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All Proceed towards Absolute Ideal

Surely you, O men, are striving hard toward your Lord and so you are going to meet Him. (Surah al Inshiqaq, 84:6)

This Qur'anic verse sets a very high target for human society. It says that humanity endeavours on every level to meet its Lord. In this verse the word, 'kadh' has been used, which means persistent movement and tedious and irksome progress. The whole human society has to work hard to move forward, for this is not an ordinary movement.

It is an ascending movement representing development and evolution. It may be compared to the serious effort the mountaineers have to make to get on the top of a mountain. They have to cross many heights to reach the summit.

Their movement is irksome and requires great effort. The same way humanity endeavours to reach Allah. Only by making a persistent effort it is possible to climb the ladder of perfection, to make evolutionary progress and to proceed to the high position that befits humanity.

It is evident that this persistent movement requires a way along which man marching towards perfection should move till he reaches his destination. This way has been described in several verses of the Qur'an as the way of Allah or the path of Allah.

These expressions of the Qur'an indicate the existence of a way along which man must move. As a way is necessary for movement, similarly movement is a necessary corollary of a way. When the above quoted verse says that man is striving hard, it speaks of an actual fact and an existing reality.

This verse is not a call to the people to follow Allah's way. It is not meant to urge people or to encourage them to take any action. Unlike some other verses it does not express a command. It does not ask people to come to Allah's way or to repent in Allah's House or to do any other such thing. Instead it says:

Surely you, O men, are striving hard towards your Lord and so you are going to meet Him.

Thus it mentions an actual fact that man's every movement in his long historical march is towards Allah. Even the groups which have chosen from themselves inferior ideals and false gods and are called polytheists by the Qur'an, take steps towards Allah, when they are found advancing in their long journey.

Their advancement towards Allah depends on the motivating power of their ideals. If these ideals push them forward, that means that they become nearer to their Lord. But there is a difference between the progress which creates a sense of responsibility and the progress which, as we shall explain, does not have this characteristic.

When humanity makes progress while fully conscious of its ideals, it is said that worship has been performed. It is a characteristic of worship that all along it is analogous to the world and in complete harmony with world conditions. Yet even an unconscious advance in relation to an ideal is a movement towards Allah, though as we pointed out, irresponsible.

Hence every advance is a movement towards Allah, even the advance of those who go after a mirage. As it is inferred from the above–quoted verse, those who tend to proceed social mirages and choose inferior ideal for themselves, when reaching these mirages, they notice that there is nothing there and find in place thereof Allah who pays them their due.

It is evident from this verse that, Allah is the end of their journey, yet He is not a geographical and like the end of a geographical route. For example, if we take into consideration the route between Najaf and Karbala, Karbala is the terminal point, that is the end of this geographical route.

In other words, Karbala is situated at the end of the route, not in between. If a person travels towards Karbala and stops somewhere on his way, he cannot be called to have reached Karbala, which is the terminal point and which we call the end of the route. Anyhow Allah is not a geographical end in this way. Allah is Absolute. He is Self-existent. There is no place where Allah is not present. His existence has no limit. He is the end of the journey, but He is all along the way also. The person who traverses only the halfway – he who reaches a mirage, stops at it and discovers that it is only a mirage – what does he find?

We observe that according to the Qur'anic verse, he finds that Allah is there and that Allah pays him his due, for the Absolute is present at every point on route also. As man advances on his way, he realizes his ideal in proportion to his progress. He finds Allah as much as he advances along his way. As Allah is Absolute, the way to Him also has no end.

Therefore a journey to Him means only to come near to Him. The more man advances, the nearer to Allah he comes, but this nearness is always relative. Man only can take some steps along the line of march, but he cannot traverse the whole route, for a limited being can never reach the Absolute. A limited being cannot reach the unlimited one.

Therefore in this case there exists an unlimited field between man and his ideal. In other words, man has

an unlimited field of action. He can make unlimited progress. The scope of his development is unlimited, for the way before him is indefinitely long and limitless.

Quantitative and Qualitative Changes

Two changes, one quantitative and the other qualitative appear in man when he regards his real ideal as the indicator of his route to humanity and reconciles his reason and understands with the universal truth ensuing from the ideal which he holds to be the true reality. In other words when man's conscious advance is reconciled with the cosmic reality of his advance, quantitative and qualitative changes appear in him, for man and the world both are advancing towards Allah.

Man's movement towards Allah produces a quantitative change in him, because as we said earlier, the way towards his true ideal has no limit. In other words, there always exists for him an opportunity for self-construction, self-development and progress and the door for his going forward is ever open, for the ideal can remove from his way every false god, every idol and every idol-like impurity that may become a barrier between him and his Allah.

Hence the monotheistic religion constitutes a constant struggle and a continuous war against all false gods and low and repetitious ideals, for an ideal other than Allah always requires man to confine his movement up to a particular point only. The false gods want him to stop in the middle of his journey.

