean that the term Allah really does not refer to what it actually is intended to refer to. With the advent of Prophet Mohammed, this term was restored back to its originality. To be more accurate, monotheism was restored back to its original purity just like in the case of the Kabba, for example. The Kabba was built initially by Prophet Abraham as a shrine of monotheism, for the worship of the One God. Interesting fact: it's the first house to ever be built on earth as a shrine for monotheism.

The fact that pre-Islamic Arabs had perverted the use of the Kabba and put idols inside it, does not change its historical origin. That's why when Prophet Mohammed and the Muslims had attained victory, they destroyed the idols and cleansed the Kabba and restored it to its original self.

It's a matter of restoration of monotheism.

Host: Having clarified the term Allah and clarified its meaning in Islam and how it relates to the word God in English, is Islam, as a faith, expressed in a [precise] form like the shayma for the Israelites?

Jamal Badawi:

It does, it's simple yet very profound. Sometimes when people hear 'simple' they think it's only for simple people or simple minds. This is simple but very profound. In Arabic it is *Ashhadu ana la illaha illa Allah wa ashhadu ana Mohammadan rasula Allah*. This translates to English as "I bear witness that there is no deity (or no God) worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Mohammed is His prophet and messenger."

As you may notice, you can say that this creedal form or confession of faith is composed of basically two points, which reflect two very important beliefs. The first part "I bare witness that there is no deity except for Allah" is a reference to the concept of pure monotheism; the oneness or unique oneness of Allah. The second part, "I bear witness that Mohammed is his messenger," is actually a reflection of another concept that we have which we'll be discussing in another lecture: the concept of prophet-hood in Islam.

You might wonder why I say prophet-hood and not just the belief in Mohammed, but the answer to that (as will be clarified later) is that once a person believes in Mohammed, who is the last of all the messengers, by definition one must believe in all the prophets before him.

The mere recitation with conviction, under no compulsion, of this according to Muslim jurors, this would be sufficient to enter the person (reciting this) into the folds of Islam. In other words there is no other official process, no "church" structure or hierarchy. The person might say this phrase in front of anyone but actually saying it with conviction is sufficient. It's a matter of sincerity, deep understanding, and conviction and not ceremonies.

Host: It is very interesting to note that the shahada or the creedal formula of Islam starts with negation. In other terms, it doesn't say 'There is one God' but it says 'I bare witness that there is NO God but one God.' Is there any significance to that initial negation?

Jamal Badawi:

There are at least three reasons for the use of negation. First, by definition, when a person admits the supremacy and oneness of Allah, then one must reject any other deity than Allah. In other words, it would be a contradiction to say that there is God but somehow implying [at the same time] that there are also other gods. Pure monotheism means the rejection of any other false deity and the negation of any 'god-hood' attributed to any of the creatures of Allah.

The second main reason is that even though pure monotheism has been preached by all prophets throughout history (according to the Qur'an), the concept still gets perverted and changed. People added their own ideas and philosophies, which results into a sort of 'paganizing' or changing the purity of the nature of monotheism. So it was necessary and very important to clarify the right from the wrong and which deviations are not authentic

and relevant to the pure teachings of the prophets from Adam to Mohammed.

The mission of Prophet Mohammed as being the conclusion of this prophetic tradition (since Muslims believe that all the prophets had preached Islam) that extends throughout history leads to the third point. The third reason is that it is essential to clarify the errors that have taken place prior to the mission of Prophet Mohammed so that it warns people and brings to the attention of the believers what kinds of temptations and erroneous interpretations of God has already taken place so as to avoid them and maintain the future purity of the faith and the purity of monotheism.

Host: Since it's a very wealthy and rich concept, we should start by looking at the negations and then move (in the next program) to the affirmative side of the creedal formula in Islam. To start with the negations, could you elaborate a little bit more on the position of Islam vis a vis the idol worshiping that was rampant in the Arabian Peninsula?

Jamal Badawi:

The idol worshiping was not only rampant among the pre-Islamic Arabs but if you study history you'll find that it was rampant in so many other nations. The Qur'an discusses, for example, the dialogue between prophet Abraham and his father, "And mention in the Book the story of Abraham. He was a man of truth; a prophet. Behold, he said to his father, 'O my father, why worship that which hears not, and sees not, and can profit you nothing?'" (19:41-42)

A passage that is quite intriguing in the Qur'an talks of the story of Prophet Abraham and his people. His way of speaking to them helped show them the error of their ways. The story, just to keep it brief, says that the people went out of the town for one of their festivals and Abraham refused to go with them. He stayed behind. When everyone went out, he went inside the temple where they had their idols. He took an axe and smashed them to pieces. He only spared one idol, which was the biggest of the idols (and some scholars interpreted that Prophet Abraham placed the axe in the arms of this idol). When the people returned, they entered the temple and were outraged and very angry to find that their gods were all smashed to pieces. They suspected that it was probably Prophet Abraham because he was always talking about monotheism and the rejection of idol worshiping. They questioned him and the verse says "They told him, 'Are you the one who did this to our gods, o Abraham?' He

said, 'Nay, their biggest idol did it. Ask them, if they can speak intelligently.'" In other words he was bringing home to them, in a very logical way, the point. Yes, there are so many gods here and they must have gotten into some quarrel and so the big idol smashed them. If you don't believe me then ask them. Where basically he's saying that these objects, which cannot hear, cannot defend themselves against destruction.

The Arabs before Islam had their share of this kind of perversion just like many other nations did. In fact, there were so many idols worshiped by the pre-Islamic Arabs that sometimes you'd have a tribal god (an idol for a specific tribe) and so when they'd travel they'd carry their gods with them. Imagine a god being carried in your pocket or in your caravan. This was so ridiculous. What is even more comical is that they would get dried dates and then would press it into the form of a statue and that would be their idol they'd worship. Then when they get hungry during a shortage of food, they eat it. They eat their god. They also used to sacrifice animals to their gods thinking that they were gaining favor with them. These are just few examples of pre-Islamic Arabia.

With the advent of Islam all of these forms were totally annihilated and monotheism was restored.

Host: What would make human beings to worship a piece of stone, a statue- an inanimate object?

Jamal Badawi:

It is very rare that you'll find someone in his or her heart that really believes that this is their God. There are other reasons for this perversion. For example, historically at times when some people died, a pious man died for example, some may make a shrine or a statue in memory of that good person. As Ibn Abaas, one of the companions of the prophet, explains (as quoted in Bukhari) that gradually people forget the origin of the idol or the statue and actually turn it into an object of worship. This was one of the reasons people turned to idol worshiping.

Another reason is that many idol worshipers did not believe that those idols are Gods in themselves but in fact they used them, more or less, as intermediaries between God and man. They thought that by appeasing those idols, by worshiping them, by sacrificing animals at their feet would lead to their favor with God.

The third reason is perhaps more common because it applies to not only the idol worshipers but to others as well. That is the human weakness and tendency to try and materialize everything

into a tangible and physical form, which is a human inclination. Especially in the early stages of human development, the higher concept might be difficult to accept and touchable things might be closer to people's minds.

With this kind of attitude people started searching for God, and in that search they tried to create an image for God that they could identify and relate to.

Host: The worship of natural phenomena and forces of nature like the sun, the moon, and the wind was again very common in mythology as well as pre-Islamic Arabia. What would cause people to worship these?

Jamal Badawi:

This is another example, or another facet of man's error while searching for truth. The motive for searching for truth is good and commendable but again there are errors on the way and that's why you mentioned earlier that you'd need divine revelation to guide that search.

In the search for The Power behind the universe, people get so fascinated with powers of nature; the powers that they feel can benefit them, or the powers that are capable of bringing harm to them. People had many superstitions concerning the impact of the heavenly bodies, and stars, and astrology is a reflection of this kind of thinking.

With this kind of mindset, people gradually may turn from admiring these forces of nature, to worshiping them, trying to appease them, or seeking benefits from them. Islam fully rejects this type of worship. In fact, it is indicated in the Qur'an that these are only creatures [and creations] of Allah and not substitutes and they definitely do not have parallel powers with Allah.

In the Qur'an it says, "Among His signs (of God's existence and power) are the night and the day, the sun and the moon. Adore not the sun or the moon but adore (or prostrate) to Allah who created them if it is Him you wish to serve." (41:37) This is very simple logic and very powerful at the same time. The night and day, the sun and the moon are created by Allah and so we should worship Him who created them.

