

1.1 The Purpose of Human Beings

OBJECTIVES

WE WILL:

- Learn what the purpose of the human being is.
- Learn the three tools that can help one reach this purpose.
- Learn about how true worship (*ibādah*) can help a person reach one's purpose.

DĪN: religion, way of life

‘IBĀDAH: worship, an action that is done with the intention of getting closer to Allah ﷻ

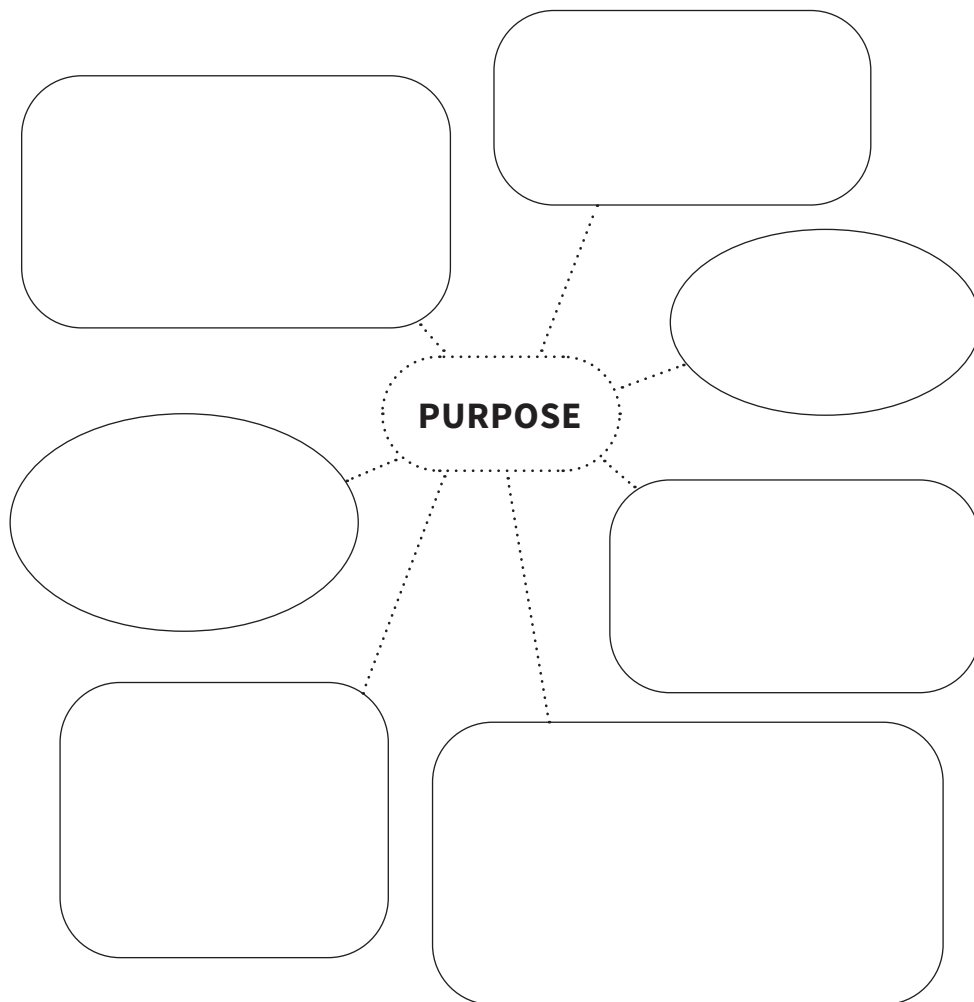
QURB: closeness (often used in reference to Allah ﷻ)

KAMĀL: perfection, being our best selves and trying to attain closeness to Allah ﷻ

HADAF OR PURPOSE: the reason for which something exists, is done, made, or used

Activity 1.1a: Pre-Reading Reflection

What types of words/thoughts/phrases come to mind when you hear the term ‘purpose?’
Create a word-web with the word ‘purpose.’



