

All Humans Seek Happiness and Prosperity

All humans, regardless of their background or beliefs, are driven by a fundamental desire for happiness and prosperity. This universal quest unites everyone, from the most devout to the most skeptical, the righteous to the wicked.

The only difference among people is their understanding of what constitutes true happiness. Some may mistakenly pursue fleeting pleasures, while others, despite knowing better, get sidetracked from their ultimate goal. Those who follow a religious path, however, recognize that true and lasting happiness lies in their relationship with God. They understand that the deepest joys are found in a divine connection, and that living in a way that pleases God brings not only eternal peace but also comfort in this life.

As Imam al-Sajjad (a) beautifully expresses in the Supplication of the Lovers:

إِلَهِي مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي ذَاقَ حَلَاوَةَ مَحَبَّتِكَ فَرَامَ مِنْكَ بَدَلًا؟ وَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي أَيْسَرَ بِقُرْبِكَ فَأَبْتَغَى عَنْكَ حَوْلًا؟

O Lord! Who has tasted the sweetness of Your love and then sought someone else in place of You? And who has found comfort in Your proximity and companionship and then wished to leave You for another?

This sentiment captures the profound satisfaction found in a divine bond.

The prophets were sent to guide humanity toward this profound joy, not to burden them with hardship. They never advised people to seek out suffering or to deny themselves pleasure for no reason. Instead, they taught that we should choose true and valuable pleasures over trivial ones. It's like a parent who tells their child to avoid eating too much candy now so they can enjoy healthy teeth and delicious food for a lifetime.

Sometimes, the path to happiness involves temporary hardship for a greater good. Consider a person who endures the pain of surgery to regain their health. Their reason tells them that the pain is a necessary step toward the ultimate pleasure of being well. Human logic dictates that we should always seek "maximum pleasure"—meaning we should analyze our actions by considering their full impact across our entire lives, and choose the path that yields the greatest overall benefit.

This is why divine duties, which may seem like burdens, are in reality acts of grace. Just as one must endure the effort of preparing and eating a meal to enjoy its flavor, we must undertake these seemingly difficult duties to attain a higher, more profound joy.

Ultimately, the most crucial step on this journey is recognizing what true happiness is: the knowledge of and communion with God. This realization is both essential and transformative.

Why We Choose Different Paths to Happiness

If all humans are seeking happiness, why do we take such different paths to find it? Why are some people religious while others aren't? Why are some kind to their parents and others are not? Why do some pray and others lie? Our actions are rooted in two fundamental factors: our thoughts and our inclinations.

The first factor shaping our behavior is our knowledge and information. Imagine two people left in the middle of a desert. The first question they must answer is, "Which way do we go?" If one believes the path to safety is east and the other believes it's west, their actions will be entirely different, not because their goal is different, but because their information about how to reach that goal is different.

This applies to our everyday lives as well. A person who smokes believes that happiness and pleasure are found in smoking. In contrast, someone who avoids tobacco understands that their well-being, and that of their community, depends on staying away from drugs and tobacco. Our actions are a direct result of what we believe to be true.

The second factor is our inner inclinations and dispositions. You've probably seen someone who knows an action is wrong yet does it anyway. For example, they might know that smoking is harmful, that disrespecting elders is bad, or that traits like stinginess and envy are negative. Yet, they still act on these impulses.

Even when we try to do the right thing, our inclinations can lead us astray. Under stress or anger, we might deviate from what we know to be true. Our dispositions can distract us from our beliefs, causing us to mistakenly pursue something else as our happiness. For instance, a person might know that their happiness lies in forgiveness and kindness, but in a moment of anger, they might mistakenly believe that revenge is the path to satisfaction.

In essence, the path we take isn't just about what we know; it's also about what we feel and what we're inclined to do.

What Thoughts Influence Behavior?