Since prophet Abraham is a common prophet for all monotheistic faiths, he is mentioned in the Qur'an often. In this one instance he was educating his people and wanted to give them a practical example. It says, "Lo! Abraham said to his father Azar: "Takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest

error." So also did We show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might (with understanding) have certitude. When the night covered him over, He saw a star: He said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, He said: "I love not those that set." When he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said: "This is my Lord." But when the moon set, He said: "unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray." When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he said: "This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all)." But when the sun set, he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah. "For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allah."" (6:74-79)

1.3 Monotheism- Forms of Shirk

Summary of Previous Lecture "Analysis of Creedal Formula"

The previous lecture discusses the Islamic concept of creed. The first of the three major points discussed was the profession of faith. The statement when said with conviction a person Muslim instantaneously. This statement is *Ashhadu ana la illaha illa Allah wa ashhadu ana Mohammadan rasula Allah* or "I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except for Allah (God) and I bear witness that Mohammad is His messenger." This statement is the first thing emphasized and we tried to indicate that to say this confession of faith there is no need for a church or a priest or any type of officiation. It's a matter of conviction and sincerity.

The second main point discussed was the question as to why the Islamic creed or confession of faith starts with negation rather than affirmation. First of all it emphasizes the recognition of the supremacy of God. Out of necessity it excludes any divine attributes, divinity, or godhood to any of the creatures of Allah. It is required to have a negation as well as an affirmation. Secondly, we raised the point that monotheism, belief in the one and only universal God, has been preached throughout history through Adam, Prophet Noah, Prophet Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed.

However, it is evident that throughout history, monotheism has been compromised. It mixed with philosophical and theological ideas that diverted it from its pure and original form. Islam in the final form or the mission of the Prophet Mohammed being the conclusion of this divine revelation, must take into account these

deviations or aberrations of the original monotheism. As such, it is very important to clarify negations so that we don't lapse back into these previous errors done before us.

Thirdly, we started dealing with specific areas of negation. We described two areas: the idolatry or worship of idols which the Qur'an has condemned in very clear terms and the worship of objects in nature or the powers in nature such as the wind, sun, moon. We quoted the Qur'an indicating that these are creatures of Allah and that they are really signs and proof of His presence. They should be taken only as signs not as objects of worship in themselves.

1.3 Forms of Shirk

Host: How does Islam look at polytheism and what is the verdict that Islam has on polytheism?

Jamal Badawi:

The verdict is similar to the previous two negations. The Qur'an makes a very clear tie between the unity in the order of the universe (ecological balance) and the cosmic order of the universe at large, on one hand and between the oneness of the creator on the other. In other words, it is clearly made that this coordinated universe cannot really emanate from more than one will, one designer, and one creator. This is the first logical basis to start from as is clarified through the Qur'an.

It follows from this that any assumption of more than one God, or more than one ultimate authority in the universe is contrary to what you see as a balanced order in nature. An example from the Qur'an, "If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both! but glory to Allah, the Lord of the Throne: (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!" (21:22)

Furthermore, the Qur'an also indicates that the assumption of more than one deity or god, each with independent will, automatically results in the possibility and likelihood of conflict between those independent wills or authorities. The Qur'an says, concerning the presence of more than one god, "Behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to

Him.” (23:91) In other words, if there were more than one creator, then each can take away what he has created and just claim absolute will and power over his own creation, which is unattainable.

Host: Now lets move from polytheism, which is the belief of several gods, to the belief of two Gods: God of good and God of evil. How does Islam view the dichotomy between good and evil and the worshiping of two Gods?

Jamal Badawi:

The belief of two gods is viewed as a form of polytheism. The number may be two but it is still the multiplicity of God. Any recognition of rival authority to that of the one and absolute Lord of the universe is one form of polytheism. All the arguments and discussions we have had on the previous question on polytheism would be applicable here as well.

We can add a few more points as well. When you assume the presence of two Gods then you have one of two possibilities and no more: either that these two Gods have equal power or that one of them is superior to the other.

Lets begin with the second assumption. If we assume that one God is more powerful than the other then it means the other God is really a weaker God or an inferior God compared to the first. When we talk about deity, the question on inferiority and weakness is totally irrelevant and completely inapplicable. So that’s a logical contradiction.

The other assumption is that both Gods have equal power. The questions that may be interesting to focus on here are 1) to assume two equal powers is contrary to the cosmic order and to the unity that we see in the structure of the universe and 2) what happens when there is a decision that’s controversial and they have a disagreement? For example, the god of good wants to give life to someone while the God of evil wants him to die. Now who will prevail? How do you reconcile a controversial question like that? It’s impossible.

Some may argue that these two Gods could compromise, but when you talk about compromise it means that one would have to give a little here and then the other would do the same at another time. That means ones will and the others will could not be absolute or final and that again is a contradiction because we already said that to talk about

God we're talking about a type of authority as absolute, final and uncompromising.

On these grounds the question of duality, or having two Gods, is totally unattainable and illogical as far as Islam is concerned. This leads us to conclude that there must be one creator, one will, and one authority. As far as the paradox of the existence of good and evil we can seek a better explanation than assuming that there are two Gods and in fact we address this issue in a future series.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "Take not (for worship) two gods: for He is just one Allah. Then fear Me (and Me alone)." (16:51) Another verse says, "If Allah touches you with hurt, there is none can remove it but He: if He designs some benefit for you, there is none can keep back His favor: He causes it to reach whomsoever of His servants He pleases. And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (10:107) In conclusion, taking two Gods is only another form of polytheism, which is unacceptable to the Muslim.

Host: Thus far we've talked about the association of other deities with Allah, whether they are in the form of idols or in the form of natural phenomena like the wind, the sun, the moon etc, or are bonnified deities. Let's discuss the worship of other orders of creation such as spiritual beings, Satan worshippers, sorcery, magic, and people making a whole faith, a whole religion, a whole belief, or cult out of them. How does Islam view the association of God with others that are not exactly deities?

Jamal Badawi:

You raised three issues that I'll deal with separately. The first issue is whether or not a Muslim believes in other orders of creation. The second issue is whether those creatures or orders of creation have independent or separate authority or power than Allah/God. And the third issue is that of invoking and communicating with those spirits for purposes like magic, sorcery, exorcism etc.

On the first issue, Muslims do believe in other orders of creation and unseen creatures. For example, the Qur'an talks about the angels as one creation of Allah. I believe that Jews and Christians also believe in this same basic concept. There is no problem in admitting their existence even though we can't see them. Secondly, the Qur'an also

discusses devils, Satan and jinn in general and that's another set of creations, which are also unseen. Thirdly, the Qur'an talks about the survival of the soul after death. After the physical bodily death, the soul keeps on living for eternity. The main point is the belief that the souls of the humans who die, even if their bodies have dissipated, still lingers and survives until the Day of Judgment and thereafter. As far as this issue is concerned, yes there are orders of unseen creations that you cannot physically touch or see.

The second issue is whether Muslims believe that these creatures have powers. The answer is most definitely no. Again, Islam is quite strict on this purity of monotheism and relating all power to where it belongs: to God, to Allah. It follows from this that these spirits or other levels of creation have no power, whatsoever, that are independent from God's power. They have no knowledge of the unseen or the future more or less control over them. All that is said concerning their abilities to have these is considered superstition. God is the one who controls everything.

The third point is concerning whether one can evoke those spirits, utilize them, or communicate with them. We find, again, that the position of this in Islam is very clear. It condemns in no ambiguous terms any form of magic, sorcery, exorcism or any similar type of witchcraft. In fact, the Qur'an clarifies that one of the dangers is that people may end up worshiping Satan. So when we talk about the church of Satan or Satan worshipers, it is something that the Qur'an warns about over 1400 years ago. In the words of God Himself it says, "Did I not enjoin on you, O ye Children of Adam, that ye should not worship Satan; for that he was to you an enemy avowed?" (36:60)

There is a very clear position taken here. In fact, this is all supplemented by the saying of prophet Mohammed in which he equated the use of magic or belief in it with becoming a disbeliever. In other words, the resort to magic, especially black magic, can amount to disbelief in Allah. In fact, many people sometimes resort to superstition or sorcery because somehow they feel they can seek refuge in those spirits or in their protection.

