

The Beautiful And Lofty Names Of Allāh

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله وعلى آهله وصحبه أجمعين

Class 2

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The Greatest Name of Allāh

The Greatest Name Of Allāh Differs As It Relates To Individual Circumstances:

The scholars have discussed that there is a greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل) but they have not united upon what that name is. The focus of this session is to look at the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل) **absolutely**. There is the greatest name of Allāh absolutely, and then there is the greatest name(s) of Allāh as it relates to a particular individual. Firstly, we will look at the greatest name(s) of Allāh as it relates specific circumstances. **The scholars discuss that the greatest name of Allāh may differ in relation to a particular individual in a particular circumstance.** For example, if one is in a state of need or weakness or sin etc., different names of Allāh will appeal to that person differently. Below is a table showing example of such circumstances and the relevant names of Allāh as it relates to the one experiencing those circumstances:

Circumstance	Greatest Names of Allāh as it Relates to That Individual
for the one in a state of need:	• Al-Jawād (The Bountiful and Generous) • Al-Muḥsin (The Benefactor) • Al-Mu‘ī (The Giver)
for the one in a state of weakness:	• Al-Qādir (The Fully Able) • Al-Qadīr (The All-Powerful) • Al-Muqtadir (The All-Determining, The Omnipotent)
for the one in a state of humiliation:	• Al-‘Azīz (The Almighty) • Al-Jabbār (The Compeller) • Al-Mutakabbir (The One Who Is Justly And Rightfully Proud)
for the one who has sinned: (these names return to the mercy of Allāh):	• Al-Laṭīf (The Subtle and Kind) • At-Tawwāb (The One Who Accepts Repentance From His Servants) • Al-Ghaffūr (The Forgiving) • Al-Ghaffār (The Oft-Forgiving)
for the one who is suffering or is in need of sustenance:	• Ar-Razzāq (The Abundant Provider) • Ar-Rāziq (The Great Provider) • Al-Mannān (The Bestower of Bounties)

The Story Of The Two Angels Hārūt and Mārūt Who Taught The Greatest Name of Allāh:

After looking at the greatest names of Allāh as it relates to individuals in particular circumstances, then we have the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل) absolutely. ‘What is the greatest name of all?’ has been the topic of discussion among the people of knowledge in the past and of the present. Is it just one name, or is it a combination of names? The first thing that we should look at is that there are some qaṣaṣ (stories) that return to the greatest name of Allāh that are not established, such as the false tale of the two angels in Babylon: Hārūt and Mārūt. There is a narration that is oftentimes mentioned around the āyah where Allāh says,

"وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيْطَانُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ ۖ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَٰكِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ
النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الْمَلَكَيْنِ بِبَابِلَ هَارُوتَ وَمَارُوتَ ۚ"

“They followed what the shayaṭīn gave out (falsely of the magic) in the lifetime of Sulaymān. Sulaymān did not disbelieve, but the shayaṭīn disbelieved, teaching men magic and such things that came down at Babylon to the two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt ...” [Sūrah Al-Baqarah; 02:102]

The story goes that there were two angels in Babylon that were given magic and they were a trial and a test for the people. They were given magic but it was not permissible to take it from them. If one did so, they would fall into kufr. This is just as Allāh tried and tested Ādam (عليه السلام) in the garden with the tree. The tree was a trial and a test for Ādam whether he would consume it or he would obey Allāh and leave it. Hārūt and Mārūt were sent down because the earth was filled with open sin: intoxication, bloodshed and other types of sharr. So Allāh sent Hārūt and Mārūt as judges between the people to bring about iṣlāḥ (rectification).

However, when they were sent down, they were taken by debauchery and the other sins, being inclined towards the women from among the children of Ādam. It was said that they knew the greatest name of Allāh and this gave them the ability to return to the heavens whenever they wished. It was narrated that a woman approached them seeking a judgment and they were both infatuated by her. They attempted to seduce her but she refused to engage with them except on the condition that they should teach her the greatest name of Allāh. She also stipulated that they should engage in sins with her. As the story goes, they succumbed to her requests and indulged in wine, adultery, and even killed an innocent person. The woman then invoked the greatest name of Allāh and ascended into the heavens away from them. She was transformed into a slinking star known in the Arabic language as Zuhra, which is the planet Venus. It is said then that the planet Venus is in actuality the manifestation of this woman in the heavens.