All over history the monotheistic religion has borne the standard of opposition to all false gods and low ideals. That is why the true ideal brings about a quantitative change in man's movement, unties his shackles and liberates him from the bonds of artificial limits and thus enables him to continue to march forward.

As for the qualitative change in the man's movement, it is brought about by the true ideal through providing a basic solution of human contradictions and controversies. Man gets a sense of responsibility as the result of his faith in this ideal and a consciousness of his universal limits. This consciousness creates in him a deep sense of responsibility. Unlike all other motivating ideals over human history, it is only to this ideal that man feels responsible.

Why so? It is so because this ideal has a concrete reality and in no way depends on man. It is from here that the logical condition of responsibility materializes, for a true responsibility two sides are required: a responsible person and to whom he owes responsibility. If there is no higher side or the man responsible does not have faith in it, no sense of responsibility can be produced at all.

For example take low and inferior ideals into consideration. These important gods and abject deities have done over human history nothing other than creating dissensions and undue discriminations among mankind. These ideals along with man form one whole and are reckoned as a part of a total. Man cannot feel to have a sense of responsibility towards something which he has set apart from himself and

which he himself has shaped and developed. The Qur'an says:

They are but names which you have named. (Surah an Najm, 53:23)

These ideals cannot create a sense of personal responsibility. Owing to them laws may be framed and habits and customs may be framed but all such things remain superficial and seeming. Man can throw off these habits and customs at the first opportunity available to him.

On the contrary the ideal which has been presented as the monotheistic religion of the Prophets, having all over history a concrete reality independent of man and fulfills all the necessary conditions in this respect.

Why have the Prophets brought about the most intensive revolutions in human history? Why have they been the soundest revolutionaries in the world? Why have the Prophets on the historical stage been above all personal consideration? Why have they not agreed to any compromise? Why have they never wavered in their mission?

Why have the Prophets been like that? We find many revolutionaries in history who changed their doctrines, but it has never been heard that a Prophet ever wavered in his mission or faltered in his compliance with the teachings of his revealed Book. The Prophets always remained steady because they had an ideal which was independent of man and superior to him. This ideal gave them a glimmer of the sense of responsibility.

This sense is not a matter of secondary importance in man's spiritual journey. It is the basic condition of his success in this respect. It is the sense of responsibility which resolves man's inner conflict and contradictions. According to his creational scheme man always lives in a state of contradiction, for according to the Qur'an he has been created of clay as well as of a flash of divine spirit.

The Qur'an says that man has been created of clay. It also says that a breath or a flash of divine spirit has been breathed into him. As such man is a combination of two things. His clay (origin) draws him to the earth and calls him to base desires, material tendencies and all that is low, vile and becoming of the earth.

At the same time the breath of divine spirit breathed into him calls him to high and noble qualities and lifts him so much that he comes near to the divine qualities and adopts them. Divine spirit invites him to Allah's endless knowledge, His endless power, His endless justice, His generosity and magnanimity, His mercy, His retribution and His other attributes and qualities.

Man finds himself in the midst of the contradiction. He had fallen into this conflicting situation as a result of the nature of his psychical content and his inner structure. It is man's inherent nature which has given rise to this conflict and contradiction, as we shall elucidate by explaining the story of Adam, the first man.

The only way of resolving this contradiction is the creation of a sense of responsibility. Mere perception

of this inner conflict can identify this conflict, but cannot do away with it. Nothing can create a sense of personal responsibility in man except his choice of the supreme ideal.

It is this lofty ideal that makes man realize that he is accountable to his Lord, Who is Omnipotent and Omniscient and who recompenses him for all his good and bad deeds. Therefore a sense of inner responsibility which is a sort of a qualitative change in man's behaviour, is the only way of resolving the contradiction and conflict having their roots in man's nature.

The role of the monotheistic relation is to facilitate the adoption of this solution and with the growth of its quantitative and qualitative effect to remove the obstacles in the way of human progress. While supporting this solution the monotheistic religion carries out an incessant and intensive struggle against artificial, low and repetitious ideals which stop man's progress on the one hand and make him devoid of the sense of responsibility on the other.

That is why, as already mentioned, the fight of the Prophets against false gods has throughout history been incessant and intensive. Every low ideal on completion of its incubation period assumed the form of an idol and gains supporters. It is but natural that those whose material interests and worldly position depend on such ideals, keenly defend them.

That was the reason why those whose interests depended on the low ideals or idols tooth and nail opposed the Prophets and fought against them in defense of their own material and worldly interests and the luxurious life which they led.

The Qur'an has revealed a norm of history when it states that there has been a continuous clash between the Prophets, because they were the people who were benefited by the false ideals. When these ideals assumed the form of idols, they were against those given to easy life and enjoyment who reaped all the benefits and justified their own existence by the existence of their idols.

