

## Discourse Four: The Role of the Supernatural in Society

Some discourses have been with us from ancient times and still have a place within our thoughts; such as “the effects of destiny and decree” and “the effects of the unseen world”.

Admittedly, we cannot say that all inner productions that we call “thought” are made up of right materials and correct formulas or that they have good effects on our lives because in the process of our daily lives we constantly encounter many mistakes and endeavor to correct them. We even find faults in our corrections and strive to put them right.

This point impresses upon us the fact that we are not immune to error in the process of our lives and utilization of our existential resources to attain bliss.

Also, philosophically speaking, if humans were insusceptible to error and completely realistic, we could never achieve existential evolution. Thus, our movement would be blocked, our situation would be fixed, and creation would come to the end of its journey in the second moment of existence.

Also, if all human thoughts were erroneous and utterly unrealistic, life would not conform to the external world and it would be destroyed in the first moments as well. One cannot conceive that the thoughts of humankind or other sapient races are completely faulty or that their conformity to the external world is accidental.

Human evolution is caused by the formation of correct and incorrect thoughts. In other words, evolution exists because of the cline of realism ranging between the positive and the negative. By virtue of this cline, we are drawn toward our ultimate goal.

With our inborn disposition toward gaining knowledge and examining the unknown, we continually discover our errors. We deem our thinking formulas faulty and inadequate in their correspondence with the external world and note in our minds the obscurities we encounter each day. With restored spirit we

review and revise our past thoughts, posit novel theories, reach newer conclusions and more expressive views, and make headway in spiritual and material matters of life.

After thinking about this short discussion, the first thing we realize is that humans are perpetually faced with many obscurities upon which our lives depend. What we know of the causes and conditions of our spiritual and material lives is always much less than our ignorance.

In fact the ratio cannot be calculated because there can be no ratio between a finite and infinite amount. Regardless, human life depends upon all its known and unknown causes and conditions and the system that reigns over the whole of creation also governs humanity as opposed to the compact system that humans perceive using their infinitesimal knowledge.

## **The relationship between life and the supernatural [mawar' al-tab'ah]**

Causes and conditions that hide behind the veil of human ignorance are called “the unseen or supernatural” [ghayb or mawar' al-tab'ah]. If a series of knowns and unknowns are combined, they would still be veiled and invisible. All that we know of the supernatural world is the existence of a veil and that there is something behind it that is not unrelated to our lives.

Humans cannot disregard the fact that our lives are related to the unseen nor can we content ourselves with only causes and conditions that are known to us.

Even those who ridicule belief in the unseen and supernatural as a superstitious religious belief and insipid relic from the Age of Myths pragmatically accept and are humbled by this truth. In the process of life, they are not exempt from the effects of supernatural causes and cannot be nonchalant about unexpected incidents.

Even so, faithfulness to the existence of unseen effects does not mean that one should give up the effects of knowledge and devices at hand, awaiting supernatural aid. In truth, this is sacrifice of knowledge in favor of the unknown—something that reason cannot sanction.

In fact, our realist mechanism that notifies us of the unknown behind the veil also informs us of the effects of what we know and forces us to use them.

Divine religions invite us to believe in the unseen and supernatural and also endorse the products of work and toil in our lives. The Qur'an repeatedly bids us to believe in unseen effects. In regard to religious calls, such as the invitation of Prophet Noah ('a), the Qur'an states:

﴿وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى﴾

***“And that humans have nothing save what they make an effort for.”<sup>1</sup>***

Moreover, regarding the Day of Judgment, the Qur’an declares:

﴿يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى﴾

***“It is a day in which humans remember their works.”<sup>2</sup>***

## **Law requires executive support**

Humans can only achieve perfection and bliss if they form societies and cooperate in performing myriad vital activities that one person cannot do alone.

This entails the need of social members for rules and regulations that can protect the rights of individuals and determine the share of each person in the benefits of society. That is, people must work as they are able and barter the results of their endeavors, such that each person should benefit from others to the extent of their work value and such that power and weakness not cause injustice and persecution.

These laws can only be effective if there are penal codes to warn against offence and encourage obedience. Also, a governing power must reign over the society with justice and fairness to guarantee the execution of these laws.

This aspiration may only be realized if the executive power is notified of the crime and has the power to punish the criminal. However, if a crime is committed such that no one is alerted—which is very common—there will be no obstacles in the way of its perpetration.

Also, if the government lacks the power to punish criminals or if it is negligent, criminal offence and infringement of rights will become prevalent. This is because humans have a propensity for greed and make use of everything in their power to gain personal interests—even if it causes disadvantage to others.

The greatest tragedy occurs when all powers are focused in the executive and ruling body. When this unparalleled power considers the people weak and no power remains among the people to regulate its power, its will shall reign absolutely over the affairs of the people. History is brimming with stories of tyrants and oppressors that exploit and abuse the people. The world is still rife with such cases.

Consequently, even if just laws are formulated and severe penal codes are developed, crimes and offences cannot be obstructed save through virtuous human morality.

We must not be fooled by the order and justice that exist in some advanced nations. We should not assume that rules and regulations necessarily bring about justice because the mentality of these nations

is fundamentally different from others.

They think socially and consider their interest and loss the interest and loss of the society; however, they too exploit weak nations and subjugate backward countries.

These same people who give the appearance of justice, deal with subjugated countries in the same way that tyrants of old behaved toward their own people with the difference that, in modern times, individual dictators have been replaced with societies and some words have lost their original meanings becoming the exact opposite.

Liberty, honor, justice, and virtue are attributed to things that represent bondage, abasement, oppression, and vice.

Thus, laws are not safe from violation unless they are based upon virtuous human moralities. Also, morality cannot guaranty human bliss and impel people to act suitably unless it relies upon monotheism [tawhīd].

This means that a person has faith that the vast world, of which humans are also a part, has only one God that exists in all places and all times. Nothing is hidden from His knowledge and nothing can overcome His power. He has created all things according to the most complete system—not because He needs them.

In the end, He will return everyone to Himself. He rewards the righteous well and chastises the evil; the righteous will forever remain in beatitude and the evildoers in torment.

It is evident that if morals are based upon such beliefs, no grief or sorrow will remain except the anxiousness associated with being heedful of the Lord's approval. Thus, devotion to God will prohibit violation of laws and committing prohibited [harām] acts. If morality does not stem from such belief, no aim will remain for humans but hedonism—pursuit of ephemeral worldly pleasures.

As a result, they will limit themselves only to the extent that keeps the society in existence or causes others to praise them, so that after death their good name remains embossed upon the pages of history.

However, the laudation of the people only pertains to things of which they are aware. Therefore, this cannot be grounds for performing good acts and abandoning evils in secret and far from the eyes of people.

However, perpetuation of one's good name and taking joy from it, which usually involves patriotic selflessness and self-sacrifice in favor of the government, for a person who does not believe in life after death is nothing but a superstitious fallacy that fades with the slightest of consideration. Since, after annihilation, how can anyone take pleasure in the fact that their name is remembered fondly, and what sensible persons would turn their backs on life and bliss for the pleasure of others without any personal benefit?

Therefore, these things neither have any value in comparison with tawhīd and belief in God, nor can they take their place in preventing sins and crimes.

## [The role of the Resurrection \[ma‘ād\]95 in our lives](#)

Those who are unfamiliar with Islamic teachings and examine Islamic issues separately from Islamic teachings say: what effect does faith in the Resurrection and Judgment Day have on morality and human actions?

What major aspect of the human society is corrected by it? There is no doubt that the human society lives through the actions of people and the actions of people are motivated by a feeling of need and understanding necessities of life.

Due to the extreme affection humans have for survival and its requisites, we enjoy gaining anything that positively influences this aspiration. We obtain the spirit to work by envisioning life and the advantages we may gain and therefore we indefatigably continue our endeavors.

Those actions that are successful inspire intensity, celerity, and determination in human endeavors. Because of this, from the time society first started its progression, every moment it accelerates and finds newer and more profound activities.

It is evident that though thoughts of death and otherworldly life may not cripple individual resolve and put an end to the escalating development of the society, they have no effect in the process of life and cannot give it new spirit.

To answer this delusive argument, we must say that there is no doubt that divine religions to some extent base the system of their call on individual duty and requital on the Day of Judgment.

Especially, among these, the holy religion of Islam founds its call upon the principles of tawhīd, nubuwwah (prophethood), and ma‘ād, such that a person who doubts ma‘ād—like a person who does not accept tawhīd or nubuwwah—is outside the boundaries of the religion and the circle of Muslims. This makes obvious the importance Islam puts on belief in the Resurrection—it is side by side with tawhīd and nubuwwah.

Considering that Islam has established “revival of human nature” and “creating a natural human” as the ideal for education and edification, we realize that Islam views belief in ma‘ād as one of the critical pillars of the natural human, without which the true human constitution is like a soulless body that has lost the source of all human bliss and virtue.

Moreover, it is certain that Islamic teachings and laws are not dry and soulless items that have been formulated to occupy the people or produce lackluster devoutness and imitation.

Rather, they are a completely systematic series of articles of faith, and spiritual and practical issues that have been formed as humanity's life plan and have taken into account the genetic requirements of human beings. The following Qur'anic verses bear witness to this fact:

﴿... يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ ﴾

***“O believers! When Allah and the Prophet invite you (to faith and good deeds), accept so you attain eternal life.”<sup>3</sup>***

﴿... فَأَقِمَّ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ﴾

***“So set thy face to the pure religion of Allah; this is the fitrah (nature) upon which Allah has created humankind...”<sup>4</sup>***

Therefore, Islam is not different from civil laws in advanced societies that have been formulated to secure their necessities for survival. However, the perennial difference between the divine religion and human-formed laws is that civil laws consider human life as fleeting material existence and base laws upon the desires of the society's majority.

On the other hand, Islam considers human life an eternal one that does not end upon death such that our beatitude or torment in the next world is relative to the rectitude or corruption of our deeds in this world. This is why Islam designs a logical life plan for humans, not a self-indulgent one.

In the view of civil laws, the desires of the majority is law and absolutely binding; however, according to the divine religion, only right and rational laws are binding, irrespective of whether or not they accommodate the inclinations and sentiments of the majority.

The divine religion declares that the innate insight of the natural human—one free of superstitions and caprice—validates ma'ūd. Thus, it sees itself as having an eternal life that must be forever lived with reason, never neglecting this apparatus of realism.

As opposed to the materialistic person, ignorant of the Origin and Resurrection with no logic but the shared logic of animals and no wish but mastery of material pleasures, and faith in ma'ūd has a clear effect on all aspects of thought, spiritual morality, and social and individual acts of the realistic natural human.

## **The effect on thought and morality**

In this manner, with the eyes of realism, humans see everything—themselves in particular—the way they really are. They see themselves as limited transitory creatures that are part of this impermanent world.

All components of the world collectively make up a convoy that is advancing day and night toward an eternal world, continually pushed by the hands of creation (the efficient cause) and pulled by the aim and result of creation (the day of ma'ad).

This is why the realistic method of thought mitigates the natural human's inner sentiments and emotions and limits them in a manner appropriate to such an objective and destination.

Persons who see themselves dependent, due to their needs, upon the passing world where they are like a straw in the grip of the waves of this terrible deluge, rising and falling along toward a general destination, can no longer accept the ignorant human self-conceit and insurrection. They can no longer submit to sensualism and hedonism.

They will no longer bind themselves by exertions to gain more provisions necessary for their short stay in this world, which would make of them a will-less automaton. As a result, a significant bulk of their social and individual conflicts would be resolved.

No more will they see their selfless endeavors that necessitate loss of life and property a waste because, even if they lose their lives on the path of benevolence, all they would lose is the short vexing worldly life but they would have their eternal life, there realizing the lofty fruits of their sacrifice and attaining endless happiness.

For their sacrifices, they will no longer need to find a series of beguiling and corrupting superstitions like materialism. They do not need to be brainwashed into believing that sacrificing one's life for social sanctities—such as liberty, law, and country—gives a person an everlasting good name by which they may gain glorious eternal life, for if we truly cease to exist after death, life and glory after death are nothing but a myth.

Here, the unfoundedness of the criticism's culmination is made clear. Contemplating death and the afterlife does not take away the zest for work. The human enthusiasm for work is a result of need and by envisioning ma'ad our need does not go away.

A proof of this is that the Muslims of the advent of Islam, who better followed religious teachings and whose hearts sparkled more than any other time with the vision of ma'ad, had an awesome amount of social activity that cannot even be compared with later Muslim activity. Indeed, envisioning ma'ad stops us from overindulgence in materialism and sensuality and self-destruction for the sake of myths and delusions.

Another benefit of ma'ad is that it vitalizes the human soul with faith. Such persons know that if they are oppressed and cannot reclaim their rights, a day will come when they will be requited and their rights restored—a day when they will be highly commended for their every good deed.

Hence, those believing in ma'ad know that their deeds are constantly being monitored and that the flesh

and soul of their deeds—both hidden and visible—are manifest before the Omniscient God.

They know that a day will come when our accounts will be reckoned with utmost care. This belief does something to a person that one hundred thousand undercover detectives and intelligence officers cannot do because they all work on the outside whereas this belief is an internal sentinel from which no secret may be concealed.

## **Analysis of belief [i'tiqāḍ], disposition [akhlāq], and action [ʿmal]**

We know the literal meaning of the words “belief” [i'tiqāḍ], “disposition” [akhlāq], and “action” [ʿmal] and in the process of our lives, we find many senses for each of them. Although, many people may not understand these concepts through these particular words, they do nonetheless understand these concepts, using other words to signify them.

A belief is a form of thought in which a person has faith and affirmation. For instance, we may say, “The solar year cycle revolves around the seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter”, “Genghis Khān was a bloodthirsty man”, and as an example for the beliefs of Muslims, “The world of existence and everything within it is the creation of God” and “The Creator of the world is One and everything that exists is from Him”.

A disposition is a form of discernment that resides within a person manifesting at appropriate times, compelling motivation to act. For example, brave persons possess an inner property that causes them to get excited, display themselves, and challenge or defend; in contrast, cravens possess an inner property that causes them to lose their nerve and run away when faced with danger.

Therefore, these properties—braveness and fear—are two human temperaments one of which is desirable and the other undesirable. Usually, a person possesses one of these two attributes affecting their behavior.

Even so, sometimes—especially when very young—it happens that the inner slate of a person is clear of both characteristics and neither of them has a consistent impression. Therefore, in the event of certain or probable danger, the individual's condition is not clear such that sometimes the person may stand firm against terrible threats and at other times may make a break for it.

An “action” is a series of movements and pauses or gestures that a person willfully performs upon matter to reach an objective. Naturally, an act may be a combination of thousands of gestures or movements and thus it is not a true unit. However, the singularity of the objective unifies these motions and therefore we consider an action singular.

If we examine one instance of eating, which we consider a single unit or act, we easily realize that eating one morsel requires many gestures of the hands, head, mouth, throat, stomach, etc. which a person needs to sate the fires of the appetite. We use satiation as a measure to expertly regulate the

movements of our organs and signify a unified name for it. We intend the collection of these motions and call our act “eating a meal”.

When an action is closely related with matter and body parts, it is called an “external act”. However, an “internal act” is an activity that is performed within the self, managing innumerable gesticulations and consolidating them through the unity of purpose and stimulation of the will. Such acts are different from external acts, even though it also consists of a multitude of movements.

Clearly, all external acts with their specific names are subject to change. By way of illustration, primeval humans ate raw food but then ate cooked food when they learned more about how to live.

Also, once upon a time, they ate food with their hands, but now they eat with spoons and forks. In all these instances the act is eating food. However, our internal acts, meaning managing the myriad movements of various body parts and unifying them through a chosen aim and instigation of the will, are invariable and unalterable.

Doubtless, when eating, if a person—whether civilized or savage—forgets the unified objective or the process of movements and pauses related to it, in that instant, they will be unable to eat and the relevant gestures will fragment and disintegrate.

## **Appearance of disposition and its relation to faith and action**

Considering our analysis of “eating”, it is clear that regarding all actions, the aim of the act, e.g. satiation, manifests through feelings intermingled with human reason. First, we investigate how to attain the aim—such as the internal and external causes and obstacles.

Then, we consider the nature of our goal and its unity, discern and record suitable gestures for each body part and picture each member in its necessary place—e.g. the hand must perform a task before the mouth, and the mouth before the throat. Finally, we establish the necessary order among the movements and apply our will to perform the action.

As you can see, internal acts require more components and operations than external acts. Even so, in my opinion internal acts, like external ones, gain unity through a unified objective. We call these unified acts “contemplation”, “decision-making”, and “preparing for action”.

Even more amazing is that in every great and small act that we carry out, maybe thousands of times a day, we repeat the internal act. The difference of each act with the previous one is that the more we perform external acts, internal acts become easier and vice versa. Because with repetition the internal operation is facilitated and previous experience is not lost.

When considering an action that has never been carried out nor even thought of, one realizes how hard it is to do that act because the new internal operations must be performed without any preparation and

the performer will have to strive hard to formulate the preliminaries.

However, after doing it once, the performer will not have to go through the hardships of the first instance since the necessities and obstructions have already been contemplated, verifying the necessities and invalidating the obstructions, and the operations of the action will not have to be authored and systematized anew.

The action is no longer arduous. A brief reference to previous experience will solve the problem; thus, the more an action is repeated, the less hardship is experienced in new decisions.

By repeating an action, we finally attain a state where the form of the internal act is constantly present in our minds and manifests and provides results with the slightest of thought, as in breathing, using the eyes to see, and speaking to convey intentions.

Indeed, sometimes having faith in something does exactly what repetition does. Regardless, we name such emotion-related mental statements “disposition” and for this reason it is said, “Disposition is the internalization of actions and existence of fixed mental forms such that their related actions are accomplished easily.”

For this reason, the disposition is formed through repetition, inculcation of the goodness of the act or both. Sometimes a coward may be faced with one peril after another such that danger loses its significance causing them even to throw themselves in death’s way because of powerful suggestion and stimulation.

In reality, the effect of repetition on emergence of the disposition is related to the effect of belief. Repetition imprints on the mind the feasibility, rectitude, and expediency of the action so as to concretize its viability and attractiveness and deter all opposing thoughts such that a horrific conceptualization of the most dangerous of predators may cause a person to completely forget escape and paralyze him or her when encountering such a beast.

Moreover, if an opposing thought enters one’s mind in such cases, it will manifest as an illusory and ineffective idea. For instance, a person addicted to opium or alcohol cannot give up his ruinous desires, even though he knows the physical and spiritual harm of his predicament, due to a weak will.

Consequently, disposition fills the gap between knowledge and action. In other words, on one side it borders on belief and on the other side it borders on action. To put it another way, a disposition is an established and internalized drive-producing belief in the rectitude and feasibility of an action.

If a person gives up a belief for whatever reason, they will also lose its relevant disposition. Also, if a person is unable to perform an action or acts in an opposite manner, the relevant disposition will slowly degenerate until completely erased.

Therefore, on one side “disposition” ensures “action” and on the other it ensures “belief and faith”.

Those who do not believe in the necessity to defend their sanctities will never possess the virtue of bravery. Furthermore, those who allow others to do whatever they want with them, dishonoring and degrading them in any way, will not be able to defend themselves and will forever be deprived of bravery.

That it is sometimes said, “Disposition does not guarantee implementation in society” is inapplicable because the guarantee for implementation of every matter is suited to that particular matter.

In this case, with the direct relationship between disposition and belief, on the one hand, and suitable action, on the other, we can say that the success of disposition may be guaranteed in the best possible manner. By strengthening belief and supervising actions, disposition can be protected and maintained.

One cannot assume that disposition does not guarantee implementation in a society where the people live in an environment of appropriate actions and have faith that their happiness derives from those actions?

## **Disposition requires practical support**

We clearly see that in civilized countries, where national laws are implemented completely and people are aware of and bound by their social responsibilities, the disposition related to laws are established and predominant.

People do not lie to each other; they do not abuse one another; they do not betray their society; they are not xenophobic, treasonous, or uncontrolled; and they do not revile national laws and sanctities. This is because, on the one hand, they perform their legal responsibilities and, on the other hand, the suitable environment and unflagging propaganda of the government supports this behavior.

When occasionally an undesirable disposition manifests somewhere, it is anomalous. With the existence of civilization, unlawful acts are uncommonly committed.

However, governments cannot establish a disposition in the society, such as eschewing sexual intemperance, deviant behavior, and drinking alcohol, that does not have practical support, even with powerful propaganda. In fact, even weakening such behaviors may prove problematic and every day will bring a new defeat to the powerful propaganda machines.

It is evident that in societies where, for instance, alcohol is given to swaddled babies and preschool children instead of drinkable water or where millions of bottles of alcohol are produced and imbibed, even the most powerful and comprehensive publicity would be considered nothing but idle prattle.

In these societies, the answer to thousands of public campaigns is one verse describing wine from poets such as Shakespeare and Lamartine.

The reason that the civilized world has become entangled in moral degradation is not that moral behavior is devoid of a guarantee for its implementation. It is because current laws have not been devised to conform to virtuous human behavior.

In a nutshell, in its emergence and persistence, disposition is closely related to faith and belief, on the one side, and action, on the other, and the continuance or degradation of these is directly related to disposition.

Now we must see whether or not actions have the same relationship with and dependence on belief and disposition, and whether belief and faith also have a similar relation with disposition and action. Is their relationship and dependence similar to that of three equal siblings or that of parents and their children?

Moreover, to what extent does Islam observe and give credence to these relationships in its laws? What are the views of other social methods in this regard? These are questions that may be answered in short using the preceding discussion.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. [Sūrat al-Najm 53:39](#).

<sup>2</sup>. [Sūrat al-Nāzi‘āt 79:35](#).

<sup>3</sup>. [Sūrat al-Anfā‘ 8:24](#).

<sup>4</sup>. [Sūrat al-Rūm 30:30](#).

<sup>5</sup>. From the quarterly, “Maktab-e Tashayyu” and also the journal, “Kitab-e Fasl”.

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