Activity 1.1b: Vocabulary

On a blank paper, draw a map with the words: *dīn*, *‘ibādah*, *qurb*, and *purpose*. Where does everything go on the map? Where is your destination? What obstacles do you face on the way?

IBRAHIM'S DREAM

Part 1: The Mysterious Garden

Ibrahim had just come home from soccer practice, where his team was getting ready for the big 7th grade match, so he fell asleep as soon as his head touched his pillow. Later on, he woke up in a complete daze, confused, and unsure of where he was or how he had gotten there. *Where am I?* he thought to himself. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, and blinked. He pinched himself. “Ouch!” He was definitely awake!

Ibrahim stood up, overwhelmed with the scent of flowers, the buzzing of bees, and the sound of the wind. He definitely was not in his bedroom anymore. Had he fallen asleep in a park somewhere? All of the small sounds surrounding him seemed amplified—more vibrant and intense than he remembered them to be. It was as if everything around him was trying to tell him something really important. He began to roam around, trying to discover an answer to this mystery he suddenly found himself in.

Ibrahim walked around observing his surroundings. All of a sudden, he banged his face into a glass wall that seemed to pop up out of nowhere. “Ouch!” he cried out in pain, cautiously checking his head to make sure that he was not bleeding anywhere. His eyes caught the glint of light reflecting from the pane in front of him. Still processing this crystalline barrier, his eyes scanned around him, looking for the end-point. There did not appear to be one no matter how much he turned. Where did these glass walls come from? Ibrahim looked around. His eyes widened as he realized that he was trapped inside of the glass walls! Ibrahim started to pace back and forth in nervousness when he noticed a piece of paper crinkling under his foot.

Dear person,
You are only here for a short while. In this garden, you will find everything that you need to get the keys to help you escape these glass walls. Good luck!



Ibrahim continued to walk around the garden. He thought to himself: *Where could I be? Why am I here? What is on the other side of this glass?*

As he continued to roam around trying to avoid the expansive glass walls (which was harder than it looked), he tripped over a huge rock and fell flat on his face amidst a field of tulips. Grateful for the soft landing, he looked up at the tulips in front of him. These tulips, in particular, were an odd shade though; they seemed to have lines on them... or were those letters? *Words written on a tulip?* he thought quizzically.

Ibrahim sat up and looked closely at the tulips, picking one of them off of its stem. Holding it in his hand, he took apart one of the flowers and carefully studied its petals. There was a message written on the petals: “Who created you? What purpose were you made for?” The oddity of the situation was not lost on Ibrahim as he began to think about the questions posed on the tulip. He had not truly contemplated these questions before. *Hmm, this might be a clue! Maybe it has something to do with how I can get out of this strange place,* he thought; and after seeing the petals, he really wanted to get the answers.

Suddenly, Ibrahim heard his stomach make a noise, and he felt thirst itching his throat. He saw a stream in the distance and hurried toward it, only to bump into another glass wall! “Ouch!” Ibrahim rubbed his head. He had to escape these walls; it was the only way he could find water to drink and survive. He was sure that whoever had sent the message was trying to help him find a way out, and reach something more meaningful beyond these glass walls.



OUR PURPOSE AS HUMAN BEINGS



STOP AND REFLECT: How can you define ‘purpose’ in your own words? Provide an example of something that has a purpose. For example, your purpose in most sporting activities is to score a goal.

Activity 1.1c: Discussion Questions



DIRECTIONS: After reading the story above, discuss the following questions with a partner:

1. Walls are often used in narratives to represent what concept(s)?

2. In your own words, explain the moral message of this story.

3. Explain how the story of Ibrahim relates to us finding our purpose in this life?

Our purpose in life is to reach perfection...to become as close as possible to Allah ﷻ.