Again the Qur'an is very clear: protection comes only from Allah. Seeking refuge should be only directed towards Allah. An ayah that clarifies this says, "Say (O Mohammed): "No one can deliver me from Allah (if I were to disobey Him), nor should I find refuge except in Him."" (72:22) In fact, to conclude, from our own human experience,

we hear about people who slip into cults, especially in sorcery and magic, and end up going crazy because it has dangerous psychological effect on them and it's a dangerous area to get into so one should really direct himself to the creator and seek refuge and protection only from him.

Host: Moving away from associations with Allah of other deities and orders of creation to associating Allah with other humans? In other terms, what about the worshipping of humans?

Jamal Badawi:

This is, again, part of the category of negation (negating the oneness of God) that we mentioned earlier. It is rejected and not acceptable in Islam. Again, this negation is not ambiguous whatsoever. The Qur'an is very clear and decisive on this issue.

The worshipping of others may take a variety of forms. To start with, one of the practices of worshipping other human beings is the worshipping of ancestors. I believe it still exists until today. People believe in the spirits of their predecessors who come back to oversee what their descendants are doing. At times they are actually worshipped. The Qur'an puts this attitude in a very logical form. It simply says that since it is He (God) who created us and created our predecessors, then only God should be worshipped and not our predecessors.

To quote from the Qur'an: "The Lord of the heavens and the earth and all between them, if ye (but) have an assured faith. There is no god but He: It is He Who gives life and gives death, - The Lord and Cherisher to you and your earliest ancestors." (44:7-8) The Qur'an also talks about the confrontation that took place between Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) and the pharos, magicians, and others around him. He addressed them, according to the Qur'an, by saying, "Your lord and the lord of your fathers from the beginning!"(26:26)

Why worship other creatures that Allah has created? In a more affirmative tone, we find in the second chapter of the Qur'an verses 21-22, "O mankind! Adore your Guardian-Lord, who created you and those who came before you, that you may attain righteousness; Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith Fruits

for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when you know the truth."

It follows from this that the worship of human beings is totally rejected not only as it relates to ancestors but in any other form. In fact, we find throughout history, that some of the deviation from the true path of pure monotheism has taken the form of worshiping other holy men or holy people. A righteous man may have died, for example, and his grave is worshiped and ultimately the person himself is deified or regarded as a deity (as god).

Even the Qur'an rejects the worship of great prophets and messengers of God because even those people, great as they might have been, are still creatures of Allah. We know, for example, from history, that this idea has lingered in the past among even the older civilizations, even before the advent of prophet Jesus (peace be upon him). The Egyptians believed in Horace as the Son of God. The Persians believed in Mithra as the Son of God. It's quite fascinating to note that in both cases and others Mithra and Horace were regarded as Sons of God who came to expiate the sins of humanity and reconcile man to God by sacrificing their own lives. Like I said, this is quite interesting and fascinating if we know that this idea did actually exist before the mission of prophet Jesus (peace be upon him).

Host: You just brought up a very important point. How is Jesus viewed in the Qur'an? Is he viewed as half way between human and divine? Is he viewed as divine or totally human? Where does he stand?

Jamal Badawi:

In Islam there is nothing that is half divine and half human. There is no order of existence or creation between divinity and humanity or in general between creator and created. A person would have to be either the creator (which is only one Allah and He is not human) or created. There is no half way. There is no compromise. He has to be either not both.

The position of Islam is very clear on this point. Instead of using my own words let's turn to the Qur'an. Chapter 112 is comprised of four verses: "Say (o Mohammed to the people): He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, the Absolute; He begetteth not and nor is he

begotten; and there is none like (unto) Him." The position is very simply put in this short chapter.

Also, we find in chapter 6 verses 101-102, "To Him (Allah) is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: How can He have a son when He hath no consort? He created all things, and He has full knowledge of all things. This is Allah, your Lord! There is no deity but He, the Creator of all things: then worship you Him: and He has power to dispose of all affairs." There is no mediating authority. There is no in-between type of existence.

Since you are asking particularly about prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), we find that his name is mentioned in the Qur'an frequently. In the fifth chapter verse 75, in the Qur'an, it says, "Christ the son of Mary was no more than a messenger, a prophet; many messengers passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how Allah doth make His signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth!"

Another citation to clarify it further is, "Yet have they taken, besides him, gods that can create nothing but are themselves created; that have no control of hurt or good to themselves; nor can they control death nor life nor resurrection." This passage can be found in chapter 25 verse 3. This clearly shows that all of those human beings, including Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) and all other great prophets and messengers are creatures of Allah. They are people who cannot control life, they cannot defend themselves against death. They cannot resurrect themselves without the permission of Allah, which confirms again the point that there is one authority in the whole universe.

A last citation to make sure this question is answered clearly, the Qur'an says, "It is not (possible) that a man, to whom is given the Book (revelation), and Wisdom, and the prophetic office, should say to people: "Be you my worshipers rather than Allah's": on the contrary (He would say) "Be you worshipers of Him Who is truly the Cherish-er of all: For you have taught the Book and you have studied it earnestly." Nor would he instruct you to take angels and prophets for Lords and patrons. Would he bid you unbelief after you have bowed your will to Allah in submission in Islam?" This passage can be found in chapter 3 verses 79-80.

Notice here the emphasis is being made on the fact that the prophets viewed themselves as servants of God. And this is not really a demotion. The biggest pride for any human being, including all those great messengers of God, including Mohammed, Jesus, and Abraham, is to say that they are true servants of Allah. In fact, if you go back to the New Testament (of the Bible), you'll find lots of passages that would support this position of their basic humanity and humility.

Host: So being the servant of God is really actually an honor.?

Jamal Badawi:

Exactly.

1.4 Monotheism- Forms of Shirk (Cont'd) & Divine Attributes

Summary of 1.3 "Forms of Shirk"

In the last lecture, we continued the explanation of Muslim creed, which says basically that there is no deity except for Allah and that Mohammed (peace be upon him) is Allah's final messenger. We explained, also, that Allah is the Arabic term for God as the creator and sustainer of the universe. We discussed briefly as to why the Islamic creed starts with negation rather than affirmation. We indicated that there have been lots of human errors throughout history in trying to attain knowledge concerning God.

So far we've discussed six specific types of negations. The first is idolatry, the worship of idols. The second is the worship of forces of nature such as the stars, the moon, and the sun. The third is polytheism or the belief in more than one God. Fourth is dualism, which is the belief of one God for good and one for evil. Fifth was the discussion of other beings such as spirits, Satan, or those who practice sorcery. The sixth is the worship of other human beings whether they are ancestors, people who were pious and righteous, holy men, or even in some cases prophets and messengers of God. We indicated in the lecture that all the great messengers were proud to be servants of Allah and that includes Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed. We, finally, clarified that all these forms of worship or interceding of God are forms that are not consistent with the Islamic perspective on pure monotheism.

1.4 Forms of Shirk continued & Divine Attributes

Host: The word worship as we've used it so far was worship in the sense of deification. Is there another sense that worship may take? Does it have another meaning within Islamic context?

Jamal Badawi:

This is an interesting question because in fact we could have a whole series just on the concept of what it means in Islam to worship, but I'll limit myself to your question as it relates to worship of other human beings.

According to Islam, blind obedience to other human beings, the refrain from using our Allah-given intellect and human faculties in searching for the truth is a form of worship of those individuals. To illustrate this I'll relate a story that occurred over 1400 years ago during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed may peace and blessings be upon him.

At that time a passage was revealed in the Qur'an discussing those following their religious leaders prior to Islam. It says, "They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah." (9: 31) One of the companions of the prophet, Ali Ibn Hakim, who had some knowledge and background on Christianity, came to the prophet and said, "O messenger of Allah, it is not true that those people really worship their priests." So the prophet asked Ali, "Didn't some of those religious leaders make unlawful things that God made lawful?" Ali replied, "Yes." The prophet asked, "Didn't they take authority by also making lawful that which God made unlawful?" Ali said, "Yes." The prophet replied, "Well then that's who they worship." This really conveys the message that you don't have to bow down before a human being to be considered as worshiping that person. This denial of obedience, this limiting ones use of God-given capabilities such as intelligence, thinking, and the literacy to do research, is one form of worshiping those individuals. Interesting enough to say that this story is 1400 years old. It's remote, way back in history, but I consider it very relevant to today's generation and problems.