Therefore it was but natural that the people living at ease who had vested interests were always in the front line of those who were hostile to the Prophets. The Holy Qur'an says:

We did not send a warner before you to any township but its luxurious ones said: 'Surely we found our fathers following a religion and we are following their footprints' (Surah az-Zukhruf, 43:23)

We did not send to any township a warner, but it's pampered ones declared: 'No doubt we are disbelievers in what you bring to us' (Surah as-Sabah, 34:34)

I shall deprive them of the blessing of My revelations those who are arrogant in the earth, and if they see any sign, they do not believe it and if they see the way of righteousness, they do not choose it as their way, and if they see the way of error they choose it as their way. That is because they deny Our revelations and are used to disregard them. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:146)

And the chieftains of his fold, who disbelieved and denied the meeting of the Hereafter, and whom We had made prosperous in the life of this world, said: 'He is only a human being like you, who eats like you eat and drinks like you drink' (Surah al Mu'minun, 23:33)

Therefore in order to exterminate their false gods the monotheistic religion has taken steps to neutralize the interests of these luxurious people. In the beginning these false gods were only ideals, but subsequently their statues were made and thus they were converted into idols. The monotheistic religion severs man's relation with these low and abject gods.

Yet is it possible to sever the relation of humanity with these abject ideals and bury their heads under ground simply to allow them to raise their heads again in a different godless form, as has been the case with the dialectical–materialistic revolutionaries who take inspiration from historical materialism and from what they call the materiality of history. They also like us fight against false gods and call a belief in them the opium of the nations.

Yet the difference between our thinking and theirs is that we do not fight against the false gods to convert man into an animal or to sever man's relation with his spirit of lofty love and adoration. We do not fight against them to drag humanity to a lower course.

We sever man's relation with inferior ideals to establish his relation with his real and supreme ideal, to guide him back to the course of humanity and to attach him to his Almighty Allah with a view to bring about in him the desired quantitative and qualitative changes in the course of his development.

Now it must be understood clearly that the march of humanity towards this supreme ideal depends on certain prerequisite conditions which are as under:

(i) Clear Intellectual and Ideological Approach to the Supreme Ideal: To have a clear idea of the supreme ideal prevailing over history and which depended on monotheism. This belief co-ordinates and unifies all ideals, goals, aspirations, desires and all human knowledge in the Person of the Supreme Ideal, who is all-Knowledge, all-Power, all-Justice, all-Mercy and all-Retribution.

The doctrine of monotheism gives us a clear idea of this ideal who has realized all aspirations and goals in His Person. This doctrine teaches us that we should regard all Divine attributes as concrete facts, but dissimilar to our own qualities and characteristics.

We should regard the Divine attributes as a model, as a practical guide, as a goal for our practical advance and as mile-stones on our long route to the Almighty. The doctrine of monotheism fulfils the condition of providing a clear ideological and intellectual approach to our ideal.

(ii) The existence of a psychological force emanating from this ideal so that it may serve as a permanent asset and a motivating force for human will over history. This spiritual force which we call the motivating force of will, is inspired by our faith in Allah. This faith crystallizes in the belief in the Doomsday and the

Day of Resurrection, which are a continuation of the life of this world.

A belief in resurrection and the life after death teaches man that the small historical field in which he plays his role in this world, has a strong link with other fields or worlds called *barzakh* (purgatory) and the hereafter.

Man's condition in those great and perilous worlds depends on the role he plays in the historical field of this world. This belief equips man with a spiritual force that brings his will into action and fortifies it for successfully performing his role in the other worlds.

(iii) This supreme ideal of which we are talking differs from inferior ideals because it is outside the existence of man. It is not a part of man detached from him. The supreme ideal has its own separate and independent existence. It is everywhere and is not a part of man.

Its separation from man makes it necessary that there be a link between man and this ideal. Other ideals have a human aspect and they have been detached from man. As such it is not necessary that man should have any link with them.

Of course the devils and the Pharaohs have over history tried to establish links of some sort between man and the so called gods of the sun and the stars. But such links are false, for these gods are imaginary and fictitious. They are only a mental concept detached from man and given a concrete shape.

In contrast the supreme ideal has no existence absolutely separate from man, and hence there should be genuine link between man and this ideal. It is this genuine link that has found full expression in the role of the Prophets. Every Prophet has pointed out the existence of this link, for a Prophet is the person who fulfils in himself the first and the second conditions of arranging the progress of humanity to this ideal by the Will of Allah.

He has a clear ideological vision of this ideal and at the same time his psychological force is fully saturated with this belief in Allah and the Day of Judgment. These two elements combined in his person help him play the role of a Prophet, and the link between the supreme ideal and humanity expressed in this combination makes the Prophet a warner and bringer of good tidings.

