

Unit: Understanding Ourselves

Chapter 2 - The Real ME

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

يا الله يا محمد يا علي يا فاطمه يا صاحب الزمان ادركني ولا تهلكني

C1 - The Real ME

Item 1: Non-composed vs. Composed realities

Consider the image of an apple, this apple has a stem and has seeds in it and has the peel surrounding the outer side of it. It has a sweet fibre material which makes most of it up. This apple which I considered is composed of parts. It is composed, it is made up of components.

Now consider the meaning of love. Unlike the apple, when you think of the pure meaning of love it is formless. Yes it can be considered in examples such as the giving of a rose, or receiving of a gift etc. but those are just examples of this larger meaning. The meaning itself is formless. Its displays have a form to it. This type of existence is formless. And componentless. Unlike the apple this meaning of love does not have an outer layer or an inner layer or seeds or other parts. It is itself partless, not composed. This type of existence is called a (non-composed) existence.

I vs MY

Consider the meaning of “I” that which you experience, is it a composed meaning or a non-composed meaning? This I is a non composed meaning. However, it has the ability to have associates, like ‘I’ and the things ‘I’ is linked to, like a book or a pen or a bag or a school or a hand or an eye or strength or looks etc.; after considering the contents of the last unit regarding “I” we can say some things. One is that the essence of “I” is non-composed in nature. Yet it is true that other things get allocated to it. When looking at those associates, the ‘I’ turns into “my” my body, my clothes, my thoughts etc. One more thing we can say after examining the experience of this “I” is that it is singular in nature. So too, is its attribution to all its associates, meaning that the things all the associates are connected to is the same, it is not the case that the book is connected to one meaning of “I” and the body connected to another. The associates are all connected to the same “I”. This “I” in reality is a singular thing and we deal with it such.

So far we see that we have a material aspect to us, our body and we experienced some aspects of our immaterial self, the *nafs*.

Last unit we gave intellectual explanations of the existence of the *nafs*, this unit we see that all along we have been dealing with the *nafs* and associating everything to it in our daily lives. With this lifelong experience with allocating associates to the singular *nafs* and the intellectual explanation of the existence of the *nafs*, the denial of the *nafs* would be the denial of our “I”. and such a denial is unreasonable.

Items 2 and 3:

So far we see that the nafs is our real self, and it has associates, one of those associates is the body. It is important to note that when we get rid of some associates of the nafs, the nafs remains, for example if I get rid of my favourite book, the "I" in me remains yet the book does not, if I cut some of my fingernails or get a haircut (both parts of the body) the "I" in me remains unchanged. So then the question naturally comes, is the association of the body required for the nafs to exist? Can I have a nafs which is not associated with the body? When my body dies and decomposes, is it possible for my nafs to live on?

We considered a verse of the Holy Quran last unit which talked about the creation of the nafs and the immaterial aspect of ourselves.

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

Here we can see that the body was used to develop out of it another creature: this immaterial nafs. This does not necessitate that the nafs can only exist while the body does. It is in some aspects like saying that from a large flower pot we developed a sapling (tree). So there is no logical issue with the nafs needing the body to remain. Lets see what the Holy Quran says about the Nafs and its longevity and its importance.

Passage 1: The following passage from the Holy Quran displays that the calling of Allah (swt) is directed towards the nafs. It is the nafs that is called back to its lord. It remains after the separation of the body. It also relays to us that some nofoos (pl. nafs) are so valuable that Allah (swt) himself calls on them and is well-pleased with them.

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ [٨٩:٢٧]

(To the righteous soul will be said:) "O (thou) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! [89:27]

ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً [٨٩:٢٨]

Return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing! [89:28]

Passage 2: this passage also shows that the nafs, this “I” of ours exists in the Day of Judgement. It also shows that there is no nafs which has independent power over others, on this day, the amr (command) is only with Allah (swt), and those whom He (swt) gives the authority to.

ثُمَّ مَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ [٨٢:١٨]

Again, what will show you what is the Day of Retribution? [82:18]

يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِّنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا ۖ وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ [٨٢:١٩]

It is a day when no soul will be of any avail to another soul and all command that day will belong to Allah. [82:19]

Passage 3: from this third passage we can again see that the nafs is present in the yaum hisaab (qiyamat) and that based on what it has put forth, it may have created for itself a fierce heat or gardens.

وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ [٨١:١٢]

when hell is set ablaze, [81:12]

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ [٨١:١٣]

when paradise is brought near, [81:13]

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ [٨١:١٤]

then a soul shall know what it has readied [for itself]. [81:14]

So from the various passages of the Holy Quran we learn that the nafs has a reality to it. This nafs is present after death, in the hereafter. The Nafs has levels, on the one hand it is so grand that Allah (swt) calls it directly, on the other hand some are so weak that they have no command over others, some have put forth Gardens for themselves, others have put forth a blazing fire.

Another passage which further shows this is:

After constantly taking an oath on multiple things including the nafs, Allah (swt) tells us that the true criteria of success and failure is in the purification or corruption of the nafs.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّاهَا [٩١:٩]

one who purifies it is felicitous, [91:9]

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّاهَا [٩١:١٠]

and one who betrays it fails. [91:10]

Think on this for next session: why is the purification or corruption of the nafs the criteria presented for success and failure?

Item 4: Purification or Corruption of the Nafs?

Class discussion: why is the purification or corruption of the nafs the criteria presented for success and failure?

Well imagine for a second if another criteria was to be there. Well, that would have to be other than the nafs. So then those things that are not “I” will be the reason for success and failure.. but the question was of *my* success and *my* failure not that of someone other than me. So the only real gauge of success and failure is then this “I” and what it becomes.

Consider if someone holds money or car or house or spouse as a criteria of their success. Well if one has a lot of money and that is what is giving them success then the success is attributed to the money not the person. So anyone with that money would be successful, it is not the success of the person but the success falsely seen in that object. The same applies to a car or a house or a spouse.

The same can't be said to my ability to control my anger when the environment pushes me to get angry, or my capacity to control my desire when there is no other barrier between me and my beloved person or thing, except myself telling me that it is not okay to act on this desire. In both of these capacities the true value of the nafs, the true strength of the nafs, the true merit of the nafs is seen. And it is based on this type of a criteria that a nafs then creates gardens for itself or a blazing fire. And then that which the nafs has created is solely attributed to it, not another, as was the case of the car or money or spouse. The failure and success is then innately belonging to the “I” and not its associates.

