

## Chapter 7: The Limits of Attraction and Repulsion (Peace and Violence) in Islam (Part 1)

The topic suggested to me to discuss is the limits of attraction and repulsion from the viewpoint of Islam. In dealing with any discussion, its topic must be clarified first so that we can thereafter raise the issues relevant to the topic. Here we should also examine what is meant by attraction and repulsion in Islam so as to later determine their limits.

### [Explaining the Concepts of “Attraction and Repulsion” and “Islam”](#)

We all are familiar with the concept of “attraction and repulsion” and whenever we hear this terminology, what comes first to our mind is usually the attraction and repulsion existing in nature and the physical world. This is especially true in the case of professors in the fields of engineering for what comes to your mind is Newton’s law of gravity. Meanwhile, the manifestation of repulsion in the natural sciences is the centrifugal force or the positive–positive (or negative–negative) poles of a magnet. However, this concept has naturally some changes once it enters the social sciences and humanities and it no longer means physical and material attraction and repulsion. It will rather be used to mean spiritual and emotional attraction and repulsion.

That is, for example, a person feels that there is an element drawing him toward it and he likes to get closer to it, and if ever possible, to be united and merged with it. On the contrary, he observes that he does not want to get closer to some things and individuals and their existence is such that he likes to keep distance with them and be away from them. The element of spiritual and emotional attraction and repulsion can be a material thing, person, belief, and way of thinking. Sometimes, a panorama is so beautiful that you are unconsciously drawn to it and although you cannot physically get closer to it and you stand right there in your place, you direct all your attention and senses and are absorbed in looking at it. Sometimes also, man wants to get away from a deafening sound or unbearable scene as soon as

possible.

The attractiveness of the personality also means that apart from physical and exterior features, there are certain attitudes, spiritual features and attributes in him that make others incline toward him and be attracted to him. Persons who are polite and courteous, cheerful, and kind and compassionate to others occupy a place in the hearts of others and everybody wants to deal with and be close to them. The personality of impolite, ill-mannered and selfish individuals is such that it drives others away from them and makes people keep aloof from them.

Of course, whenever there is a talk about attraction and repulsion regarding individuals and people, we should bear in mind that this issue depends on culture and values; that is, some characteristics possibly possess positive value in a certain society and culture and in another society and culture the same characteristics may be regarded as devoid of any value or even inconsistent with moral values. It is natural that a person possessing those characteristics has an attractive personality in the former society and culture and is loved and respected (by people) but in the latter society and culture, he will be a common person or even be hated. At any rate, we only wish to stress that the attractiveness and repulsiveness of one's personality are different depending on the value system and culture dominant in a certain society. In any case, this issue itself requires a separate discussion which is presently not our concern.

Given our explanations, so far the concept of attraction and repulsion which appears in the title of our discussion is clarified to some extent. But the subject of our discussion is attraction and repulsion in Islam. As such, we have to clarify also what we mean by "Islam."

Islam in our view is a set of beliefs, values and laws, and it encompasses doctrinal and ideological issues as well as individual and social laws. Whenever we say that Islam is such-and-such, by Islam it means the set of these beliefs, values and laws. In this discussion also, when we say attraction and repulsion in Islam, it means the attraction and repulsion existing in the doctrinal principles and foundations, moral principles and foundations, and the laws and ordinances of Islam.

In the section pertaining to beliefs, the attractiveness of Islam denotes that the Islamic doctrines are consonant with the truth-seeking natural disposition [*fitrah*] of man. That is, they are doctrines which are anchored in the realities of creation and since the natural disposition of man is to seek the truth, these doctrines are harmonious with the natural disposition of man and they can be attractive for him. In any case, the attraction and repulsion related to the Islamic beliefs are presently not our concern in this discussion and at this point what is more important than them are the attraction and repulsion related to the values and laws of Islam, especially the attraction and repulsion related to the laws of Islam on duties and obligations. And we are more interested in knowing whether the set of Islamic values and laws are more attractive or repulsive to man.

## Is the Assumption on Repulsion about Islam Possible?

This question may possibly be entertained in the mind: If the sum of Islamic tenets is set on the basis of the natural disposition of man, it naturally follows that it must be attractive to him. Yet, how can repulsion be imagined concerning it?

