

By What Means Do We Gain Nearness to God? How to Follow this Path?

What Exactly Does Nearness to God Mean? What Role Does the Imam Play in This?

One of the most common terms in religious literature and popular culture is the phrase "nearness to God." We all innately understand what this statement means. We can even tell when we are close to God and when we are not; nevertheless, if we are asked what it means to be near to God, we may be unable to respond accurately and maybe we have never thought about its true meaning.

Words like near and far are usually used to describe distance. For example, we say that we get nearer to something or someone if the physical distance between us decreases, and that we are further away when the distance increases. However, God is not a person or a thing; He is an omnipresent and infinite truth that is present everywhere. Then nearness to God does not refer to decreasing the physical distance between us and God, but rather to our becoming more like God. Other expressions like achieving perfection, making the heart colorful with the divine hue, and reaching God all have the same meaning and refer to becoming like God. Regarding this similarity, there are a few important points:

- In what aspects should we become like God?
- How and through what means can we achieve this similarity?
- What is the necessity of this similarity, and what is its relation to the purpose of our creation?

In previous lessons, we thoroughly discussed the necessity of becoming like God and its relationship with the purpose of our creation. We mentioned that the purpose of our creation is to go through the path of human perfection and to become like God of our own free will. However, we did not discuss how to achieve this similarity, the qualities that must be manifested in us, and the path to this similarity. In the following, we will explain these topics in more detail.

In What Aspects Must We Become Like God and How?

As mentioned before, nearness to God does not mean being near to God physically, but rather becoming more like Him. For example, our nearness to God is like the closeness of a student to the inherent qualities of her mentor. A talented and hardworking student initially has a potential talent and lacks actual abilities. However, after learning lessons from a mentor and practicing with patience, she knows everything inside out and reaches a stage where all the inherent qualities and existential assets of her mentor become manifest in her soul. Eventually, the student acquires the same name as her mentor.

What is a name? A name represents the essence plus an attribute. When we internalize an attribute, we have acquired a name. For example, we are called kind when we repeatedly show kindness, even in situations where we can be unkind. For example, an apprentice in a baking school acquires the attribute of pastry making and becomes a pastry cook after months of practice under the guidance of his mentor. The pastry cook is a name; carpenter, painter, engineer, architect, doctor, tailor, writer, poet, and so on are also names. Each name represents a perfection and an asset, and whoever has more names is naturally more capable

than other people. This is because he can use and take more advantage of these names in different areas of activity. For example, someone who is both a carpenter and an architect is more capable and has more perfections than someone who only knows one of them.

The same thing goes for nearness to God. God has many names, such as *Rahman* (The Most Merciful), *Raheem* (The Bestower of Mercy), *Jawaad* (The Most Generous), *Kareem* (The Most Esteemed), *Ghaniyy* (The Self-Sufficient), *Haleem* (The Most Forbearing), *Khallaq* (The Most Creative), *Qadeer* (The Omnipotent), and more. The number of God's names varies in different religious sources. There are 135 divine names in the Holy Quran, ninety-nine divine names¹ in narrations, and one thousand in the *Dua Al-Jawshan Kabeer*.² These differences do not indicate conflicts, as the number 99 refers to the divine names and attributes which are more important. In general, the most important point is that the divine names are unlimited and have no end.³

The divine names run the entire realms of existence. The world is nothing more than a manifestation of the divine names in beings, but this manifestation is not the same in all beings. God manifests Himself in each being only by a limited number of His names according to the existential structure and the purpose of the

¹. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Verily, Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, has ninety-nine names, and whoever acquires and manifests them will enter the heaven." (Shaykh al-Saduq, *KITAB AL-TAWHID: The Book of Divine Unity*. AMI Press, Al - Mahdi Institute, 2013.