Host: Now how about obedience to a dictator? Would this still come under the concept of worship?

Jamal Badwi:

This could fall under the worship of other human beings. Indeed some people misunderstand or misinterpret the various liberation movements that took place throughout the history of Islam. Many times they try to separate between what may be considered as social reform or political uprising on one hand verses purely religiously motivated types of uprisings. The fact of the matter, as far as Islam is concerned, is that obedience of dictators, just like obedience of clergy without thinking, constitutes a form of human worship. This type of obedience is a kind of acceptance of the authority of dictators above the authority of God.

Like I might have indicated before, in Islam there is nothing called one compartment that you should render unto the leader and another unto God. Everything should be rendered unto God. This is a kind of struggle that you find in the history of the Muslim people against dictatorship, past and present, which is a continuous and ongoing process.

More specifically, in the Qur'an we read, in chapter 5 verses 47-50, that those who do not rule in accordance with what God has revealed are regarded as unbelievers in the first verse, as oppressors in the second, and as rebels in the third. It is interesting to notice that this passage in the Qur'an simply says so of whoever does not rule in accordance with what Allah has revealed. It does not exempt Muslims. In other words, a person may pay lip service to their faith, a person may claim to even be a Muslim as a ruler whereas his actions and his behavior are contrary to Islam and are contrary to the revelation to Allah. Even that person, though he might nominally be called a Muslim, would definitely be going against Islam and that indicated quite frankly with the majority of rulers in Muslim countries today whether they have the titles of kings or sheiks or presidents. These titles (of being Muslim) are there to mislead people and indeed in many cases they're totalitarian regimes and dictatorships that are contrary to the Islamic conjunction and system of government.

Host: So far we have been limiting the concept of worship to worshipping extra-personal beings or phenomena. How about worshipping oneself or self-worship in the form of vanity and pride? How does Islam view these?

Jamal Badawi:

Even this was not left out in the comprehensive coverage of monotheism in the Qur'an. It is regarded as worship of other mortals. It might take a variety of forms. Let me focus on two of

those forms. In some cases it may even take the form of self-deification. The Qur'an, for example, narrates the story of the pharos during the time of Prophet Moses may peace and blessings be upon him. Chapter 79, verses 23 and 24, in the Qur'an says, " [The Pharaoh] collected (his men) and made a proclamation, Saying, "I am your Lord, Most High."

This is, perhaps, the utmost of human arrogance when a person claims to be the final and ultimate authority; to say what is to be done and what is not to be done. But self-worship also takes another more subtle form that many of us at times fall into in some form or other to some degree. That is when we take our own desires and our own opinions and place them as the ultimate source of guidance, the ultimate source of values to guide us in our lives. [This occurs] even though it may contradict with clear and decisive divine injunction.

In fact, there are many specific verses that discuss this in the Qur'an. One of those verses (in chapter 25, verse 43) says, "Have you seen him who takes his/her low desires and whims for his/her God? Will you be a guardian over him/her?" In other words, the term used in the Qur'an, "Illahahu," which means his God or his Lord. So instead of saying 'Allah or God is my Lord', I would say 'My desires,' 'What I want,' 'What I think,' is right and is my ultimate source and I put aside all revelations.

In my humble opinion, I consider this form of adoration or self-worship as one of the most serious abortions in our age. Many times we are tempted to say, 'Well material is everything. Let's put aside spiritual and moral teachings and divine revelations. As far as it serves my objectives, I can use it if not I'll just put it aside.' And we normally hear these statements made quite frequently: 'I know what's good for me.' 'I know what's best for me.'

Sometimes, we even go against the clear and decisive injunctions of Allah, even when we destroy ourselves through drinking, doing drugs, and other aberrations and still we say, 'I know what's good/best for me!' Again placing what we think is right, what we think is good supreme to and above what God Himself tells us.

Host: There is one concept still left. That is the concept of pantheism; God existing in everything and everywhere. How does Islam view this idea?

Jamal Badawi:

I think this kind of argument mixes, as a philosophy, between the two different things. On one hand, to say that we can see the power of God, we can see, in a metaphorical sense, the hands of God and his compassion by looking at his creation all around us is one aspect. On the other hand, to argue that because God created everything and his power is manifested in everything, then God must be inside or incarnated in everything. I believe these two views should not be mixed.

From the Muslim standpoint, and this relates to one of the earlier discussions, is that the Qur'an encourages and implores us to look into ourselves, our environment, and the universe at large. By finding the functioning and operations of all of these things, we are bound to find that there must be a designer, a compassionate all-powerful Creator behind all of that. This doesn't mean that He is in the sun, or He is in the moon. This kind of aberration is simply carrying the argument too far, which is not acceptable in Islam.

Host: That takes care of the negation part of the creed. It is time now to start looking at the affirmative attributes of Allah from an Islamic standpoint and I was wondering if one could possibly define Allah, so to speak?

Jamal Badawi:

There is a problem when we use the term 'define' because anything that is definable must be limited, must be finite. Allah or God is infinite. Then you can be subject to any definition because definition is limited and God is beyond limitations. This is one point.

This problem could be addressed by making a distinction between two things: the essence or nature of Allah and the divine attributes of Allah. Now let me explain what I mean by this. When we talk about the essence or nature of Allah, we can say that his nature and essence is so sublime, so transcendent, that our human minds, no matter how intelligent they may be, are incapable of completely grasping his essence. However, as far as the attributes of Allah, these can be within reasonable reach and understanding as far as our human comprehension goes. I say 'relatively' because again, when you talk of attributes of the infinite, you can't completely separate the attributes from the essence but at least the distinction can be useful.

Sometimes people wonder how could we fail to understand the essence of God and only know his attributes/manifestations of power? What we forget when we make this argument is that even in physical and tangible things, we sometimes are unable to

define their essence. Electricity, atomic energy, and many others can be examples of this. We can explain a great deal about electricity and how it works, but can we really describe the essence of electricity? We can't quite do that.

Another example is human beings. You can describe a human saying he's this tall and weighs this much and his face looks like this or that. That's fine but can you even with the best knowledge of psychology and psychiatry, understand the essence of a human being? Can you understand your own essence as a human being? What I'm saying here is even in physical and tangible things, in this universe, we are incapable of penetrating our understanding to fully comprehend their essence. Then how about comprehending the essence of the Supreme Being?

Host: As a matter of fact, even when we limit ourselves to using attributes rather than the essence, we find ourselves facing other problems. I was wondering if you can comment on that. The problem is if we're talking of Allah as being finite and ourselves in being limited and relative. This means we have to use relative terms that are understandable within our own vocabulary, so to speak. We start using terms that have human connotations. How do we reconcile these two? Like when we say God sees and hears. These are all terms that we understand in our own human context or perception. How do we bridge that gap when we start using these terms in reference to Allah?

Jamal Badawi:

I think you are quite right when you point to the fact that no word in any human language, be it Arabic, English or other, can be completely accurate in conveying the attributes of Allah. However, through His infinite mercy, Allah has communicated with us in a way that we can understand. Like we said again, using terms that might not have exactly the same human or material meaning, but these terms would be useful in giving use some understanding and perspective about God Himself.

The Qur'an, also, in God's own words, warns us in taking these words in a very literal or very physical meaning that we understand as human beings. To make the point less abstract, here are a few citations from the Qur'an that illustrate the point.

The first, found in chapter 42 verse 11, says, "There is nothing whatsoever like unto God and he is the one that hears and sees all things."

Another moving passage, "No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things." (6:103) Again, I repeat a citation that was used previously, because it is very crucial is chapter 112 that says, "Say (O Mohammed to the people): He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, the Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him." Notice the last part is very important, "And there is none like unto Him." There is no one comparable.

Whenever we use terms such as, 'God hears and sees,' it doesn't mean that He needs eyes to see with and it doesn't mean He needs ears to hear with. Even we as human beings sometimes don't see everything with our eyes. If I ask you to close your eyes for a second and imagine the shape of your TV set or your couch you can see it even when your eyes are closed. Similarly, we don't hear everything with our ears.

Of course, when we talk about Allah or God we're not simply making comparisons, we're simply saying that He does not need the physical or biological organs in order to be able to see or hear.