The reply is as follows: It is true that man is innately a truth-seeker, perfection-lover and beauty-passionate, but there is also an array of other dispositional and instinctive things in him. In many instances, there are conflicts and contradictions between these two sets of dispositional and instinctive things, each setting aside the other one. In other words, if in order to avoid a mistake and misconception in the discussion, we label the material and animalistic desires of man as instinct and the other desires as natural disposition, in many cases there is no harmony between the instinct and natural disposition.

The instinct is only after its satiation and gratification, and does not acknowledge justice, mercy and fairness. The hungry stomach recognizes bread only. It does not make any difference between the lawful [*halal*] and the unlawful [*haram*], good and bad, and personal property and that of others. It shall be filled with whatever bread, regardless of whether lawful or unlawful. The comfort-yearning nature of man is in pursuit of acquiring money and wealth to provide for his comfort. It makes no difference for him whether this money is obtained through just or unjust way. But the natural disposition of man is concerned with fairness, concordant with justice and honesty, and disgusted with injustice, oppression and treachery.

Notwithstanding this justice-loving and anti-injustice disposition of man, sometimes the external reality is such that to satisfy the material instincts, physical needs and animalistic cravings cannot be obtained except through oppression and treachery. It is here that man, if he is a seeker of his true human perfection, is forced to dispense with some enjoyments and not to eat, drink and listen to certain things. And in sum, he has to restrain himself. In such cases, Islam which wants man to be drawn toward true perfection has naturally taken the side of natural disposition and set limits on the instincts and materialistic enjoyments.

Along this line, for those who cannot control their instincts, or in other words, bestiality still prevails on them, it is natural that some of the laws of Islam are not attractive and are even repulsive. Islam has a series of commandments consistent with both the instinct and natural disposition such as:

***“Eat of the good things We have provided you (7:160)”***

and

***“Eat and drink. (7:31)”***

This kind of commandments creates no problem for individuals, but it says, “Do not drink wine; do not eat pork... etc.” such orders are not attractive for everybody and some people are not pleased with these

decrees.

## [A Historical Example of Repulsion in the Laws of Islam](#)

It is not irrelevant here to cite an account from the history of Islam. As you well know, during the time of the Holy Prophet (S), Christians of Najran came and discussed and debated with him about their alleged beliefs on monotheism and they were defeated in the said academic discussion. In spite of this fact, they were not ready to embrace Islam. The Prophet (S) challenged them to an imprecation. They accepted the challenge and were supposed to have imprecation.

When the Prophet (S) came along with his most beloved ones; namely 'Ali, Fatimah, Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn ('a) for the imprecation, the attention of Christian priests was drawn to the five pure ones and luminous countenances. They said, "Anyone who disputes with these five personages, his lot will be nothing but curse and damnation in this world and in the Hereafter." They were not willing to become Muslims, saying: "We will remain Christians but we will pay the *jizyah*." <sup>1</sup> When the Companions of the Prophet (S) asked one of them as to the reason behind their unwillingness to embrace Islam, he said that it was because of their habit and desire to eat pork and drink wine, and Islam has forbidden both of them. <sup>2</sup>

This is a historical example of a group who, even though the truth of Islam was proved to them, the repulsion that some of the laws of Islam had for them posed as the hindrance to accept Islam. That is, their human disposition came in conflict with their animalistic instincts and in this conflict, they preferred the latter. This problem is not only confined to the Christians of Najran but also to all those who have not acquired divine training and are subdued by their carnal desires and instincts.

The laws and commands which in a sense set limits on the materialistic instincts and desires of man are repulsive for this group of people. And as pointed out, in Islam such laws exist. The law that orders a person to fast and abstain from food and drink for sixteen hours during a 40-degree Celsius summer is not harmonious with the base instincts and inclinations of man, and it makes an affair difficult for him. This is especially true in the case of persons such as bakers and the like who are forced to work near a blazing fire. Of course, there are also those who, in spite of working under the scorching heat of the sun or beside a blazing fire, ardently act upon this ordinance and observe fasting. However, this kind of self-nurtured people are not many.