². This is a long Islamic prayer that contains 1001 names and attributes of God. It is mentioned in the books, al-Balad al- Amin and al-Misbah of al-Kafa'mi. It is related from Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Sayyid al-Sajidin from his father from his grandfather, the Prophet of Allah, who received it from the Angel Gabriel during one of the battles. (<https://www.al-islam.org/articles/reflections-dua-jawshan-kabir-mohammad-ali-shomali>)

³. Makarem Shirazi, Nasser, *The Holy Quran, Text, Translation & Commentary*. Tehran: Imam Ali bin Abi Talib publication.
and Ibn Ashour, Muhammad Bin Tahir, *Al-Tahrir and Al-Tanweer*. Beirut: Est. 3 al-Tarikh, 1420 A.H., first edition, vol. 8, p. 362.

creation of that being. For example, a flower is a manifestation of the names of *Jameel* (Most Beautiful) and *Mussaweer* (The Fashioner) of God and is devoid of names such as *Rabb* (The Lord) or *Muntaqim* (The Avenger) because these names have nothing to do with the purpose of the creation of the flower. The same is true for other beings. The only being in which God manifests Himself with all His names and attributes is the human. In other words, among all the creations, the human being is the perfect manifestation of God and the most similar to Him. The most perfect human beings, who have manifested all God's attributes, are the Fourteen Infallibles (PBUT). For this reason, they are our only role models on the path of life and nearness to God.

The Necessity of Having a Role Model for Nearness to God

Based on these points and those mentioned in previous lessons, we can understand why God has introduced the Infallibles as role models to us. We can achieve human perfection by becoming more like God and gaining nearness to Him. This is because God is our true Beloved, and we can only keep our heart, which is the main element of our existence, peaceful and happy through nearness to God. Only in this way we can build a truly human and divine life in this world and then in the realm of *Malakut* (Celestial Kingdom). The first step in nearness to God is knowledge. However, as humans, we cannot know God because He is an infinite and omnipresent entity. Then, in order to know God, we must know His manifestations. But which ones? Imperfect manifestations of God are not suitable for us. Our goal is to become perfectly similar to our Beloved. Therefore, we need to fully and truly know the Beloved as He really is, with all His attributes of beauty and majesty. This

is where the intellect and revelation both save us and prove the necessity of having a role model.

A role model is like a mirror, reflecting the image of our Beloved without any deficiency. By looking at this role model, we can know when God is *Rahman* and *Raheem* and shows kindness, and when He is *Jabbar*⁴ and *Qahhar*⁵ and gets angry. We can know when He is *Ghafur*⁶ and forgives, when He is *Muntaqim*⁷ and takes revenge, when He is *Sattar-ul-Uyub*⁸ and conceals all the mistakes, and when He uncovers our flaws. We cannot understand how the divine names work and we cannot remain on the straight path without a role model.

The Infallibles (PBUT) are our mentors on the path of nearness to God. In every situation, we must compare our behavior and manners with theirs. We must see how far we have moved away from God or towards Him, and how many of the divine names we have acquired and made our own. The value of every human being is determined by the level of her nearness to God and the absorption of the divine names. The more names a person receives from God, the more she feels the nearness to God. Everyone has the potential to acquire these perfections, and there is no exception in this regard. This is because we all have the Divine Spirit and the potential to become like God. The evidence for this potential is the love we have for these perfections and the pleasure we derive from having or observing them in other people. We all are pleased with these qualities and perfections such as cheerfulness, generosity, kindness, power, knowledge, creativity, self-

⁴. The Compeller
⁵. The Ever-Dominating
⁶. The Forgiving
⁷. The Avenger
⁸. The Concealer of faults

sufficiency, and so on. As we mentioned in the lessons on the laws of wishes, this indicates that we have the innate potential to acquire these perfections.

In the upcoming lessons, we will discuss the function of divine names and their role as tools of life.

Mentazer Mentazer

Mentazer Mentazer

Mentazer Mentazer

Mentazer Mentazer

Mentazer Mentazer