

ALI 637 – CREATING AN ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW, MODULE 1

Unit 1 : Understanding Ourselves

Chapter 1: Body and Soul, and the four faculties of Mankind

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The 4 faculties of Mankind are:

- Anger (*ghadab*)
- Desire (*shahwat*)
- Imagination (*waham*)
- Intellect (*aql*).

Filled with activities to focus on the faculty when you use it.. The experience of realizing the use of the faculty shows you its existence - *al nafs fi wahdatihi kul al quwa*

Body and Soul, and the four faculties of Mankind (Week 1)

Item 1: Tools of Measure

There are 2 ways to study objects, by means of a MEDIUM and by MY EXPERIENCE of the object itself.

There are various ways to study an object. One way is to describe the thing and explain the object and by means of a medium of sorts such as images or explanations, reach an understanding regarding said object; for example, staying indoors and studying about the sun, and its benefits and its features and its formation, and effects on earth etc.

Another method is to experience the object and interact with it and by means of experience see certain traits of said object, like going outside and seeing the sun and considering its various aspects while interacting with it, for instance experiencing its warmth via the rays that reach you.

The tool must have the capacity for the task at hand!

For each object which we want to consider and study, an appropriate tool is required. For measuring the area of a room we would not use a weighing machine. It is not because the weighing machine is bad or the room is unmeasurable, rather the right tool for our object in question is not a weighing machine, the tool and the object do not match!. The measurement of the area of a room is beyond the scope of the weighing machine. We would have to make use of a measuring tape to measure the area of a room.

Activity

Activity 1: make a list of tools we have and then consider what objects those tools can be used to study.

- In this try to start the list from external tools like a meter stick or a weighing machine.
- Build onto innate tools like eyes, hands,
 - Eyes are only capable of seeing a small portion of the physical world. (the visible spectrum is very small)
 - Hands are able to touch and sense things (this one example will be used later, try to get them to see hands as a tools for studying the texture of clothing)
- Build onto our intellect, when it feels a certain feeling (hunger) and allocates as we need to eat food.
 - Some kids get really cranky, and can't tell that that unwanted feeling is related to their stomachs being empty, they get hangry.. parents pick up on this as their intellectual capacity is more developed than the child's.

Activity 2: from the above list consider the tools - they have a limitation to them

- For instance, instantaneous speed is not actually measurable by means of a speed gun, it is an approximation,
- the exact weight is not measured with a weighing machine it is an approximation,
- the physical form of our person can't be actually captured by means of a camera, only certain details of our physical appearance can be captured, if you were to zoom on to an image it will not zoom indefinitely and reveal the atoms or electrons or further.. at one point the image is an approximation. Only certain aspects are captured in a picture.

The key point is to come to a conclusion that tools have a limit to how well they work, this is noted as % of error or the +/- tolerance factor of said tool.

And the more efficient a tool is, the higher its value becomes.

Lastly, the key point is that in certain measurements or observations we need a highly accurate tool, this example can be used: we can't measure chemistry lab ingredients or elements on the average weighing scale at home. We need a more accurate scale for measuring.

Item 2: Nafs – studied via the Immaterial Tool of Measure

Similarly if we want to measure something immaterial, it would be unreasonable to expect the measurement of the immaterial object by means of material tools. Certain tools we have are great at dealing with material objects and we can use those to study material objects, e.g. hands, eyes, tongue.

There are tools that we have at our disposal which help us study objects which are not material. Some examples of objects that are not material, yet we know them to be real and existing are **pain** and **love**. We can't point at pain, we can only point at the source like a cut, but the cut is not the pain. The cut causes you to feel pain. This pain is a very real thing but it is not something which can be observed by means of a material instrument. Hence when you go to the doctor, you are asked on a scale of 1-10: how much does it hurt? As there isn't a material object which can measure your feeling of pain.

However, as pain is an object which you experience, you are able to reply to the doctor and say 1 or 4 or 10, you are able to put a measure to the object by means of experiencing it.

This tool you used to experience the pain level, is what we call our *nafs*. The immaterial part of our being which works hand in hand with our physical body. It has a give and take relationship with our body, sometimes we get a cut on our hands and the *nafs* feels the pain, other times as the *nafs* is feeling pain let's say due to the loss of a loved one, we may undergo physical issues like a heart attack or increased blood pressure

Some ways to bring onto focus our understanding of what we mean by the *nafs*.