When humanity arrives at the stage called by the Qur'an the `Decisive' stage, the significance of which we shall explain in our forthcoming lectures, things so develop that the coming of a warner and bringer of good tidings becomes insufficient, for this is the stage when the low ideals or false gods block the road of man's development.

At this stage it becomes necessary to remove the obstacles and pull down the barriers which prevent man from proceeding towards Allah – the Almighty. At this stage it is necessary for humanity to launch a campaign and fight against the false gods, vicious and malignant beings and low ideals which regard

themselves as the guardians of humanity but actually are a sort of highwaymen, for they block the way of humanity and prevent it from continuing its onward historical movement.

For this purpose a leader is required. Such a leader is called Imam and his role is known as Imamat. An Imam is the leader who guides and supervises human combat against falsehood. At a stage of Prophethood the roles of the Imam and the Prophet are amalgamated. The Qur'an has spoken of this feature and we shall discuss it shortly. Most probably this amalgamation began with Prophet Nuh.

The role of the Imam is though amalgamated with that of the Prophet, yet it continues even after the role of the Prophet has come to an end. This happens when a Prophet quits the field while the fight is still on and it is necessary in the interest of his mission that the struggle for crushing the false gods be continued. In such a case the period of Imamat maintains the continuity of the role of Prophethood even after its coming to an end

This was the fourth condition of arranging the way of human progress to the supreme ideal. In its light we can have a clear idea of what we call the five cardinal principles of religion. Now we shall see how sound these five principles are and how they determine man's historical course.

The five cardinal principles of religion are as under:

- (i) **Monotheism:** The role of monotheism lies in the fact that it provides us with a clear intellectual and ideological point of view. Monotheism attaches all human aspirations and goals to the supreme ideal, that is Allah.
- (ii) **Divine Justice**: Justice is just another dimension of monotheism. From social point of view knowledge, power and other attributes of Allah are not His distinguishing features, but justice is, for justice is the quality which can give many things to society and can make it independent of others.

In the course of our social progress we need justice more than any other quality. Justice has appeared as the second cardinal principle of religion, because from social point of view it has a guiding and instructional aspect.

We have said earlier that Islam teaches us not to regard the Divine attributes as mere metaphysical realities having no connection with us. We should look at them as sign-posts which guide us to pursue a certain way of life.

From this point of view, justice is the biggest concept that can guide humanity, and for this very reason it is distinguished from other attributes. Otherwise justice lies within the framework of total monotheism. It is an essential quality of a perfect ideal.

(iii) **Belief in Prophethood**: It is the third cardinal principle of religion. It establishes a genuine link between man and his ideal. As said earlier humanity needs this link when it marches toward its ideal, that is Allah who is independent of man, and has neither been detached from him nor produced by-him.

It is a Prophet who ensures the establishment of this link. Throughout history the Prophets have satisfied this real need.

(iv) **Imamat**: It is that leadership which amalgamates with Prophethood. A Prophet is an Imam also. He performs the functions of Imamat as well as Prophethood. Yet Imamat continues if the struggle is not over even after the end of the period of a Prophet, and a leader is still required to carry out his mission.

In such a case an Imam shoulders this responsibility and during the period of his Imamat supervises the unfinished work of the Prophet. Thus Imamat is the fourth cardinal principle of religion.

(v) **The Day of Resurrection**: The fifth principle is the belief in the Day of Resurrection. This principle ensures the fulfillment of the second condition out of the four prerequisite condition of arranging the progress of humanity to the true ideal, as mentioned above. The principle of the Hereafter creates a psychological force that motivates and fortifies human will and guarantees man's responsible behaviour.

From the foregoing it is clear that in the final analysis these cardinal principles of religion are the elements which take part in man's adoption of the supreme ideal. They have also determined the social relationship of this ideal over history as we explained in a previous lecture when we discussed the four-fold advantage of religion.

We explained earlier that according to the concept presented by the Qur'an the social relations are four-dimensional and not three-dimensional. We deduced this concept from the word `istikhlaf (appointing a vicegerent) used by the Qur'an. Explaining this word we said that appointing a vicegerent had four dimensions.

It required the existence of man, nature, Allah – the Almighty and the person appointed the vicegerent. This combination of four-fold social relationship is another way of expressing the combination of the five-fold cardinal principles of religion for the purpose of the tedious and long journey of man to Allah – the Almighty.

The above mentioned facts explain man's role in determining the course of history. In his historical journey man is the centre of gravity, not as a physical body, but because of his inner content, the meaning of which we have already explained. The basis of man's inner content is the ideal which he himself chooses.

The true ideal is only that which can ensure to man all his main and prior goals and objectives, which serve as historical incentives to his activities on the stage of history. Hence the choice of the supreme ideal by man as his ideal lays the strong foundation of his inner content. This shows the importance of the role of this fourth dimension.

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