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Chapter 1: Belief

Meaning Of Belief

The Persian word 'aqideh' meaning "belief or opinion is derived from the Arabic root 'aqd' which has the sense of "tying', 'grafting' 'forming a knot', and so on.

Tying or grafting one object to another may be either literal and physical, such as when we graft a sapling or branch of a tree to another tree or figurative, such as the bond of matrimony, which binds husband to wife.

An 'aqideh' therefore, is something which is figuratively 'tied' or 'grafted' to a person's mind, thought or soul. When his mind accepts that the earth revolves around the sun, or that the sun, revolves around the earth; when it accepts that blood circulates in the body or does not circulate; when it accepts that the world has, or does not have, a creator; when it accepts that there is, or is not a life after death; when, in other words, a person accepts any theory either true or false, this theory is, as it were, tied or grafted or knotted to his mind, and the theory becomes a belief and part of that person's ideology.

The Role Of Belief

Since Ideology forms the basis of his quests and objectives in life it plays a crucial role in man's individual and collective life. As the Quran states:

Every man acts in accordance with his nature. (17:84).

What form a person's inner or real nature are his beliefs or ideology, and these are what motivate and direct him in life.

If a person's beliefs are correct and in accord with reality his life will follow a correct course, and if they are false his life will lead to a cul-de-sac. For this reason Islam attaches greater importance to the question of correcting beliefs than to anything else.

Without a doubt Islam sets greater store by a person's beliefs than does any other school of thought, and goes so far as to claim that belief is the proper yardstick by which to judge deeds, so that even a good deed, if it is not accompanied by soundness of belief, is without value.

As Imam Baqer says: 'No action is of value if it is based on doubt and denial. In other words, the soundness of an action, its role in a person's development and its 'usefulness' all depend on the soundness of the agent's beliefs.

If a person is ideologically unsound, and denies or doubts the truth, no action arising from his beliefs can be sound or useful, for it is his beliefs that motivate him and his motivation that gives direction to his deeds and it is the motivation and direction of his deeds that determine their meaning and intrinsic value.

For this reason Muslims believe that the first thing that happens when a person dies and enters the life to come is that in the preliminary examination of his life in this world he is asked what his beliefs were. The first questions are about his beliefs, not his deeds, such as what god and what religion did you believe in? And which leader did you follow?

Of all the world's religions and philosophies there is none that ascribes more value and importance to a person's belief s than does Islam. From the Islamic viewpoint, Ideological discussions are the most important of all discussions, and theological centers and universities in Islamic countries should pay more attention to ideological indoctrination and discussions than to other subjects.

A detailed understanding of the importance Islam attaches to ideological debate requires a study or such subjects as *ma'rifat* (divine knowledge), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *fikr* (thought), *'aql* (intellect) *'ilm* (science), *fatwa* (rulings on points of jurisprudence), *Taqlid* (following authority) and *ray* (opinion in textbooks of Islamic thought). A detailed study of such works is beyond the scope or this introduction.2

Here, we will restrict ourselves to quoting a hadith of Imam 'Ali, who is justly regarded as the greatest guide to belief and action that aptly illustrates the importance of ideological matters in the Islamic view.

According to Sheikh Saduq, the late ninth-century muhadith, a certain Abu al-Muqaddam ibn Shorain, quoting his father, related that in the thick of the Battle of the Camel, which 'Ali fought against Internal counter-revolutionaries, just when 'Ali's warriors were gathered around him to decide on military plans and operations, a Bedouin stood up and said in a loud voice: 'O Commander of the Faithful do you believe in the unity of God?' To the rest of the warriors, who were totally absorbed in questions of military strategy, this question was quite unexpected.

They thought that if anyone wanted to ask the Imam a question it would be connected with the battle, the vital topic of the day. When they heard this nomad's ideological question, which apparently had nothing to do with the war and could be discussed and answered at a more appropriate time. They vented their spleen on this man for failing to appreciate situation they were in.

A Valuable Lesson

Imam 'Ali, however, when he saw the Bedouin coming under attack from all sides, rose to his defense, and delivered these historic words, which may serve as a clear indication of the importance and role of ideological discussion, and of the value of ideological indoctrination:

"Let him ask his question and refrain from scolding him. For what this man of the desert wants to know is the very question over which we are in dispute with our enemies!"

These words of Imam 'Ali, uttered in such circumstances are of extraordinary importance and deserve close study.

If we consider the Imam's situation at that critical time, when any moment could be decisive, we may well agree that he really did not have the time to reply to this question: be might have asked someone else to deal with it or proposed that it be left till later. But he neither referred it to someone else, nor postponed answering it, because he wanted to teach the Muslims an important lesson.

He wanted to teach them the philosophy of *jihad*, or holy war. He wanted to show them the importance of ideological questions, discussions and indoctrination. He wanted to say that if today Ali is fighting internal counter revolutionaries, and if tomorrow a descendant of 'Ali and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran is fighting internal and external counter revolutionaries and insists on continuing the war until the final victory, and if one-day the eleventh successor of 'Ali and Fatima, the promised Mahdi, is fighting world arrogance and atheism and all the Satanic forces of the age, and paints the earth red with their blood and cleanses the world from their pollution, all these wars are for Islam, all this fighting is to destroy the Satanic regimes that have prevented the blossoming of society's talents to free man from slavery a bondage, and to set him on the path towards absolute perfection and sublimity, as his creator intend.

It was for this reason that Imam 'Ali defended the Bedouin's question at a critical and decisive moment, and used that brief opportunity to explain the philosophy of jihad and war. He told his followers to let the man ask his question and said that they were fighting the war over precisely that question.