It was said that because the angels taught her the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل), they were given the choice between being punished in the hereafter or remaining on earth as a punishment, and so they chose to remain on earth as their punishment, and they

continued to exist on earth until this day. Additionally, they claim that the shayāṭīn who are familiar with this affair, are able to communicate with Zuhra/Venus and if she is pleased, she teaches them the greatest name of Allāh and his gives them the ability to carry out all types of affairs - they are able to be transported, to travel, to float on air, to walk on water and to carry out other fantastical feats. This is the claim that is spread.

The Story of Hārūt and Mārūt Is Fabricated:

Concerning this story the scholars of Ḥadīth all mention that there is no Marfūʿ chain i.e. no authentic chain of narration going back to the Messenger (ﷺ) and even though it was mentioned by a number of the salaf, the scholars of Tafsīr hold that **that is not thābit (established) and therefore it should not be mentioned as an affair related to the greatest name of Allāh.**

The Story of The Boy And The King As Established From The Sunnah Of The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ).

The second story is a popular narration around a boy who was from Al-Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd (The People of the Trench) - from the famous story of The Boy and The King. The famous story goes that there was a king that had a magician, a sorcerer. He was getting old and feared that he would die, so he sought someone to be his apprentice. He recruited a young boy and began to teach him what he knew from the books of magic. The boy would attend his sessions with the magician but on the way back home, he would pass by a rāhib or person of knowledge from The People of the Book of the past who would teach him from the Book of Allāh, which was or had in it that which was sound at that time.

On one occasion, there was a large beast that blocked one of the pathways into the city and so the boy supplicated to Allāh (عز وجل) and said, **“Oh Allāh indeed if what the rāhib is teaching me is more beloved to you than what the magician is teaching me, then remove from us that which blocks his path.”** The supplication was accepted so thereafter, people would approach him in order to cure them. One such

instance was when one of the ministers from the king's court who had become blind approached him seeking his supplication which successfully cured his blindness.

This affair was spread among the people and when it reached the king, he commanded that his court men kill the boy. The king was a tyrant who called people to his worship. However, every attempt at killing him was in vain until the boy advised that the only way they would be successful is if they gather the people and say, “**In the name of the Lord of the boy**” and then shoot him with the arrow. When the people of that region witnessed this, they all entered into Islām. That is what is established from the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ).

A Fabricated Version Of This Story In Relation To The Greatest Name Of Allāh:

‘Abdullāh ibn Thāmir (the fabricated name for the boy) was from the region of Najrān which is in the south of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In actuality, what had happened was that the boy had sought from the priest to teach him the greatest name of Allāh. The priest knew the greatest name of Allāh and he became popular among the People Of The Book because of this. However, he refused to teach the boy this name because he believed that he would be unable to deal with what comes with it. So the boy took some pieces of slate and wrote the names of Allāh on them. Then he stood in front of a fire and he threw them one by one into the fire. Each one that he threw into the fire remained in the fire except for one that jumped out of the fire and could not burn and so he knew that that was the greatest name of Allāh. He then informed his teacher of what he did to which he affirmed that it was the greatest name of Allāh but that he should keep it to himself, even though he knew he would not.

It was narrated that it was by this name that he invoked Allāh to carry out his tasks like curing the leper and the blind. However, this narration is not established and it cannot be used to affirm concerning the greatest name of Allāh.

Authentic Narrations Regarding The Greatest Names Of Allāh:

First Narration – The Hadīth of Asmā’ bint Yazīd:

Disregarding the aforementioned stories, there are indeed established texts concerning the greatest names of Allāh (عز وجل). The first is a ḥadīth that was declared ḥassan by Shaykh Shaykh Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī (رحمه الله) and it is the ḥadīth of Asmā' bint Yazīd who said that the greatest names of Allāh are present in these two verses in the Qur'ān. The first of them is the ayah in Sūrah Al-Baqarah,

“وَاللَّهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَحْدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ”

“And your 'ilāh (God) is One 'ilāh - lā 'ilāha 'illā -ilāh huwa (there is none who has the right to be worshipped but He), **The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful.**” [2:163]

The second is the beginnings of Sūrah Āli 'Imrān:

“اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ”