We often encounter people who justify their choices by linking them to happiness. For example, a friend might defend their smoking habit by claiming it brings calmness and productivity. Someone else might argue that spending time on entertainment is a better use of their youth than serving their parents, citing their "freedom." Similarly, a person who dresses immodestly might claim that they are simply pursuing comfort and pleasure.

These justifications reveal a deeper set of beliefs. The smoker believes cigarettes are beneficial, the person seeking entertainment believes life is for leisure, and the person dressing immodestly believes true freedom lies in personal pleasure. They all act on the conviction that their choices lead to happiness.

To engage with these arguments, we must first understand the underlying beliefs. With the smoker, the approach is straightforward: we can use medical and financial facts to show that the harms of smoking far outweigh any perceived benefits. By demonstrating that the act is irrational, we challenge their core belief directly.

However, debating the second and third examples is more complex. Their arguments are not about a single product; they are about their entire worldview. To truly respond, we must address foundational questions: What is a human being? What is the purpose of life? Where do we come from, and where are we going?

If a person believes their essence is a soul that survives death, they will naturally see life differently. They will understand that a life of service to parents is not a waste but a profound investment in their own spiritual well-being, bringing them peace in this life and the next. They will also realize that pleasures beyond the physical world—like the joy of spiritual connection—are far greater than worldly entertainment. The prophets teach that focusing on our inner selves and knowing God can bring a joy so immense that it makes us independent of worldly pleasures.

Imam al-Sadiq (a) has said:

مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يُخَفِّفَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَنْهُ سَكَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ فَلْيَكُنْ لِقَرَابَتِهِ وَصُولاً وَبِوَالِدَيْهِ بَاراً فَإِذَا كَانَ كَذَلِكَ هَوَّنَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ سَكَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَلَمْ يُصِبه فِي حَيَاتِهِ فَقْرٌ أَبَداً.

Whoever wishes that Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, ease for him the agonies of death, let him maintain ties with his relatives and be dutiful to his parents. If he does so, Allah will make the agonies of death easy for him, and poverty will never afflict him during his lifetime.

The Layers of Belief

This shows that our beliefs, which shape our actions, exist on two levels:

1. Limited beliefs that affect a specific part of life (like whether smoking is beneficial).
2. Fundamental beliefs that affect our entire life plan (our understanding of the soul, our purpose, and our relationship with the world).

The most powerful way to seek happiness is through intellectual freedom. This means freeing ourselves from blind imitation and truly seeking the truth. Islam strongly encourages us to think for ourselves, to build our fundamental beliefs on reason and research, and to never let our life's purpose be guided by prejudice or blind adherence to tradition.

What Are the Principles of Beliefs?

The term "principles of beliefs" refers to the foundational and core convictions that shape a person's entire life. These are not minor ideas; their accuracy or inaccuracy can completely change your life's direction and purpose.

In contrast, other beliefs are secondary and do not hold the same level of importance. The most critical areas within the principles of beliefs include:

- Epistemology: The study of knowledge—how we know what we know.
- Anthropology: Understanding the nature of humanity—what a human being is.
- Cosmology: Understanding the universe and its creation.
- Theology: The study and recognition of God.
- Divine Guidance: The recognition of prophets and Imams as God's guides.
- The Path: The understanding of religion, specifically Islam and Shi'ism.
- Eschatology: The study of the afterlife, or resurrection.

These discussions delve into the most fundamental questions of existence and belief. While traditional theological books often focus more on God, divine guidance, and the afterlife, this collection aims to explore the most important and practical topics from all seven of these foundational areas.

Important Discussions in the Principles of Beliefs

Epistemology

- Is it possible to recognize reality?
- What are the ways of recognizing reality?
- Can all of reality be recognized?
- Why are some thoughts incorrect?
- What are syllogisms, empiricism, and knowledge based on calculating probabilities?
- What are logical fallacies and how can we save ourselves from them?