For another example, such laws as *khums* may possibly not be problematic for you and I who perhaps are not required to pay a thousand *tuman* <sup>3</sup> as *khums* of our properties, but for one who has to pay millions of *tumans* as *khums*, it is truly hard and difficult. Many people during the early period of Islam abandoned Islam because of the decree on paying *zakat*, and they stood against the Prophet (S), and when the emissary of the Prophet (S) came to them to collect the taxes, they said, "The Prophet is also asking for a tribute! We will not pay tribute to anybody." This law (of *zakat*) was repulsive to them, and it made them alien to Islam and even fight against the caliph of Muslims.

As another example, Islam gives order to wage war and participate in *jihad*. It is natural that war is not a bed of roses, and there is the possibility of being killed, becoming captive and blind, the amputation of hands and feet, and thousands of other dangers, and most people do not will to face these dangers and oppose the order for the waging of war and be present at the battlefield. Of course, there are also volunteers who unreservedly will to be present at the battlefield and passionately face all these dangers. Yet, it cannot be denied that this decree is not attractive to most of people who have not nurtured themselves in this way, and under any pretext, they shirk and avoid it.

Therefore, the reply to the question on whether the laws and ordinances of Islam are attractive or repulsive is that for different people some of the decrees of Islam are attractive while others are repulsive.

## **Islam's Injunction on Attraction and Repulsion in Behavior**

Meanwhile, as the question on how the behavior of Muslims should be toward one another as well as toward non-Muslims, the answer is that Islam is founded on fostering attraction. Islam wants to lead individuals and societies toward perfection and felicity. Thus, the behavior of the Islamic society should be such that the others outside it would incline toward it and be attracted to it so as for Islam to be explained to them and guide them. If people keep aloof from the Islamic society and the capital of Islam, one cannot propagate Islam to them, and as a result, they will not be guided.

So, the principle is that Muslims should behave in such a manner that they be attractive both to one another and day by day, their unity and solidarity would be strengthened, and to the non-Muslims who are outside the group in order for the former to be able to guide the latter. Of course, although the crux of the matter is the fostering of attraction, it is not accurate for us to say that absolutely and in whatever condition, they have to behave in such a way. In fact, in some cases, they definitely have to employ an instrument of repulsion. In a bid to explain and prove this subject, during the remaining time for this session, we shall deal with some matters and continue the discussion in the future meeting.

## **Examples of Islamic Attractive Behaviors**

In Islam, we lay much emphasis on the observance of justice, fairness, goodness, service to others and making them happy. One of the most valuable forms of worship in Islam is for a person to make another person happy and if ever the other person has sorrow and grief, he has to eliminate them in a certain way. In some narrations, the reward of making a faithful happy and removing his sorrow and grief has been mentioned as greater than many years of worship. It is such even if that action is only to the extent that the person would behave kindly with the other and talk in such a manner that would give hope and peace of mind to him.

For such actions like smiling in the face of a fellow *mu'min*, shaking hands with him, embracing him, visiting him when he is sick, and hastening to help him achieve his works, which foster sincerity and

attraction among Muslims, numerous rewards have been mentioned in narrations. Islam does not stop here and has even enjoined and laid much stress on many of these ordinances even in the case of behavior toward non-Muslims. Islam says that if a non-Muslim becomes your neighbor or fellow traveler, he acquires some rights over you.

If you happen to travel with a non-Muslim and you reach a point where you have to part ways and separate from each other, the said non-Muslim has the following right over you: You should take some steps along with him and escort him, and then part ways with him and go on your way. Islam regards it incumbent to observe justice and equity toward anyone though he may be a non-Muslim, and considers injustice as absolutely repugnant. Even if a person is an unbeliever, you still have no right to treat him unjustly:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۚ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۚ اْعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ  
لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

***And ill feeling for a people should never lead you to be unfair. Be fair; that is nearer to God-wariness. (5:8)***

Even more serious than this, merely to observe justice with respect to non-Muslims is not enough; rather, compassion which is loftier than justice should also be observed:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ  
الْمُقْسِطِينَ

***Allah does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, that you deal with them with kindness and justice. (60:8)***

And even in some cases, it goes beyond this point and it enjoins that from the revenues that Muslims have paid to the Islamic government, some of them should be given to the non-Muslims who live along the borders and within the Islamic territory so as for their hearts to incline toward Islam and be attracted to it. (Qur'an, 9:60)

It is not necessary that in reaction to this act, they should certainly become Muslims; rather, merely the fact that hearts are softened with respect to Muslims and become kind and friendly to them is good enough. This act will gradually pave the way for them to become closer to you, interact with you, observe your behavior, actions and lifestyle from a close distance, and be kind to you. And in so many cases, they would be affected and become Muslims.

Throughout history, there have been many non-Muslims who, on account of interaction with Muslims,

listening to the logic of Islam and observing the manner and behavior of its followers, have embraced Islam. At any rate, they were examples of the ordinances and programs which have been taken into account by Islam for attraction.

## Does Islam always enjoin the Policy of Attraction in Behavior?

The point which is necessary to note is that this policy of fostering attraction which we mentioned with respect to both Muslims and non-Muslims is not general in application, and in some instances, it is replaced by the policy of employing instruments of repulsion. Sometimes, apart from not contributing to the spiritual growth and perfection as well as guidance of a person, love and kindness even create an obstruction along the way.

Sometimes, man, as the effect of the storm of animalistic instincts and materialistic desires or being under the influence of certain social factors, family training and the like, will be prone to committing oppression, tyranny and debauchery and if he is not controlled, day by day he will drag himself further down the cesspool of corruption and adversity and spoil his life in this world and the Hereafter, not to mention the fact that it will bring about trouble, annoyance and violation of the rights of others. In such cases, it is to his interest and that of society to be reprimanded and punished so as to put an end to the corruption and mischief and open the way toward goodness and welfare.

That is, the inner nature of this punishment is mercy. It hinders him from further deviation and fall and prevents the permeation of his mischief to others. Of course, the outward appearance of the punishment be it in the form of fine, whip, imprisonment, execution, or others annoys and upsets a person any way, and naturally, no one is pleased with it. Islam says that in certain circumstances your behavior must be violent and repulsive, and attraction is not desirable and recommended in all places.

## Summary of the Discussion

To sum it up, we stated the essence of defining attraction and repulsion in Islam. Similarly, we said that attraction and repulsion may possibly be related to a thing, a person or a belief and idea. We also stated that Islam is a set of beliefs, values and laws, and attraction and repulsion in Islam may be related to any of these three spheres. Then, we focused our discussion on the attraction and repulsion related to the laws and ordinances of Islam. In this part, we said that Islam has laws which are desirable to all individuals and all people will incline to them. It has also laws to which many people will not incline and are repulsive for them.

Applying perfume, brushing teeth, hygiene and cleanliness, good manners, sincerity, honesty, justice, and goodness are among the things enjoined by Islam and are attractive to all individuals. Fasting, waging war and going to the battlefield, and paying religious taxes such as *khums* and *zakat* are among the cases which are part of the Islamic laws, but many people are not amenable with them and are repulsive for them. In continuation, we embarked on the main subject and question of the discussion.

What is the injunction of Islam to the Muslims regarding the behavior toward others? Does it say that Muslims should always be kind toward others, smile at them and not employ any means of repulsion, or has it also recommended that in some cases, the behavior must be violent and repulsive? Given the explanations we had, it was evident that both kinds of behavior are enjoined in the precepts of Islam. The cases wherein the behavior of Muslims toward others must be violent and repulsive in nature are very few, but such cases do exist. We will cite some examples of these cases in the future meeting, God willing.

1. Jizyah: a tax levied on non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic state in exchange for the protection they receive and in lieu of the taxes, such as zakat, that only Muslims pay. [Trans.]

2. For the circumstances surrounding the event of mubalahah, see the exegeses [tafsir] of Sūrah Al-‘Imran 3:61:

“Should anyone argue with you concerning him, after the knowledge that has come to you, say, ‘Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our souls and your souls, then let us pray earnestly and call down Allah’s curse upon the liars.’” [Trans.]

3. – Tūman: every tūman is equivalent to ten Iranian rials. [Trans.]

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