“Allāh! lā 'ilāha 'illā -ilāh huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), **The Ever Living, the One Who Sustains and Protects All That Exists.**” [3:2]

In the verse of Sūrah Al-Baqarah, 2 names are established: **Ar-Raḥmān (The Most Gracious) and Ar-Raḥīm (The Most Merciful)** and in Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, the 2 names established are: **Al-Ḥayy, (The Ever-Living) and Al-Qayyūm (The Self-Subsisting By Whom All Things Exist).**

Second Narration – The Ḥadīth of Abū Umāmah:

The second ḥadīth is a version of the first ḥadīth though it is from a different companion. This ḥadīth that is collected by Imām Ibn Mājah and it is the ḥadīth of Abū Umāmah. This confirms that **the greatest name of Allāh is established in the sunnah of the Messenger (ﷺ)** where the Prophet (ﷺ) himself affirmed that there is such thing as the greatest name of Allāh and it is not something that is just based upon the ijtihād of the scholars.

Abū Umāmah reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said that Al-Ism Allāh al-A'ẓam – the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل) is that which if Allāh is called upon by way of it, He will

respond. Here we see that the Prophet (ﷺ) described it with characteristics - if you call upon Allāh by way of it, Allāh will respond. This is where the varying narrations about calling on Allāh by these names come from, such as the one about ‘Abdullāh ibn Thāmir and Hārūt and Mārūt, as well as one concerning Bil‘ām, the minister of Sulaymān, who supplicated to Allāh for the throne of Bilqīs to be delivered, which it did in the blinking of an eye. He called upon Allāh by way of His greatest name. He was known as mustajāb ad-da‘wah – one whose du‘ā is accepted. From the saḥāba, there were individuals who were like this – they were mustajāb ad-da‘wah. However, it is not established that he actually knew the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل).

The Position That The Greatest Name Of Allāh Is Al-Hayyul Qayyūm:

Returning to the ḥadīth, Abū Umāmah reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said that **Al-Ism Allāh al-A‘ẓam – the greatest name of Allāh is that which if Allāh is called upon by way of it, He will respond and it is found in three sūrahs of the Qur’ān: Sūrah Al-Baqarah, Sūrah Āli ‘Imrān and Sūrah Ṭā Hā.** One of the narrators of the ḥadīth, Abū ‘Abd Ar-Raḥmān Al-Qāsim, the tābi‘ī who took from Abū Umāmah said, **“I sought these names out and I found that they are Al-Ḥayyul Qayyūm (The Ever-Living, The Self-Subsisting Upon Whom All Things Exist).”**

The specific verses containing **al-Ḥayy al-Qayyūm** in these 3 Sūrahs are:

- **Sūrah al-Baqarah (2:255) – Āyat al-Kursī:**

“اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ...”

"Allāh! Lā ilāha illa Huwa, Al-Ḥayyul Qayyūm..."

- **Sūrah Āli ‘Imrān (3:2):**

“اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ”

“Allāh! lā ‘ilāha ‘illā -ilāh huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), Al-Ḥayyul Qayyūm.” [3:2]

- **Sūrah Ṭāhā (20:111):**

“وَعَنَتِ الْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ...”

"And [all] faces will be humbled before Al-Ḥayyul Qayyūm.."

So, Abū ‘Abd Ar-Raḥmān Al-Qāsim strove to come to a conclusion as to what the three verses that contain the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل) were and why did the Prophet (ﷺ) select these three Sūrahs alone. His conclusion was the name ‘Al-Ḥayyul Qayyūm’. We see here this is not just one name but a combination of the names – Al-Ḥayy and Al-Qayyūm. This is one position. Ḥāfiẓ Ḥajar that there are about 16 different positions concerning what the greatest name of Allāh is.

Different Name Combinations Of What The Greatest Name Of Allāh Is From Various Viewpoints:

1. Ar-Raḥmān and Ar-Raḥīm - people of knowledge such as Ibn Al-Qayyim hold this combination to be the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل). He argues that Ar-Raḥmān’s great station is because of its universality - i.e Allāh has referred to Himself as Ar-Raḥmān in a universal, all-encompassing manner. This name denotes that Allāh’s mercy encompasses the whole of creation, not only to His servants, but to everyone - the believer, disbeliever, animals etc. Ar-Raḥīm on the other hand, returns to Allāh showing mercy specifically to the believers. Ar-Raḥmān is also greater in encompassing mercy because it is a noun that revolves around the verbal form ‘Fa‘lān (فَعْلَان)’ which denotes abundance. Any noun that is in the form of Fa‘alān, then that noun has an abundance of whatever is present or whatever it describes.