In this story, Ibrahim is trying to figure out where he is, and what his purpose is. A **purpose** is defined as ‘the reason for which something exists, is done, made, or used.’ This extends to all creatures in existence: from a seed that turns into a fruit tree, to the bee that pollinates flowers. Everything has a purpose in this world—including us!

When we come into this world, we have to find what our purpose is and fulfill that.

If we realize that everything has a purpose, then we should ask ourselves: “What is our purpose as human beings in this world?” In the story above, Ibrahim found a clue asking him what his purpose is, which motivated him to act in certain ways. This is like the world we live in. Our purpose in life is to reach perfection, which in Islam means to become as close as possible to Allah ﷻ. In Arabic we say: *Qurb-ilāhi*—closeness to my God [Allah ﷻ].

Activity 1.1d: The Resolution (Extension Activity)

Ibrahim's story ends in a cliffhanger; if you were given creative liberties to resolve the predicament Ibrahim has found himself in, how would you end his story? What could help Ibrahim break free of his glass prison?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

As Shī'ah Muslims, we believe that we can reach the point of making the best decisions in all situations. We pray to Allah ﷻ that He always helps us as He is the All-Perfect, and the All-Knowing, so we should never stop striving to get close to Him.

Although the teachings of the Qurʾān and the Divine guides have a special role in guiding us, things that happen in our lives or that we see in the world around us can also guide us toward Allah ﷻ.

In previous years, we have talked about various proofs of Allah's existence. Allah ﷻ is All-Perfect and All-Knowing, and He created us with the purpose of becoming our best selves through following Islam. After using these and other such proofs, we come to the realization that our life must have some purpose, and this purpose must be taught to us from our All-Perfect Creator—Allah ﷻ. Similarly, we have talked about how an All-Generous and All-Merciful Creator gave us Divine guides like the 124,000 Prophets ﷺ and the 12 Imāms ﷺ.

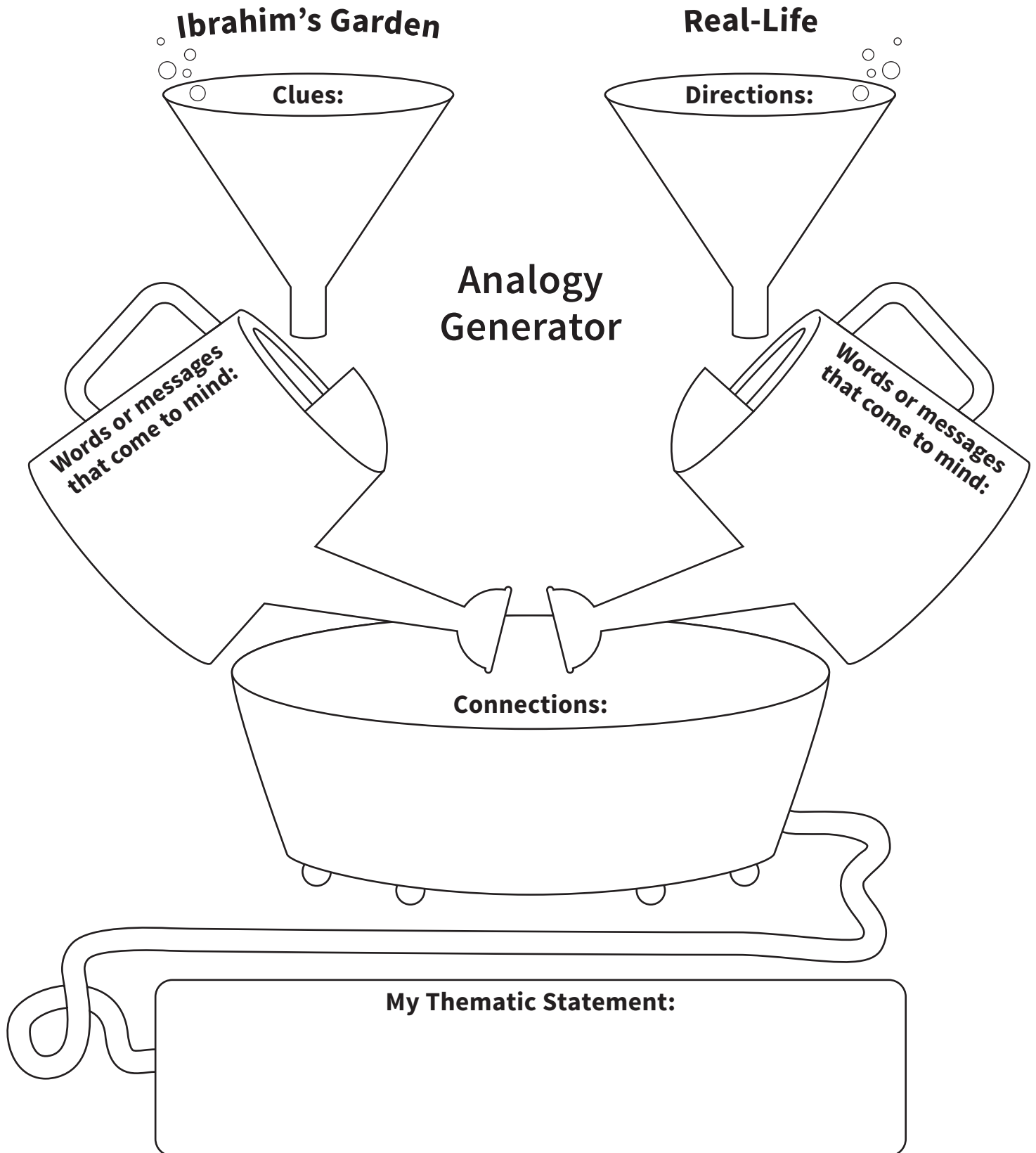
Allah ﷻ has given us three tools through which we can reach Him, and perfect ourselves:

1. **'Ibādah:** Worship.
2. **Ibtilā':** Tests and trials.
3. **Ma'rifah:** Deep understanding.



Activity 1.1e: Figuratively Speaking

- How do the clues which Ibrahim received in that strange garden relate to the directions we have been given in our lives?
- Summarize the analogies present in the story into one or two sentences that capture the theme.



THE FIRST STEPS

Our purpose in this life—*qurb* or closeness to Allah ﷻ—can only be found through the path that Allah ﷻ Himself has defined because we believe that He is our Creator, the All-Perfect, and the All-Knowing. Who knows what is best for us other than Allah ﷻ? If we believe that Allah ﷻ is All-Knowledgeable and cares for us more than anyone else, then we need to understand and accept that the only way to gain closeness to Him is by doing what He likes and what He knows is best for us—and that is by following the religion of Islam.

We all need Allah ﷻ, who is our Creator, in order to survive; and we need to become closer to Him to reach our purpose. The path to perfection means acting in the way that He likes, and staying away from what He dislikes. This is how we practice the first step to perfection—by doing His *‘ibādah* [worshiping Allah ﷻ]. Obeying Allah ﷻ and serving His creations helps us to become the best we can.

As we try to reach perfection, we need to get rid of the barriers and negative qualities that prevent us from moving forward, and fill our souls with goodness, moral character, and righteous deeds.



QUICK WRITE: What is one thing that you can add to your personal characteristics that may take you closer to reaching perfection in the eyes of Allah ﷻ?



STORY CONNECTION: Negative qualities and characteristics that we have are like glass walls—sometimes they may be hard to see or detect, but they are obstacles that stop us from fulfilling our true purpose in life. This is why we must reflect on ourselves and our actions.

When we make good choices out of obedience to Allah ﷻ, He helps us by granting us special mercy, and brings us closer to Him (*qurb*), and allows us to reach higher levels both in this world, and more importantly in Paradise.