Host: It is clear that we are trying to say or emphasis the differences between God and His creatures. This brings us to a touchy, yet very relevant, question: how do Muslims reconcile themselves to or view the biblical statement referring to God having created man in His own image?

Jamal Badawi:

You're referring to the first chapter in Genesis where God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." (Genesis 1:26) Muslims see two problems with this type of statement or any similar statement. First, as indicated previously, Allah does not have any image because he is not physical [in the human sense]. As was cited before, "There is nothing whatsoever like unto God." There is nothing whatsoever that you can think of, or you know, or experience which is comparable to Allah because if He's comparable to anything that is physical then He is limited and finite. This is one thing to keep in mind.

From the Muslim standpoint, it is erroneous to reduce the infinite to any finite form including even the finite image. A way people have interpreted this kind of biblical statement throughout history was to imagine and draw out and make a picture of God in human form. A recent issue of Time magazine, dealing again with the new theological argument of God, reproduced four paintings/ pictures that people perceived as pictures of God. In

all of them, invariably, there is a figure or face of a man, a relatively older man.

This is not acceptable to Muslims. In fact, these configurations of God raise a number of questions. First, why make a picture of a man and not a woman? Second, why are they pictures of whites and not blacks or yellow people (for example)? Why do the pictures contain facial features of Greeks or Romans rather than Chinese, Japanese, Africans or others? You open a whole can of worms once you reduce God to a certain image, which is quite limited by nature.

Fortunately, for Muslims, this problem never arises. In fact, my Christian friends have asked me, "When you think about God, do you have a mental picture of Him?" I tell them absolutely not. The spiritual image is much more valuable and important and more befitting (again I'm using image in a very allegorical sense here).

Why? Maybe when you reduce it to the physical you can identify with it. But this again, is a very serious error because you're limiting and destroying the whole notion of the transcendence and dissimilarity of God to his creatures.

Host: Now keeping these precautions in mind, can you explain to us some of the more specific divine attributes of God/Allah that is given in the Qur'an, for example?

Jamal Badawi:

Obviously, when discussing the attributes of Allah, we're talking about the Creator, so the creation would come as one of the foremost attributes of Allah. This can be explained best by referring directly to the Qur'an. For example, chapter 6 verse 102, says, "That is Allah, your Lord! There is no god but He, the Creator of all things."

In the Qur'an, we also find that creation and sovereignty go hand in hand. Some believe that God created the earth and then left. Not at all. In the Qur'an it says, "Is it not his to create and to govern (or command)?" (7:53)

In chapter 42 verse 12, "To Him (Allah) belong the keys of the heavens and the earth: He enlarges and restricts. The Sustenance to whom He will: for He knows full well all things."

1.5 Monotheism- Divine Attributes Continued

Summary of 1.4 "Forms of Shirk Continued & Divine Attributes"

We previously discussed the reason behind the negation found in the Islamic creed and how it relates to monotheism. We then discussed the worship of human beings whether they were saints, prophets, great persons, clergy. Then we discussed that following people who take the liberty of violating the commands of God and giving their own interpretations, which are contrary to the scriptures is also a form of worship; whether this worship is shown through obedience to dictators who try to impose themselves as the final authority instead of God. Then we discussed self-worship by disregarding God's guidance and revelation and thinking that we are smart enough to supersede the teachings and the commands of our Creator.

In the second part of the program we started the discussion on the positive aspects or the affirmative aspects of belief in Islam. We started with three basic remarks. First, is to distinguish between the essence and nature of God and His attributes. We said, we as human beings who are finite and limited cannot totally comprehend the essence and nature of Allah. However, we can understand some of His attributes.

The second point was that even when we try to understand some of the divine attributes, we have to be careful of the terminology we use. When we say God or Allah hears or sees doesn't mean the same human connotation those words have (i.e. seeing with eyes and hearing with ears).

The third remark, as a result of the previous two remarks, is that we should not create images of God in any form because this tends to reduce the infinite Creator into something physical, which, by definition, is very limited. We discussed how various painting, such as Michelangelo's and others, trying to depict God in a human form. Then we discussed, more specifically, one of the affirmative attributes of the Creator and that is His creation. We said that not only is He the Creator of the universe but that creation and sovereignty go hand in hand. So God is the Creator and Lord or Controller and Sustainer of the universe.

1.5 Divine Attributes Continued

Host: The concept of creation itself is a continuous, on going, process. It's not a one-stop thing that is created today and then that's it. One would assume that hand in hand with the concept of creation, God should be pre-existent and eternal in the sense that He existed before everything and will remain in existence after the end of time. How does Islam view this idea?

Jamal Badawi:

On this particular point, I'm glad to say that the stand of Islam on this is not that different from the Judea-Christian tradition. We hear our Christian and Jewish friends, for example, saying God is the only God, the first and the last. In fact, the phrase that is used in the Qur'an, in chapter 57 verse 3, "He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent: and He has full knowledge of all things." In that sense, yes, He must be the first and the last or how could we say that the whole universe emanates from Him?

Sometimes it is difficult for us, as humans, to understand how anything can be infinite. It's difficult for us to imagine this infinity. Let me give a very simple example to show that even finite things are difficult to describe. Many astronomers would tell us that the distance between earth and the farthest star is two thousand million light-years away. This is dazzling because to imagine the whole distance from the earth to the moon, which is relatively very close, the light of the moon reaches us in about one and a half seconds. The light from the sun, which is much, much farther, reaches us within a few minutes (about 8) or so.

Traveling at the speed of light, which is 186,000 miles per second, would take us two thousand million years to travel from the earth to the farthest star. It is dazzling. I can't imagine how this number even could be fully comprehended in our human minds.

The example I'm giving here is to show that even finite things are very difficult to imagine. When we think about Allah, the Creator, we should then be more accepting of the fact that He is the first and the last even though we might not totally comprehend how there could be nothing before Him and nothing after Him.

We can turn to the Qur'an to give us some clarification of this. First, it says, "And put thy trust in Him Who lives and dies not."

(25:58) If God dies who is capable of giving Him life since God controls life? Therefore, it is illogical for Muslims to believe that God is subject to death like humans. Furthermore, if God died, even on a temporary basis, who is going to run the universe in His absence? So everything is related to the will and eternal perpetuated life of God.

The second quote from the Qur'an, chapter 28 verse 88, says, "And call not, besides Allah, on any other god. There is no god but He. Everything (that exists) will perish except His own self. To Him belongs the Command, and to Him will you (all) be brought back."

"All that is on earth will perish: But will abide (for ever) in the presence of your Lord,- full of Majesty, Bounty and Honor."
(55:26-27)

I'll conclude with a very famous and widely quoted passage in the Qur'an, known as Ayat Al Kursi, "Allah. There is no god but He,-the Living, the Self-sustaining, the Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what is ahead of them (future of His creation) and what is behind them. Nor shall they compass any of His knowledge except as He wills. His Throne does extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme in glory."(2:255) If you notice here, though it's only one passage, several things are emphasized. The first is the emphasis on the oneness of God- there is no deity but Him. The second is that He is a living God. He did not create all this and then leave. Third, that he is eternal. Fourth, His knowledge is all encompassing. Fifth, His throne (which can also be a symbol of power or sovereignty) extends over everything on earth and in the heavens. Sixth, there is intercession or intermediary except by His permission. This means that no one can act as a judge and that God is the ultimate Judge and any interceding is by the permission of God. Finally, He is not subject to some of the human weakness like feeling tired or needing sleep or rest.

Host: That's interesting for it brings us to the concept of the 'Day of the Lord' or the Sabbath if we are using the Judea-Christian term. How does Islam view this idea?

Jamal Badawi:

In order to give a proper comparison, I have the King James Version of the Bible with me and in order not to use my own

words I'll quote it and then I'll give you the Islamic perspective on this issue.

The book of Genesis (chapter 2 verse 2) says, "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made."

Since your question is to see whether there are any parallel to the Judea-Christian view, in a nutshell, I could say that Islam does not have any parallel to this. In fact, there is an opposite statement in the Qur'an to this particular statement in the bible. Here are some passages from the Qur'an that reflect a different kind of understanding of this divine attribute.