Their objective was not conquest or exploitation, but rather divine philosophy and spiritual illumination. Their war was to destroy the obstacles and remove the veils that were preventing truth from being revealed. The Islamic philosophy of *jihad* is to free the people from the shackles of superstition, correct their ideology and permit true and scientific beliefs to flourish.4

So not only was the Bedouin's question not divorced from the main questions of the day- the war-but it had the closest possible relationship with it. After all, it was related to the philosophy of war and jihad and what bond is firmer than that between a thing and its philosophy?

For that reason the Imam turned to the Bedouin and with complete self-possession and precise detail

answered his question in these words:

O Bedouin! The statement that God is one is based on four assumptions, two of which are not applicable to God Almighty, while the other two are correct and susceptible of proof.5

The Imam then explained each of the four assumptions. Since this matter of doctrine is not related to our present discussion and, God willing, will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter in our discussion of the unity of God, we shall not continue with the rest of the Imam's reply here.

The Philosophy of War According To The Prophet

As we have noted, Imam 'Ali defended ideological discussion as part of the philosophy of jihad. In this connection, there is a hadith of the Prophet of Islam according to which ideological discussion is examined in relation to the philosophy of war in a different light.

It is related that the Prophet was with a group of his companions one day and wanted to tell them about what constitutes the most valuable deeds in the sight of God and what is the surest path that an individual or society can take to ensure the avoidance of sin, and the pursuit of happiness in this world and the next. The companions had been undergoing exhausting ordeals, and thanks to their ceaseless efforts on the battlefield the foundations of an Islamic government and been laid for the first time in that dark world.

The Prophet spoke to them in these Words: 'Nothing is dearer in God's sight, and nothing redeems a servant of God more surely in this life and the life to come than the invocation of His holy name.'

The companions imagined at that critical moment Islam required more than anything else resolution and courage on the battle field, and that therefore jihad in the path of God must be the most valuable of all deeds. They were therefore understandably surprised at his words, and one of them said to the Prophet, without concealing his astonishment: 'But what about fighting on God's behalf?' Isn't that more valuable?'

The Prophet of Islam then spoke these meaningful and deeply instructive words, which may be taken as a commentary on the value and importance of ideological discussion with regard to the philosophy of war and jihad: 'Without the invocation of God's name there can be no lawful command to fight on His, behalf.6

War is intrinsically undesirable and jihad is in itself of no value. Their desirability and value to man in his pursuit of perfection and happiness only exist when they are 'in the path ·of God', and the objective of jihad 'in the path of God', is God and Islam. It follows that if God and the invocation of His name and Islam are not involved there can in principle be no war in the path of God, let alone any lawful command to fight such a war.

On the basis of this principle ideological discussion which acquaints a person with God and Islam in a

fundamental and logical manner serves to give purpose and direction to war, and makes jihad in the path of God a first step towards the salvation of man and the perfection of society. It therefore follows that invoking God's name is of greater value than the actual fighting because the act of invocation lies at the heart of the philosophy of war.

Belief Indoctrination at The War Front

One or the interesting results we may obtain from this discussion in connection with the indoctrination classes arranged by the educational unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is that now, the third year in which Revolutionary Corps has served at the front against the mercenaries of the B'athist regime,7 the most important question one that must not be neglected is the philosophy of war.

The invocation of God's name is recognition of the philosophy of war without which a combatant gradually tries of fighting and becomes estranged from himself. For this reason, in addition to the need for prayer both day and night, participation in these ideological classes, as occasion permits, is essential and should not be missed, since once a combatant's ideological and spiritual foundations arc strengthened, if the war lasts not another three years, but another thirty years, or even more, if he knows God and had experienced the meaning of jihad in the path of God he will not tire of the war. There is a hadith to the effect that nobody wishes to return to this world except the martyrs who have experienced so much divine grace as a result of their martyrdom that they are eager to return to this world and be martyred once again!8

Al the end of this talk some of you may want to ask why we should fight if invoking God's name is of greater value than war. Why don't we sit at home and pray or attend indoctrination classes in our own town s and villages? There is an Arabic proverb that says 'Take what you want and don't bother with how you get it.'

The answer to this question is that first, as I shall explain in detail later the meaning of invoking God's name or praying is not, according to the Islamic text simply verbal invocation A.s we saw in the hadith in question, the meaning of invocation is knowledge of Islamic thought and God and due regard for the philosophy of war not merely saying God's name aloud.

Secondly, to reach this kind of conclusion is as if someone were to say that studying is more valuable than eating, and someone else concluded from this remark that from now on he should not eat but devote himself exclusively to study.

In just the same way that eating is necessary precondition for studying; fighting with the enemies of God and of the divine order is a precondition for knowing God and invoking his name and we cannot neglect this precondition as an excuse to go straight to such invocation and knowledge, since if the enemies of God conquer our society there will be no opportunity left to know God or invoke His holy name.

1. Mohammad Mohammadi-ye Reyshahri Mizan al Hikma(Qom, 1362-63)Vol. X, Hadith

No. 14048.

- 2. This subject will be examined in subsequent chapters.
- <u>3.</u> One who reports hadith, the sayings of the Prophet and Imams, an important source of Islamic jurisprudence and ethical teachings.
- 4. This chapter will be discussed in chapter VI of this Introduction.
- 5. Mizan, Chapter 2628.
- 6. Ibid, hadith 1331.
- 7. The literature on which this book based delivered during the third year of the imposed war.
- 8. Ibid, Chapter 2114

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