Explanation of the existence of *nafs*:

From childhood until when we get old, we know that our body changes, almost every cell changes every few years. Yet this understanding of "I" is a never changing thing. This remains constant. If a person loses a leg or a hand in a horrible accident, it is not like they lose a portion of this "I" feeling or this feeling of their 'self'. This 'I' is in fact your *nafs*, which remains mostly the same for most people throughout their life.

Deeper understanding of the existence of the *nafs*:

Every aspect of my physical being is divisible. I can imagine my arm or leg or body parts having the capacity of division to them. But this is not true for my sense of "I". This 'I' is not divisible, it is a singularity which does not have the capacity to be considered as a divisible entity. This is because this 'I' is the *nafs* - an immaterial aspect of my being. As it is immaterial it is also not bound by the limitation of the material world, one such limitation in this case is the capacity to be divisible.

Textual explanations of the reality of the *nafs*:

ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا
آخَرَ ۖ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ [٢٣:١٤]

Then We created the drop of fluid as a clinging mass. Then We created the clinging mass as a fleshy tissue. Then We created the fleshy tissue as bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced him as [yet] another creature. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators! [23:14]

Translation: Sayyid 'Alī Qulī Qarā'ī

It is key to note that once the physical aspects of the fetus were made, then from that another creation was made. This creation was the immaterial aspect of the *nafs*.

Item 3: The four faculties of Mankind

This *nafs* of ours is able to do a lot of things, let us look at some of those capacities.

It has 4 main capacities, just like your hand has multiple capacities:

- on the one hand by means of your hand you can gauge how cold or hot something is,
- you can see how slippery or rough a surface is,
- you can see how sharp an object is,

All of that done with the same hand. Similarly, our *nafs* has multiple capacities. We call these **faculties**. There are many faculties, but the main ones we will consider are 4. Under each is a plethora of minor faculties.

- The faculty of anger
- The faculty of desire
- The faculty of imagination
- The faculty of intellect

Today, we will try to use the second method to study the *nafs* and see its various capacities. For each capacity, please recall an experience which brings for you the corresponding feeling for each of the capacities under study:

The faculty of Anger:

Imagine the last time you got angry. All of the existence of the “I” in question felt that anger, it was not only some of the ‘I’ that was feeling anger, rather all of it as “I” is an indivisible entity. When it feels something it experiences it in it’s (the “I”s) entirety. But you have also probably experienced different intensities of this feeling. The source can be a multitude of things but the feeling of anger remains very similar, almost the same in its nature. That is because it is a faculty of the singular *nafs* feeling those various situations, albeit the situations may be changing but the general nature of the feeling stays the same. It is not like one time it feels like sweetness, then it feels like saltiness and then bitter, rather the innate nature of anger always feels the same. Yes, this nature can have different intensities of that very same nature.

- Hypothetical question (only go into if teacher sees fit):

Q: You said that ‘I’ is indivisible and that all of this “I” feels pain. How come when I feel pain from a paper cut, I can feel it in some parts but not all over my body, how can you explain this?

A: Well, the feeling of pain is felt by the entirety of “I”, albeit the origin of it is isolated to the source, if the source is physical then it is isolated in that physical area, i.e. a paper cut. But if the source of the pain is immaterial in nature, i.e. the loss of a loved one, then this pain is felt without a physical source point.

The faculty of Desire:

Consider your favourite meal, your best buddy, your parents, your potential spouse. Each of them we have an attraction towards but the nature and intensity of the attraction is very different.

Here we want to show the various sub faculties within a major faculty, all items in the example have this attraction to them but the various types differ for each example and so does their possible range of intensity. No matter how intense my love for my favourite food is, it does not match up to the intensity of my love for my best bud.

The general feeling of “like” is common for the examples given, albeit the types and displays of this like and intensity ranges for this “like” is different for each example.

The faculty of Imagination:

If you were to gather a class filled with sheep and show them pictures of a very real wolf. You won't have them running around in fear. Those images are not enough to cause the sheep to do much.. if you bring an actual wolf in front of them, they will start to run for their life..

If you show really scary images of non real monsters to a bunch of kids.. you have have a bunch of very scared kids to take care of.. even though these monsters are not real, but the *nafs* of the

kid has a faculty developed to a level which the *nafs* of the animals (sheep) does not. This is the imaginative faculty. The kids imagine and give a chance for risk to their person and this brings about various feelings in them (mostly fear in this example).