The Prophet ﷺ said that: “This world is like a farm for us to plant our good deeds so that we will see the fruits of our labor in the next world.”¹



To help us fulfill our purpose of getting closer to Him, Allah ﷻ says in the Qur’ān that **everything in this world** was created to help us:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا
*It is He [Allah] who created for you all that is in the earth.*²

This verse (*āyah*) shows how Allah ﷻ made everything in this world at our service to help us reach our purpose. Human beings have a unique potential to reach perfection, and everything was created to help us reach that potential. For example, the best way for food and water to be used is to serve a believer. When we drink water for energy to be able to worship Allah ﷻ, this water is helping us serve our purpose. If we play sports to become healthier, this is serving our purpose.

¹ ‘Allāmah Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. 14, P. 304.

² Noble Qur’ān, Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 29..

WORSHIP ('IBĀDAH): A MEANS TO REACHING PERFECTION

Allah ﷻ, our All-Merciful and All-Wise Creator, has given us the tools and guidelines to be able to reach our purpose of perfection. In the Qur'ān, He clearly states that He only created us to worship Him:

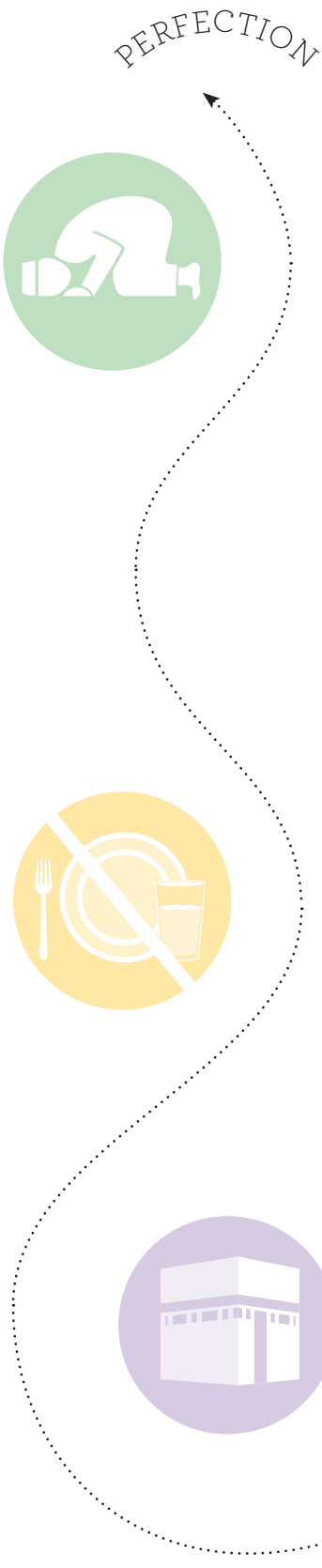
وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ
“And I did not create the jinn and humans
except to worship Me.”³

'*ibādah* (عبادة), or worship, is any action that is done with the intention of getting closer to Allah ﷻ. When we think of '*ibādah*', the first thing that we usually think of is the regular acts of worship which we have been taught to perform such as praying, fasting, and giving charity. The obligatory (*wājib*) acts of worship are the most important ones because not doing them will prevent us from moving on this path to perfection.

Think of it like a game that whenever you make a mistake, it will cause you to take a few steps back. If you keep on repeating mistakes, then you will always be stuck on the same level, or may even fall way behind!



STOP AND REFLECT: What games do you know that work like this?



³ Noble Qur'ān, Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt (51), Verse 56.

Activity 1.1f: Extension Activity

Design your own board game using the vocabulary and concepts in this lesson:

- *‘ibādah* (worship)
- *qurb* (closeness)
- *hadaf* (purpose)
- *dīn* (religion)

Complete the worksheet below as an outline for your board game.

1. What will be the starting point of your game?

2. What is the objective?

3. How about the destination or endpoint?

4. Are there any rewards or prizes along the way, or at the end?

5. How might opportunities or obstacles hinder or further your progress?