Anthropology

- Who am I? Is my reality my physical body?
- How can we find out the reality of human beings?
- What is the relationship between me and my body?
- What is my true happiness?
- What is the highest pleasure that man can attain?

Cosmology

- What are the hidden worlds?
- How can we determine the different types of beings that exist?
- Are there immaterial beings?

- Are there realms beyond the material world?
- What beings are we humans connected to?

Theology

- Does the universe have a creator?
- What reasons do we have for the existence of a creator of the universe?
- Why does everything need a creator, but God does not?
- Does the universe have only one creator?
- Is God infinite?
- Does God have knowledge of everything and power over everything?
- Is God just? What does divine justice mean?
- What is God's relationship with us?

Divine Guidance (Prophets and Imams)

- What do the terms *wali*, prophet, messenger, successor, and Imam mean?
- What do the legislative and existential *wilayah* of the Prophet and Imams mean?
- Are the prophets and Imams aware of the unseen? How?
- What does infallibility mean, and are the prophets and Imams infallible?
- Why must God send prophets to guide humanity?
- What is a miracle, and how can we distinguish a prophet from a non-prophet?

Religion and Islam

- What is religion?
- Can the programs of religion be eternal and everlasting?
- What is the relationship between religion and human reason?
- What are the divine and non-divine religions, and what are the characteristics of each?
- What kind of person was the Messenger of Allah (s)?
- What are the features of the Quran? Is the Quran a miracle? How can this claim be proven?
- Why are the rights of men and women not equal in Islam?
- Why are there harsh rulings for retribution (*qisas*) in Islam?
- What is the reason behind slavery being accepted in Islam?

Shiaism

- Did the Prophet of Islam appoint successors for himself?
- Why did Muslims divide into two groups, Shia and Sunni?
- What are the arguments for the succession and leadership of Ali ibn Abi Talib (a)?
- Why did the companions of the Prophet not accept the succession of Imam Ali (a)?
- Why do Wahhabis consider Shias as polytheists and innovators?

Eschatology

- Is a person alive after death?
- What happens after death?
- Is the period after death short or eternal?

- What stages must we go through from the moment of death to the end?
- In order to attain happiness after death what must one do?
- What is and where are purgatory, the day of judgement, heaven and hell?
- What is the path, the weighing of deeds, the book of deeds, intercession?

The Importance of Learning the Principles of Beliefs

Studying the principles of beliefs, or theology, is crucial for several reasons. It helps us find our path to happiness and success while providing three major benefits.

1. Correcting Misconceptions

Many of our beliefs, which we've held since childhood, might be inaccurate. For instance, some people picture God as a great light that fills all space, even though God is beyond physical attributes like length, width, or height. Similarly, we might have incorrect ideas about the afterlife, resurrection, or the roles of prophets and imams.

Studying the principles of beliefs helps us correct these misconceptions and gain a more accurate understanding of reality. It also introduces us to a wide range of vital topics that many people aren't familiar with, such as fate, the immortality of the soul, and the intermediate world.

2. Strengthening and Defending Your Beliefs

Simply having correct beliefs isn't enough; you need to be able to defend them. Many people raised in a religious environment can't defend their faith with strong arguments. When their beliefs are questioned, they can become uncertain and doubt what they've always held to be true.

By studying the principles of beliefs, you build a solid foundation for your faith. This not only helps you stay firm in your convictions but also enables you to guide others. For example, you might believe that God exists, but if you can't provide a reasoned argument for His existence, you might struggle to respond to an atheist's questions. Theology equips you with the tools to defend your beliefs effectively.

3. Creating a Firm Barrier Against Doubt

Throughout history, scholars of theology have acted as a strong defense against those who seek to undermine religion. They have presented a precise, reasoned worldview that includes a deeper understanding of God, prophethood, and humanity.

Someone who has not studied these principles will lack a strong foundation, leaving their beliefs vulnerable to serious challenges. A solid understanding of these principles is essential for anyone on the path to spiritual growth and perfection.