Every daydream about being superb at a certain sport or even capable of doing things you know are not possible, like having super powers etc.; this is also the job of the imaginative faculty.

The faculty of Intellect:

Consider a time when you really got angry at someone but out of fear of the punishment or uncertain outcome, you stopped yourself from acting on that anger.

Here there can be many examples given chose one

Example 1: Similarly consider a time when you had a crush on someone, and out of fear of sin or fear of a uncertain outcome you refrained from acting on that desire

Example2: consider a time when you were trying to lose weight, but you had an opportunity to eat a lot of your favourite food item. And you held yourself back.

The faculty which controlled the other faculties was the faculty of your intellect. It is also used to understand complex ideas and analyze various scenarios/objects.

Review day one and two at the end of session 3 if time permits. Focusing on the intellectual explanations of the existence of the *nafs* in sessions 1 and 2.

Item 4: Deeper understanding of Nafs

Some key points to know about the *nafs*:

1. Its faculties are many, the major umbrella faculties are 4.
2. The faculties have a range of intensities to them
3. The faculties of anger, desire, imagination are managed by the intellectual faculty
4. If the intellectual faculty is weak it is unable to manage the other faculties and they display themselves in an uncontrolled manner in a person's actions. Here are some examples.
(Feel free to make this a discussion of sorts)
 - a. Controlled faculty of anger:

A good parent showing controlled upsetness to kids for throwing rocks at passing cars.. vs a bad parent lashing out and swearing or hitting even said kids in that same situation

b. Controlled faculty of desire:

A person not overeating vs a person constantly overeating, they may be physically thin due to other factors, or they may be larger due to other factors. Overeating is the key here. Eating without the feeling of hunger present.

c. Controlled faculty of imagination:

A person keeps their belongings safe so as not to get them stolen vs a paranoid person who sees everyone as a potential thief.

d. Controlled faculty of intellect:

Thinking that its capacities are independent of Allah (swt) vs realising that even its capacity and ability is dependent on Allah (swt).

It is important to note that this faculty is also controlled by a higher level of itself, a higher intellect.

The more one leaves a faculty unchecked and uncontrolled, the more that faculty comes out in a person's actions. Hence, it is very hard for a person with anger problems to control their anger, they have left this faculty unchecked for a long time and it gets harder to manage. Same goes for the faculty of intellect, if left unchecked it starts to think itself independent of Allah (swt) till it gets to appoint where it claims that it is the center of everything. In some cases in history, certain people even claimed themselves as the greatest God. (فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى)

إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى [٧٩:١٦]

when his Lord called out to him in the holy valley of Tuwa? [79:16]

اذهبْ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ [٧٩:١٧]

[And said,] 'Go to Pharaoh, for indeed he has rebelled, [79:17]

فَقُلْ هَلْ لَّكَ إِلَىٰ أَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ [٧٩:١٨]

and say, "Would you purify yourself? [79:18]

وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَىٰ [٧٩:١٩]

I will guide you to your Lord, that you may fear [Him]?” ’ [79:19]

فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَىٰ [٧٩:٢٠]

Then he showed him the greatest sign. [79:20]

فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَىٰ [٧٩:٢١]

But he denied, and disobeyed. [79:21]

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ يَسْعَىٰ [٧٩:٢٢]

Then he turned back, walking swiftly, [79:22]

فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَىٰ [٧٩:٢٣]

and gathered [the people] and proclaimed, [79:23]

فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَىٰ [٧٩:٢٤]

saying, ‘I am your exalted lord!’ [79:24]

فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَىٰ [٧٩:٢٥]

So Allah seized him with the punishment of this life and the Hereafter. [79:25]

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّمَن يَخْشَىٰ [٧٩:٢٦]

There is indeed a moral in that for someone who fears! [79:26]

أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمِ السَّمَاءُ ۚ بَنَاهَا [٧٩:٢٧]

Is your creation more prodigious or that of the heaven He has built? [79:27]

Translation: Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī Qarā’ī

From the response that Allah (swt) gives to firoun we may guess at what he was thinking.. perhaps he was thinking that he was a very great existence, the highest of all, the most independent being.. Allah(swt) puts him in his place and says that there are more intense existences than him, one such one is the heavens (higher realms of existence) which Allah (swt) laid out its foundations.