

Discourse Fourteen: The Purpose of Covenants

In nonreligious societies, especially so-called advanced civilized ones, society and social laws have no aim other than to further and better the enjoyment of material life. Therefore, there is no reason for them to bind themselves to anything save rules and regulations that can secure material aims. It is evident that in such environs, spirituality has no value except to the extent that it is in agreement with the materialistic values of the people.

For instance, truthfulness, humaneness, kindness, beneficence, valor, and other moral virtues are only considered useful and necessary when they further the realization of personal material interests. However, if moral virtues are not compatible with material benefits, not only are they considered unnecessary, but it is believed to be necessary to act in opposition with those virtues.

Authenticity of matter

It is for this reason that governments, ruling parties, and official congresses consider no duty for themselves other than protecting the interests of the society's material life. The covenants and treaties they make are in accordance to prevailing interests and instant benefits. Their value is determined by the international weight of the obligor and their power and dominance. Naturally, their continuation depends on the balance of powers.

However, if one side becomes more powerful, they invalidate the covenant using fabricated excuses and accusations. They resort to excuses to preserve the semblance of global laws, the annulment of which would jeopardize the life of the society or a portion of its vital interests; otherwise, there would be no problem with repudiation of any treaty without the least excuse.

Furthermore, lies, betrayal, and transgression against the rights of others are not an obstacle in measures taken to attain material gain. Such people do not consider morals and spirituality to have any authenticity; rather, they are tools they use to realize the aims of the society, i.e. enjoyment of material life.

With some study of global events, especially international events over the past century, the value of treaties and covenants, and the reason for their invalidation becomes clear, giving us substantial evidence for this claim.

Authenticity of matter and spirit

On the other hand, Islam neither considers material life to be the true life of humankind, nor does it consider enjoyment of its benefits to be true prosperity. It instead considers the true and authentic life of humans to be the sum of matter and spirit, and true happiness to be in things that entail the prosperity of both worlds.

An inevitable result of this view is that the laws of life should be based upon fitrah and genetic make-up and not upon going along with what people consider to be in their own interests. Another result is that Islam founds its invitation on adherence to Truth not following the desires and caprices of the majority, which are based upon inner feelings and emotions. The Glorious Qur'an states:

﴿ فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴾

“So set thy face toward the pure religion; it is in accordance with the nature [fitrah] of God upon which He has formed the nature of humankind. There is no alteration in the creation of God. This is the enduring (and true) religion; however, most humans do not know.”¹

﴿ هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ ﴾

“It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the True Religion to make it supreme over all religions, though idolaters be averse.”²

﴿ ...بَلْ أَتَيْنَاهُم بِالْحَقِّ ﴾

“We have sent them Truth...”³

﴿ ...وَلَوْ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ﴾

“And if Truth had followed their caprices, the heavens and the earth and all in them would surely have been thrown into confusion and corruption...”⁴

This religion necessitates that true beliefs are observed and virtuous morals and actions are heeded.

Also, its teachings must neglect neither matter nor spirit. It should continually observe human virtues whether they are to the people's benefit or their apparent detriment, though it is certain that except for those who have deviated from the path of truth and righteousness no harm will come to the society.

It can be seen that the reason God, the Exalted, negated the treaties of idolaters was that they violated their vows. Even so, by His mercy He gave them four months reprieve. However, He commands those who kept to their covenant to persevere and be steadfast in their commitments.

﴿بِرَاءةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ * فَسِيحُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِي اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ مُخْزِي الْكَافِرِينَ *... * إِلَّا الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَنْقُصُوكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَمْ يُظَاهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ ﴿٥﴾ أَحَدًا فَآتِمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ عَهْدَهُمْ إِلَىٰ مُدَّتِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

“(These verses are a declaration of) estrangement from Allah and his Messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom you made covenant. Journey freely in the land for four months but know that you cannot disable Allah. Know that Allah debases the unbelievers... except those of the idolaters with whom you made covenant who then did not fail you in anything nor aided anyone against you. Fulfill your treaty with them to the end of their term. Verily Allah loves the righteous.”⁵

At the time, events had demeaned the idolaters and they had become humble before the magnificence of Islam. Even so, the Prophet asked them to cancel the covenant if they feared betrayal; however, he commanded them to publicly announce their choice. When asked why he commanded thus, he stated: God does not like betrayal.⁶

¹ Sūrat al-Rūm 30:30.

² Sūrat al-Tawbah (or Barā'ah) 9:33.

³ Sūrat al-Mu'minīn 23:90.

⁴ Sūrat al-Mu'minīn 23:71.

⁵ Sūrat al-Tawbah (or Barā'ah) 9: 1-2, 4.

⁶ Extracted from the journal, “Kitāb-e Fasī”.

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