First of all, in chapter 50 verse 38 of the Qur'an, it says "We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in Six Days, nor did any sense of weariness touch Us." Furthermore, to clarify the issue, the Qur'an says "Nor is Allah to be frustrated by anything whatever in the heavens or on earth: for He is All-Knowing. All-Powerful." (35:44)

Another statement (which is found more than once in the Qur'an including 16:40) is "For anything which We have willed, We but say to it, 'Be' and it is." In other words, once Allah decides on something it is enough to say 'be,' there is no tiring or fatigue involved at all. This is repeated, "Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it, "Be" and it is" (19:35)

Though there may be some fundamental similarities between Islam and Judea-Christian traditions there still are differences. Unfortunately, some writers make very superficial comparisons. For example, they'll find in the Qur'an the story about Adam and Eve, and so they conclude that everything that the Bible says also has parallels in the Qur'an, and this is quite different. When we assume that God could get tired and needs rest, then we are bestowing upon Him characteristics that are human, which do not apply to Him.

This is not the only example. I can give you another citation, which is very similar to this from the Bible; again Genesis chapter 3 verse 8 talks of Adam and Eve after committing their mistake. It says "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Now this as well as the other citation on God resting after creating the heavens and the earth, both depict God in human form. This is called anthroporphism, to think of God in human terms- that He walks, becomes tired, and rests.

Now, like I said, as far as the Qur'an is concerned there is no single parallel in the entire Qur'an that shows this kind of anthroporphism configuration of understanding of deity.

This leads to one more question, since you raised specifically the concept of Sabbath. A very common mistake that we find in Western media and books (even ones written by scholars) say that, for example, the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday and the Christian Sabbath is Sunday and the Muslim Sabbath is Friday. This again is a very superficial comparison. It is true that on Friday, Muslims are supposed to have a congregation of prayer. However, the concept of Sabbath, which is derived as the 'Day of the Lord' or the day when the Lord rested, has no analogy whatsoever. Fridays, to the Muslims, does not have that connotation.

Host: It is interesting now to look at another aspect of the affirmative attributes of God. They really go hand in hand again with the concept of creation and eternal life and the concept of the indefatigable nature of God and that is the knowledge and wisdom in several of the quotations that you have made in the Qur'an. You reiterated the idea of omniscience of all knowledgeable (when talking of God). Could you elaborate a little on the knowledge and omniscience of God?

Jamal Badawi:

We must keep in mind that the knowledge of God is absolute and complete and is not limited by time. The best way to discuss this is to refer directly to the Qur'an. First, the Qur'an says, "From Allah, verily nothing is hidden on earth or in the heavens. He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Might, the Wise."(2:5-6)

The second passage says, "Verily the knowledge of the Hour (the Day of Judgment) is with Allah (alone). It is He Who sends down rain, and He Who knows what is in the wombs. Nor does any one know what it is that he will earn on the morrow: Nor does any one know in what land he is to die. Verily with Allah is full knowledge and He is acquainted with all things." (31:34)

The third passage is quite interesting, it is in the sixth chapter of the Qur'an, verse 59, "With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knows but He. He knows whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf does fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is inscribed in a clear record." I find it difficult to find something

more to add to this. The expression in the Qur'an is so powerful and so clear that even with the difficulty of translating the meaning into English, I supposed it could give us the answer better than any human prose since it is the words of God Himself.

Host: One thing that we should possibly add here is the idea a lot of people have that, yes, God is omniscient and God is All-Knowing, but He is only omniscient and All-Knowing of what is manifested, of what is external, of what can be seen and what can be heard, of what is tangible so to speak. How about our innermost thoughts? If someone says, "I'm thinking of something evil, but I'm not going to do it so God will never know about it." That kind of a thing. I may be putting it in a simplistic way but what is Islam's position on this?

Jamal Badawi:

Actually this is another form of anthroporphism because in our understanding as human beings we say that we cannot have knowledge unless we have some source of that knowledge. Again, like I said this does not apply to Allah when you're talking about the absolute and perfect knowledge. I can refer, again, to the Qur'an, covering specifically two areas. The first is what happens when a few people conspire together in secret- would Allah know about this? And second, like you said, does God know the innermost thoughts in our minds?

The first aspect is talked of in the Qur'an, "See you not that Allah does know all that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but He makes the fourth among them, - Nor between five but He makes the sixth,- nor between fewer or more, but He is in their midst, wheresoever they are." (58:7) No matter where you hide, He is there.

The second citation discusses more directly the inner dialogue that you may have. "And whether you hide your word or publish it, He certainly has full knowledge, of the secrets of all hearts. Should He not know, - He that created? And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted with them." (67:13-14) It follows that if He is the one who created us, who created our innermost thoughts, how can He not know what we think of? The slightest thought that even passes in our mind without telling anyone, He definitely knows of.

Host: The last thing we can mention regarding the attributes of omniscience and knowledge of Allah is how does the Islamic concept of the omniscience of Allah

compare and relate to the similar attribute in the Judea-Christian tradition?

Jamal Badawi:

I hope I don't sound like I'm always trying to show the differences between the faiths. Of course I must show (and we've repeated this in several previous programs) the origin of the monotheistic faith (and the others that have also proceeded from Allah) but of course as time went on apparently philosophical and theological arguments have been inserted in the Christian revelation. Even though you can say that the basic notion of the all-embracing knowledge of God is in the Qur'an as it is in the Bible. The Qur'an is stricter. There is no muddying of the thought by any citation that could be misinterpreted to mean anything less than God having full knowledge of all things.

In order to make the discussion on a clear basis, I will refer to the Bible. There are two passages that strike me as really inconsistent with the Quranic conception of the knowledge of God. Quoting them directly; the first is in the book of Genesis in chapter 11 verses 5-7. It describes the attempt of humans to build the Tower of Babel. It says, "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

When I read that I get the impression that God did not realize that people would be smart and intelligent and not able to build the Tower of Babel, which He just discovered that they built. Aside from the fact that this passage may give the connotation that God was worried about the arrogance or scared of the power of humans, which again would be contrary to the Islamic concept that God is All- Powerful and All- Knowledgeable.

The second passage is in the book of Exodus chapter 32 verse 14. "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." Notice here 'the Lord repented of the evil.' We as human beings can repent because we are sinful, we are imperfect, and we don't have full knowledge. Sometimes when we do something wrong we say things like, "I was ignorant," or "I was bad," and so "I repent." But to attribute to the Creator Himself that He has to repent, also carries the meaning that somehow He didn't know or rushed to His decision so He didn't have full knowledge when He decided.

As I indicated before, this notion does not have any parallel in the Qur'an, which insists that the knowledge of Allah is perfect, complete, and He does not go into these human types of faults. In fact, this might relate to another interesting issue, which relates to the knowledge also.

One time I participated in interfaith debates. One of my friends in Montreal who is a priest, said that the fact that the Son of God, Jesus (Muslims view Jesus as a prophet), came as a human being is a blessing because after all this means that God is sharing with man his feelings. God becoming man gives Him the ability to feel what man feels, to sacrifice and suffer as humans do. He gave me an example, saying that a human being, as great as he may be and as big as he may be, cannot fully understand an ant. He must be an ant in order to fully understand how the ant feels or behaves.

My answer to him was that as humans it's true that we are imperfect and it's impossible for me to understand how the ant feels. But the knowledge of God is so embrative that he does not need to become man to understand man because He created man. He knows all the secrets. Does it mean that for God to be able to understand animals He has to turn into them? No, His knowledge is All-Embrative, it is so complete that his full knowledge of the sufferings, the feelings, and the faults of human beings is there without His need to materialize in any physical form.

Host: Now we can move from that to another misconception that is perpetuated in most western literature concerning Islam and that is the 'God of Islam' is put on such a high pedestal, that He is untouchable and unapproachable. He is so remote and far from His creatures that He cannot relate to them. What do you have to say about this?

Jamal Badawi:

This again is another misconception. It is true, like we said, that God has perfect knowledge, perfect will, and perfect power. This does not mean that he is unapproachable. And this is the beauty of it. In fact, the very first statement in the Qur'an is *Bismi Allah il Rahman Al Raheem*, which translates to "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent and the Merciful." This is the very first thing you read when opening the Qur'an. Every chapter of the 114 chapters in the Qur'an begins with this line.

Muslims believe that whenever you start any act you should always say 'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent and the

Merciful.' In that opening the attributes of mercy are used. When you begin eating, when you go to sleep and awake from sleep, when you leave your house, when you get into your means of transportation, when you enter the house and so on and so forth; a true and devoted Muslim would always start with that phrase. This, like I said, emphasizes the attributes of the mercy of Allah.

There is something even more beautiful than that. The original words used to convey the mercy of Allah are both *Al Rahman* and *Al Raheem*. *Al Raheem* simply means the Merciful, which is an attribute that can be shared with humans. You can say that I am merciful or that you are merciful and that Allah is merciful. In that sense, the term is not unique. But the other term, *Al Rahman*, according to one interpretation, doesn't just mean that Allah is merciful but that all mercy emanates from Him. He is the source of all mercy, which is much more beautiful.

One whole chapter in the Qur'an carries the title *Al Rahman* (The Source of Mercy). We also find that the passages that deal with mercy in the Qur'an are plentiful.

"My mercy extends to all things. That mercy I shall ordain for those who do right, and practice regular charity, and those who believe in Our signs" (7:156)

1.6 Monotheism- Divine Attributes (Forgiveness)

Summary of 1.5 "Divine Attributes Continued"

This lecture mainly discussed the positive, or affirmative, attributes of Allah. We reviewed the topic of creation and said that God is the Creator and that creation goes hand in hand with sovereignty. We then discussed the attributes of life and eternity; we said that God is living. Not only is He living, but He is the First and the Last. Then we talked about another divine attribute and that is the absolute will and power of Allah as the creator and we concluded from this that God could never get tired or need any rest. A question was raised as to Muslim's standing towards what is said in the Bible. The book of Genesis, chapter 2 verse 2, says that God rested on the Sabbath after creating the heavens and the earth. There is no parallel to this in the Qur'an, because as the Qur'an puts it, God never tires and so never needs any rest.

Then we discussed the absolute knowledge and wisdom of Allah and we said that this knowledge extends from the past, to the present and to the future. That's why another question was raised as to why Muslims do not have a parallel to God's regret

in creating mankind, which can be found in the book of Genesis (Chapter 11 verses 5-6 discussing the Tower of Babel) and the book of Exodus (chapter 32 verse 14 which shows that God feels remorse at create mankind).

We decided, from the Islamic standpoint, that there is no parallel whatsoever in the Qur'an to these passages in the bible, since the assumption is that God's knowledge is all prevailing and all complete He does not need to discover something He didn't know would happen.

We, also, added that God's knowledge covers all that is in the future until the Day of Judgment and thereafter for eternity, then it follows that God does not need to become man in order to know how human beings feel or suffer. That this is not necessary because His knowledge is already there. He does not need to experience becoming a man in order to know additional information. He knows everything already.

The last portion of the lecture discussed whether the emphasis on the transcendence of Allah in turn leads to being a remote God who is unapproachable. To answer this we quoted from the Qur'an giving examples on how this question is untrue. These quotes show God's attributes of mercy and compassion. Allah is not only being merciful but is the force of mercy (*Al Rahman*: all mercy emanates from Him). These attributes are very prominent and clear throughout the Qur'an. Additionally, every action a devote Muslim does will always evoke the mercy of Allah.

1.6 Divine Attributes (Forgiveness)

Host: Let's move to a more human level. How does the closeness of Allah relate to me? There are two dimensions or implications to this: the first is when I need Him I reach out to Him and the second is when I sin and need forgiveness I reach out to Him. Can you please take those two implications and separately discuss them. Also, how close is God to the human being?

Jamal Badawi:

I think the word 'close' is very expressive. Many have asked me if I thought of God as a personal God or someone 'up there' and how personal my relationship with God is. As I said, the word 'close' is very expressive because that is the exact term used in

the Qur'an about the relationship between Allah and a person who is trying to be pious and is trying to reach out for Him.

In chapter 50 verse 16 it reads, "It was We Who created man, and We know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein." The Qur'an directly states that God is closer to us than our very own jugular vein. There is no more noble a way to express the closeness of Allah, the Creator, to His beloved creatures.

A simple nomad came to Prophet Mohammed (may peace and blessings be upon him) and in the simplicity and innocence of a desert man, he said, "O messenger of Allah, tell me, is God close enough so that we may have private discourse with Him and pray to Him even in secrecy or is He far away so that we'd have to call out to Him so that He can hear us?" The prophet (peace be upon him) did not know how to answer this simple question.

Soon afterwards, however, he received a revelation. The Qur'an says in response to the nomad's question, "When My servants ask you (Mohammed) concerning Me, I am indeed close to them: I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calls on Me: Let them also, with a will, Listen to My call, and believe in Me: That they may walk in the right way." (2:186)

I have not heard of any faith on the face of the earth that has a practice that parallels Islam as far as manifesting and expressing this close and direct relationship between man and God. Take the five daily prayers as an example. When I say prayer, I am not using the limited sense of supplication. Instead, I am talking about the specific steps in doing the five prayers from doing ablution to the specific movements (bowing to God, recitation of the Qur'an, etc) that constitute prayer.

As I said I don't know of any faith that provides as much direct relationship with God as the prayer provides for Muslims. This is something you would have to really experience in order to fully appreciate it. Making ablution, standing facing the Kabba (the first house on earth built for the worship of God built by prophet Abraham), starting the prayer in full devotion and humility, reciting verses, virtually talking to Allah. You do not see Him in front of you in a physical sense, but you see Him in your heart and you communicate with Him, you supplicate to Him. There is no intermediary. There is no one is regarded as an intermediary between man and God; not even the Prophet Mohammed himself or any of the other prophets (may peace and blessings be upon them).

This relationship between mankind and Allah is the most direct and noble type. In the history of the Prophet Mohammed and his followers, you'll find that they spent portions of the night praying, in earnest, feeling so joyful (and focused on the connection with Allah) that they would forget the world around them. I do not know what could be more close and noble than not only this citation in the Qur'an but also the practice of a devout Muslim in his direct, close and personal relationship with Allah.

Host: Let's move to the other dimension, the dimension of forgiveness. Now forgiveness is such a wide and rich concept. Can you break it down for us? I want to start, however, with the idea of original sin because that is a very important concept in the west and I would like you to relate it to the Islamic concept. How does Islam view the idea of original sin and what are the repercussions and implications of it?

Jamal Badawi:

If using the term original sin then the answer is different. If asking about sinning in general then of course you would say that Islam says that we are sinful as human beings and that we should find ways of retribution for those sins. We will discuss this point later on.

When we use the term 'original sin,' I suppose you are referring to the Judea-Christian tradition. Before we make any comparisons let us see what the position the Judea-Christian tradition holds concerning the original sin and then compare it to Islam.

The idea of original sin is of when Adam and Eve committed their first act of disobedience towards God by eating (the fruit) from the forbidden tree. By necessity, this original sin would be inherited by all their decedents and so they are condemned. The only way for mankind to attain forgiveness is through reconciling God's justice and mercy. According to some, because God is merciful He wanted to forgive Adam and Eve, but since He is also just He wanted to punish them. So there seems to be a conflict (in the mind of God) between His mercy and His justice. To reconcile the conflict, He must sacrifice blood and that blood must combine humanity and divinity. The theological claim is made that Jesus is the only person who is both divine and human. By believing in him, his blood atones for the sins of humanity.

The fact that Adam and Eve committed an act of disobedience is similar between the biblical presentation and Islam. The Qur'an mentions that they committed that disobedience. However, there are five basic reasons why there is no concept of the original sin in Islam.

The first reason is that Allah created human kind. When He created us, He knew we were made of material and spirit. As the story goes He created mankind from clay, whether it's from the literal sense or the sense of having the same elements that you find in clay on earth and as such we know that we are part material and part spiritual. They are intermingling components of our existence. God knows that as humans we are malleable, we are sinful, and we are imperfect. However, our malleability and our sinfulness should not be equated with criminality. This does not mean that we are criminal, hopeless and that there is no way for us to make up for our mistakes.

Why then would Allah condemn the entire human race because of a weakness that Adam and Eve befell?

The second reason why Muslims do not accept the original sin doctrine is that the Qur'an makes it very clear that Adam and Eve, after committing the mistake realized it for a mistake and actually earnestly prayed to God for forgiveness. The Qur'an specifically says, "They said: "Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: If you forgive us not and bestow not upon us your Mercy, we shall certainly be lost" (7:23). Both, Adam and Eve, prayed for forgiveness. Additionally, it is interesting to notice that the terminology used in the Qur'an does not put the blame for that sin on Eve. In fact, the Qur'an uses the term for both, that both of them repented. Adam and Eve asked for forgiveness and Adam and Eve were both forgiven, in other words it blamed both of them. In fact, it's also interesting to note that in one verse in the Qur'an the blame is directed to Adam. It doesn't mean that Eve didn't take part in the disobedience but it shows that there is no theology in Islam that blames women for the fall of Adam as exists elsewhere.

We should realize that the sin does not really deaden our heart or close the door for reform and moral growth.

The third reason for the inability to accept this doctrine is that Allah is both just and merciful. According to the Qur'an, the mercy of Allah far exceeds his justice. It's not a matter of if one commits a sin then no matter how much one repents and prays for forgiveness then s/he will still be punished for it at the same level as one who commits the sin and doesn't repent. Allah's

mercy supersedes all. The passage we cited in the previous program sums it up: "My mercy encompasses everything."

From the Muslim point of view, how is it that God, knowing our weakness and listening to the supplication and sincere prayers of Adam and Eve, refuses to forgive them unless blood is shed and specially the blood of an innocent and great man like Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him)? Why can't God forgive, if He has the full authority and power to grant forgiveness?

The Qur'an leads us to the fourth reason. It says explicitly that Adam and Eve not only prayed for forgiveness but also that they were forgiven *before* they were sent to live on earth. The Qur'an says, "Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful" (2:37).

A similar verse can be found in the Qur'an in chapter 21 in the 22nd verse, which gives the same impression that God had already forgiven Adam and Eve.

Finally, another important reason, why Muslims do not believe in original sin, is that the original sin, as a doctrine, assumes the inheritance of the sin. Even though Adam and Eve did it, everyone, until the Day of Judgment, carries the stigma of that sin. This is not the case according to the Qur'an: "No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another" (53: 38) Therefore, sins do not pass on to others. No one can carry the sin or pay for the sin of others. Everyone stands on his or her own feet. The chapter continues "That human can have nothing but what s/he strives for; That (the fruit of) his/her striving will soon come in sight: Then will s/he be rewarded with a reward complete" (53: 39-41).

This does not necessarily mean that we are saved only by our deeds. This would be human arrogance. Definitely we are also saved by the grace of God. However, according to the Qur'an we have to earn this 'grace,' which can only be earned by those who show sincerity and turn in earnest towards Allah.

In fact, Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) echoed this concept when he said, in one of his sayings, that every child is born innocent and pure. No one is born with original sin. His exact wording is "every child or infant is born pure and innocent as the white cloth." It is what he makes of himself later on and what doctrine he gets, which makes him turn to good or turn to bad. Initially there is no sin to be inherited.

Host: Let's move to the next dimension of forgiveness that comes from one of the points you had mentioned. If Adam and Eve were forgiven, why were they sent to earth? Many think that they were sent to live on earth as a punishment to make up or atone for their sins.

Jamal Badawi:

It may appear that Adam and Eve were sent to live on earth because of that mistake and, therefore, being here is a punishment. According to Islam, we are not living on earth as a punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. In fact, the Qur'an says that Allah told the angels, before he created Adam and Eve, that He had created earth. Specifically God says to the angels, "I will create a vicegerent (trustee) on earth " (2:30). This means that Adam and Eve were destined to live on earth even before they were created.

Now a question might arise, as to why they were kept in the Garden of Eden or paradise before they came to earth. The way I understand this, as a Muslim, is that they needed to learn the consequence of obedience and disobedience to Allah before living on earth. So they learned their lesson before coming to earth.

In conclusion, we are not on earth as punishment; we should not have this stigma of paying for that sin. We are here to accomplish a very noble task, which the Qur'an describes as being the trustees of our Creator on earth.

Host: Let's move to the idea of repentance, which is the heart and soul of forgiveness. First of all, does the concept of repentance exist in Islam and what are its dimensions? How does a person repent in Islam? Do we need confessionals? Do we need absolution?

Jamal Badawi:

To start with, confessionals do not exist in Islam whatsoever. A Muslim should not confess except to He who controls the powers of forgiveness, which obviously is Allah alone. No intermediaries, no priesthood, no prophet even or messenger can grant this forgiveness.

As far as the concept of retribution- how you make up and repent for your sins- there are a few conditions regarding repentance.

The first condition is to stop the evil or wrong that is being done. That is considered an advance of good will. The second condition is to feel sorry for what you've done. If you don't feel sorry for

what you've done that means you might feel too arrogant to admit the error. Admitting error is not bad- it is moral courage. Thirdly, one should have the sincere intention to not repeat that offense or any other offense again. I'm saying 'sincere intention' because you may intend to never do this mistake again but as you go on your human weakness might pull you back into it. At least, at the time of making repentance you have the determination of not going back to the sin again. The fourth condition, which may or may not be applicable, is when the sin involves encroachment on the rights of others then the repentance cannot be accepted unless the rights are returned to those who have been infringed upon.

For example, if I stole something from you or take away some of your rights, I cannot really say I'm sincerely repenting unless I return your full due rights.

"Proclaim! O Mohammed to My servants that I am indeed the Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful; And that My Penalty will be indeed the most grievous Penalty."(15:49-50) So we have a choice between the 'grievous penalty' or the wide open door for repentance and forgiveness.

Another passage says, "*Innal hasanat uthhibna al sayyeeat*," which roughly translates to "For those things that are good (deeds) remove those that are evil (deeds)." In other words, good deeds atone for previous bad deeds. Even if you've committed lots of bad deeds do good and that should take care of the past mistakes.

"Say (Mohammed to the people): 'O My Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah. For Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Turn you to our Lord in repentance and bow to His Will, before the Penalty comes on you: after that you shall not be helped.'"(39: 53-54)

"And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring Allah to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins, - and who can forgive sins except Allah- and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done." (3:135) This passage shows one of the characteristics of a true believer.

Allah says in the Qur'an, "But, without doubt, I am (also) He that forgives again and again, to those who repent, believe, and do right, who, - in fine, are ready to receive true guidance."(20:82) It is interesting to note that the word used in this specific passage that relays the term forgiveness is *ghaffar*. And *ghaffar*

is different from the more widely used term *ghaffoor*. *Ghaffar* simply means that He is not only one who forgives but also one who forgives again and again continuously.

1.7 Monotheism- Effects of Monotheism on Life

Summary of 1.6 "Divine Attributes (Forgiveness)"

What we did last time was to more or less conclude the discussion of the positive or affirmative divine attributes of God. Last lecture there were two basic issues that we spent the majority of the lecture on. The first, was to correct one of the common errors and misconceptions that when Islam insists on the absolute perfection and transcendence of God, this means that He is remote and unapproachable. We said that this is not true and we had given plenty of evidence from the Qur'an, the word of God Himself, in which we have shown the complete consistency between the perfection and transcendence of God alongside His attributes of mercy, forgiveness and closeness to mankind.

The second major issue we discussed was the attribute of forgiveness with special reference for comparative purposes with the concept of the original sin and we said that in Islam this concept does not exist. There is no Original Sin in Islam; there is no parallel at all. We said that the sin is not to be inherited by from one human to the other. As the prophet Mohammed said every child is born innocent and pure and that in case we err or sin the only way to atone or remit that sin is to pray directly to God and seek His forgiveness so long as you are sincere and earnest in your intentions to avoid falling back into the sin or error.

We concluded the session by indicating that we are not here on earth by way of punishment for a sin committed hundreds of thousands of years ago by Adam and Eve. We are here because we have a certain mission that we are destined to perform and were created specifically for (and that is to be the vicegerent of the earth).

1.7 Effects of Monotheism on Life

Host: Before we move to the implications of those attributes in our daily lives, lets 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?

Jamal Badawi:

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 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.

Host: 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?

Jamal Badawi:

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.

Host: 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?

Jamal Badawi:

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.

Host: 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?

Jamal Badawi:

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?

Host: 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?

Jamal Badawi:

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.

Host: 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?

Jamal Badawi:

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.

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

Jamal Badawi:

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."

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

Jamal Badawi:

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.

Host: 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?

Jamal Badawi:

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"