Other Examples Of The Verb Form Al-Fa‘alān:

- ‘Ghadbān’ – related to ghabd (anger). The one who is ghabdān is full of anger and therefore, there is an abundance of anger within him.
- ‘Nadmān’ – reference to a person being filled with remorse and regret.
- ‘Ḥayrān’ – reference to the one who is steeped in and full of confusion.
- ‘Sakrān’ – reference to the one who is intoxicated or at the stage in which he loses his faculties.
- ‘Lahfān’ – reference to the one who is anguished.

Hence, this verbal form, Fa‘lān is a form wherein whatever is upon it indicates an abundance of whatever is being described here. Therefore, Ar-Raḥmān is a reference

to an abundance of mercy. This is why whenever Allāh (عز وجل) speaks of Ar-Raḥmān, or of the Istiwā upon His throne, we find in more than one place in the Qur'ān a coupling of the name Ar-Raḥmān, not with the name Ar-Raḥīm. For example: Sūrah Al-Furqān 25:59:

”الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۚ الرَّحْمَنُ فَسَلِّ بِهِ خَبِيرًا“

“Then He rose over the Throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty). **The Most Gracious!** Ask Him (O Prophet Muhammad concerning His Qualities: His rising over His Throne, His creations, etc.), as He is Al-Khabīr (The All-Knower of everything).”

Ibn Al-Qayyim shows in this example, Ar-Raḥmān being mentioned alongside Al-Arsh. **Just as Al-Arsh is the vastest and the greatest creation of Allāh that encompasses the whole of creation, similarly, Ar-Raḥmān, the great name of Allāh encompasses the whole of the creation of Allāh** which He has encompassed with His mercy.

2. **Al-Ḥayyul and Al-Qayyūm** – popular position of many scholars that this is the greatest names of Allāh (عز وجل) because of the fact that **they encompass and encapsulate the greatest of the characteristics of Allāh. Al-Hayy is the essential attribute of Allāh which by way of it, all of the other names and attributes are completed**, i.e. Allāh could not be All-Hearing, All-Seeing, All-Knowing, All-Powerful, The All-Sovereign, The Almighty except that Allāh has this perfect life that is inseparable from His other attributes. Therefore, the other attributes return back to The Ever-Living.

Also, Al-Qayyūm as well, everything within the creation returns back to the fact that Allāh is the one that brought it into existence and keeps that in existence – He sustains it, gives it power, gives it ability, gives it might etc. And so these two names are essential to firstly Allāh 's being, and secondly to the existence of everything else within the creation. **Al Qayyūm indicates the perfection of Allāh's being.** He is not in need of anything.

3. **Al-Aḥad (The Unique) and Aṣ-Ṣamad (The Self-Sufficient)** – many scholars hold this to be the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل). Aṣ-Ṣamad carries within it some of the characteristics of Al-Qayyūm in that all of the creation is in need of Allāh. There comes in a ḥadīth where the Prophet (ﷺ) heard a man supplicating, saying, “O Allāh, I ask you by my testimony that You are Allāh, there is no God but You, the One, the Eternal Refuge, who does not give birth and was not born, and to whom no one is equal,” (Sūrah Al-Ikhlās). The Prophet (ﷺ) said, **“By the One in whose hand is my soul, he has asked Allāh by His greatest name, for which He answers when called upon and He gives when asked.”**

Note that these are names of Allāh that the scholars have striven to come to a conclusion on, and are not the greatest names of Allāh categorically, but no doubt there are texts that would appear to indicate that these are from the greatest names of Allāh. Of these three positions, we cannot conclude which one is the greatest.

Position That The Greatest Name Of Allāh Is Allāh:

There is another position that the greatest name of Allāh (عز وجل) is Allāh which is the most popular position held by a number of the people of knowledge from among them, Ibn Al-Qayyim. We will begin our next session with this name and it will be discussed using the methodology of its name, its meaning, its indications, that which is related to its effect upon creation, and its effect upon īmān.

وصلى الله على نبينا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم