

Discourse Seventeen: Adherence to Superstitions

﴿ وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئاً وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴾ *

﴿ وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلاَّ دُعَاءً وَنِدَاءً صُمُّكُمْ عُمِّي فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴾

“And when it is said to them, ‘Follow that which Allah has sent down.’ they reply, ‘We will follow that which we discovered from our fathers.’ Do they follow their fathers even though they were void of knowledge and guidance? The likeness of disbelievers (in hearing the truth) is the likeness of a person who is called upon but perceives naught save shouting and yelling. They are deaf, dumb, and blind and are void of reason.”¹

The beliefs of humans are of two types:

Theoretical views and beliefs which without an intermediary are unrelated to action, such as mathematics and the supernatural.

Practical views and beliefs which are linked to action without the need for intermediaries, such as principles regarding proper behavior.

The way to attain the first type is to follow knowledge and certainty which lead to proof or ‘feeling’.

Regarding the second, the means is to adhere to things that lead to a goodness, which either entails human prosperity or promotes it, and also to abstain from things that either lead to adversity or harm prosperity.

Belief in the truth of something that one has no knowledge of (in the first type) and also belief in something, the good or evil of which is indeterminate (in the second type) are called superstitious beliefs.

Indeed, humans are lead by their fitrah. Fitrah examines the causes of phenomena and encourages

humans to follow the path leading to their true perfection. In accordance with this principle, humans do not humble themselves before a superstitious view that has been adopted through blindness and ignorance. It is the case though that feelings and emotions aroused by imagination are many and can cause a person to believe in superstitions. The majority of these feelings consist of fear and hope.

Imagination depicts mental forms linked with fear or hope. These feelings preserve their related forms and do not let them become concealed from the fearful or hopeful self.

For instance, if a person is stuck alone and friendless in the middle of an eerie wasteland on a gloomy night, unable to see, devoid of any refuge in which to calm their heart and become safe, bereft of a torch with which to discern danger from safety, imagination will enter the field and turn every shadow into a fearsome monster that intends to kill them or a ghost that is in no way real!

The imagined shadow moves, it comes and goes, it flies into the air and dives back down to the earth, metamorphosing into various shapes and figures. Whenever the person is afraid, the fantasy of that mysterious shadow is repeated. This state might be transferred to another person, creating within them a mood similar to the previous person's. It will gradually spread even though it is a superstition entirely unfounded in truth.

Is there anything beyond the senses and experience?

From the most ancient of times until today, humankind has been afflicted by superstitious beliefs. Some believe that superstitions are a quality of Easterners however this is not true. Even if Westerners are not more superstitious than Easterners, at least, they also have superstitious beliefs like the people of the East.

Scientists and scholars have continually used delicate stratagems to erase the vestiges of these superstitions integrated deep in the souls of the masses and awaken them and make them aware. However, this is a sickness that has exhausted its doctor.

Humans are not free of imitation in theoretical views and pure knowledge and also possess feelings and emotions. I am sorry to inform readers that until today scientists have been unsuccessful in remedying this illness.

Strangest of all is the view that modern civilized people and natural scientists have regarding this matter. They say that modern knowledge is based upon the senses and experience and refutes all else.

Civilization and advancement have based themselves upon evolution of the society: the society must attain perfection to the utmost extent possible and in every conceivable aspect. They have based their education on this premise.

This is a very strange statement which is itself adhering to superstitions! This is because natural

sciences only speak of the features of nature and prove the existence of these features within natural fields. To state matters differently, materialistic sciences only unveil the secrets of matter; however, they cannot deny the supernatural.

Therefore, if someone comes to believe that something that cannot be experienced and sensed does not exist, their belief is without basis and the most obvious of superstitions. The same is true of civilization since its structure is based upon attaining the aforesaid perfection.

This perfection and progress towards social prosperity sometimes necessitates that some people be deprived of individual prosperity.

For example, in order to defend their country, law, or beliefs some people endure death and sacrifice and are thus divested of individual prosperity to preserve the society. No human endures these deprivations save in order to attain perfection and on the basis that they believe that these acts entail perfection. However, the truth is contrary to this.

These are not perfection but divestment and loss. Even if there are perfections here, they pertain to the society not the individual in the sense that the society is a society (without regard to individuals rather to the identity of the society which is an identity at variance with individual identity) whereas humans want the society not for its sake but for their own!

It is based on this premise that the leaders of these societies plan schemes regarding their people and inculcate in them that humans leave a lasting glorious name for themselves—in other words, they attain everlasting life. This is a superstition. After annihilation what life is there left? This is nothing but a designation. Do we have to unduly name it life?! It is an empty designation that has nothing behind its façade.

This statement is like saying that humans must endure the bitterness of law and have patience regarding privations keeping them from their heart's desires so that the society may persevere and that it may attain perfection in its perpetual life.

A person who says this believes that the perfection of the society is his own perfection. This is a superstitious statement since the perfection of the society is the perfection of individuals only when they coincide (not when the individual is completely annihilated). If this perfection does not concur with that of the individual and does not convey him to perfection, it is not the perfection of the individual.

If through oppression and persecution a person or nation is able to attain their every wish and desire without any power opposing them dominating the entire world, will they believe that the perfection of the society is their own preserving their glorious name?! Never! Powerful nations aim at exploiting the people of weak nations!

You will find no place but that they saunter there! There is nothing that they want that they will not strive

to attain. There is no person or nation that they do not make their slave. Is this approach anything other than curing a chronic disease by destroying the patient?

The path set forth by the Glorious Qur'an in this matter is as follows:

In theoretical views it commands humans to follow that which God has revealed. No one has the right to say even one word without knowledge.

In practical aspects it commands that people seek out actions that are approved by God, the Exalted, and abide by Him. If the act conforms to one's heart's desires, it will entail prosperity of both this world and the next and if it necessitates privation from one's desires, the Almighty Lord will give a great reward:

﴿... وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى...﴾

“However, that which is with Allah is better and more enduring...”²

Is following religion imitation?

Materialists say that adhering to religion is imitation and science prohibits imitation. They also say that religion is superstition remaining from the second age of human life. They have divided human life into four ages:

The Age of Myths

The Age of Religion

The Age of Philosophy

The Age of Science

This statement is not based on science and is itself a superstitious view. The answer to the statement that following religion is imitation is that: religion is a series of teachings pertaining to the Origin [mabda'] and Resurrection [ma'ād] and a string of social, devotional, and behavioral laws that have all been received through divine revelation and prophets.

The truth of revelation and prophethood has been proved with logical rationales.

Reports imparted by a truthful person are true and following them is following knowledge. This is because our premise is that we have attained knowledge through logical rationale that the reporter is truthful. It is strange that the people who say this have no life standards or social methods of food, clothing, drink, marriage, dwelling, etc. except imitation and adherence to desires and caprices; blind

imitation and following inconsistent standards.

It is interesting that they have created a different name for ‘imitation’—adherence to that which the advanced world approves.

In this manner, the name of imitation has been wiped away but its practice has endured. The word imitation has become an alien and unfamiliar term but its essence is well-known. The motto that ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do’ is considered a scientific one that has brought about the advancement of civilization but the following slogan is considered a religious imitation and a superstitious statement!

﴿... لَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَىٰ فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ...﴾

“Do not follow caprices and desires because they will debar you from the path of Allah...”³

Hence, religion springs from the source of divine revelation and knowledge and is completely scientific. However, the conduct of the civilized world is exactly the opposite and entirely imitation. Their classification of the course of human life into four ages is repudiated by the history of religion and philosophy which has been available since the advent of Abraham’s (‘a) religion, after the era of the philosophies of India, Egypt, and Chaldea.

The religion of Jesus (‘a) came after the philosophy of Greece. The religion of Muhammad (S), Islam, came after the philosophies of Greece and Alexandria. In short, the final climax of philosophy occurred before that of religion and I have mentioned before that the era of monotheistic religion has precedence over that of all other religions.

The classification of the Holy Qur’an regarding human history is as follows:

The age of naivety

The age of unification of nations

The age of senses [hiss] and matter [maddah]⁴

¹. Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:170–171.

². Sūrat al-Qisas 28:60.

³. Sūrat Sād 38:26.

⁴. Extracted from the newspaper, “Wazifah”, issue 127.

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