

# Investigations And Challenges

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The link between the theological seminary and the university is a blessed phenomenon which bears significant and numerous wholesome fruits. Along this line, for more than a year, a number of concerned and committed scholars in the university has set up a center with the aim of holding cultural activities. One of its activities is to hold monthly sessions in the presence of Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi. In these sessions, the distinguished professor tackles issues suggested by the other professors. Nine of these lectures are presented in this book.

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## Publisher's Foreword

The invaluable legacy of the Household [*Ahl al-Bayt*] of the Prophet (may peace be upon them all), as preserved by their followers, is a comprehensive school of thought that embraces all branches of Islamic knowledge. This school has produced many brilliant scholars who have drawn inspiration from this rich and pure resource. It has given many scholars to the *ummah* [Muslim community] who, following in the

footsteps of the Imams of the Prophet's Household ('a), have done their best to clear up the doubts and spurious arguments raised by various creeds and currents within and without Muslim society and to give answers to their questions. Throughout the past centuries, they have given well-reasoned answers and clarifications concerning these questions and doubts.

To meet the responsibilities assigned to it, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly (ABWA) has embarked on a defense of the sanctity of the Islamic message and its verities, often obscured by the partisans of various sects and creeds as well as by currents hostile to Islam. The Assembly follows in the footsteps of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and the disciples of their school of thought in its readiness to confront these challenges and tries to be on the frontline in consonance with the demands of every age.

The arguments contained in the works of the scholars belonging to the School of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are of unique significance. That is because they are based on genuine scholarship and appeal to reason, and avoid prejudice and bias. These arguments address scholars and thinkers in a manner that appeals to healthy minds and wholesome human nature.

To assist the seekers of truth, the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly has endeavored to present a new phase of these arguments contained in the studies and translations of the works of contemporary Shi'ah writers and those who have embraced this sublime school of thought through divine blessing.

The Assembly is also engaged in edition and publication of the valuable works of leading Shi'ah scholars of earlier ages to assist the seekers of the truth in discovering the truths which the School of the Prophet's Household ('a) has offered to the entire world.

The Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly looks forward to benefiting from the opinions of the readers and their suggestions and constructive criticism in this area.

We also invite scholars, translators and other institutions to assist us in propagating the genuine Islamic teachings as preached by the Prophet Muhammad (S).

We beseech God, the Most High, to accept our humble efforts and to enable us to enhance them under the auspices of Imam al-Mahdi, His vicegerent on the earth (may Allah expedite his advent).

We express our utmost gratitude to Professor Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi for writing the book,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Mansoor Limba for translating it, and all our honorable colleagues, especially the dear ones in the Translation Office for accomplishing this task.

## **Cultural Affairs Department**

### **Ahl al-Bayt ('a) World Assembly**

<sup>1</sup>. Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, Kavishha va Chalesha, compiled and edited by Muhammad Mahdi Nadiri Qummi (Qum: Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute, Spring 1382 AHS (2003)), vol. 1, 192 pages; vol. 2, 240 pages.

# Preface

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and may the blessings of Allah be upon our Master and Prophet, Muhammad, and his pure progeny, and may the curse of Allah be upon all of their enemies.

The link between the theological seminary and the university is a blessed phenomenon which bears significant and numerous wholesome fruits. On the contrary, the separation of these two culture-building and influential pillars for the society always entails heavy losses. In the attempt to foster this blessed and auspicious connection, many years prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, some individuals from both the seminary and the university have always been active in this field and by understanding the importance of this issue and its strategic standing, they have always tried in many ways to expand and consolidate this connection.

The entrance of the figures such as Martyr Mutahhari,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Beheshti,<sup>2</sup> Dr. Bahonar,<sup>3</sup> Martyr Mufatteh,<sup>4</sup> and other farsighted and conscious '*ulama*' (i.e. men of religious knowledge) to the university campus has been motivated by their enlightened thinking and along the line of fostering this connection. University personalities in the past decades can also be founded who, by their conviction in the expediency and importance of promoting this line of communication, have exerted efforts in this context.

These efforts have earned new and more extensive dimensions after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the declaration of the motto of unity between the seminary and the university by the great founder of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini (r).<sup>5</sup>

Of course, there are still many shortcomings and failings, and in attaining the desirable point in this movement, so many ifs and buts must be removed along the way. At any rate, actual experience has shown that further closeness and connection of the two students and seminarians and the two strongholds seminary and university has extended worthy assistance in making the ideas of the two sides more fruitful. In the end, the society will also benefit from its blessings. In the same manner, the separation and bifurcation of the two will also result in their own destruction and that of the society.

Among the personalities who have realized, for the past three decades, the importance and exigency of creating this connection and have exerted many efforts in this direction is the erudite scholar, prominent philosopher and outstanding jurist [*faqih*], Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi. On the issues surrounding the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution<sup>6</sup> during the first years of the Islamic Revolution and established at the order of the Imam Khomeini, Ayatullah Misbah was given special attention by the eminent Imam in guiding and setting the program of this movement. This is a testimony and confirmation that the distinguished professor has been involved in this venture for many years.

Along this line, for more than a year, a number of the wary, concerned and committed scholars in the university has set up a center with the aim of holding cultural activities. One of its activities is to hold

monthly sessions in the presence of Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi. In these sessions, the distinguished professor tackles issues suggested by the other professors.

On account of the academic standing as well as the importance of these discussions in the current conditions of the society, the host of these sessions, namely, the Mobilization Center of Professors of the University of Science and Technology [*kanun-e basij-e asatid-e daneshgah-e 'ilm va san'at*] has insisted that the collection of the distinguished professor's lectures in those sessions to be published according to the chronological order of their presentation. Thanks to God, through the effort of Hujjat al-Islam wa'l-Muslimin Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Nadiri Qummi, a faculty member of this Institute and one of the outstanding students of Professor Yazdi, now we can offer to all those who are interested nine of these lectures in the form of the present book.

We hope that in the future we will be able to continue presenting these discussions to the academic and cultural centers of the country and all the academicians and knowledge-enthusiasts.

## **Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute**

### **1382 AHS (2003)**

1. Professor Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari (1298–1358 AHS) was born in Bahman 13, 1298 AHS [February 3, 1920] in the village of Fariman near Mashhad to a family of clergymen. At the age of 12, he went to Mashhad where he learned the basics of Islamic sciences and then moved to Qum where he attended the class sessions conducted by the great authorities of the theological center.

From 1319 AHS [1940], Mutahhari had taken part in the sessions led by Imam Khomeini and other famous teachers of the time. Moreover, he himself conducted lessons in subjects like Arabic literature, logic, kalam [scholasticism], jurisprudence, and philosophy. In 1331 AHS [1952], Mutahhari was transferred from Qum to Tehran and in 1334 AHS [1955], he was invited to teach Islamic sciences at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Tehran University. He was arrested at the midnight of Khordad 15, 1342 AHS [1963] and spent 43 days in prison. After Imam Khomeini's migration to Paris, France, Mutahhari went to meet him and His Eminence assigned to him the responsibility of organizing the Revolutionary Council. On the night of Ordibehesht 11, 1358 AHS [May 1, 1979], Mutahhari was martyred by an agent of the terrorist Furqan group.

He wrote more than 50 books and tens of articles, and delivered scores of speeches. Imam Khomeini said of Mutahhari, "His written and spoken words are, without exception, educational and enlivening... I recommend that the students and intellectual group not to let Mutahhari's words be forgotten by anti-Islamic tricks..." [Trans.]

2. Dr. Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Beheshti was among the combatant clerics and a very high profile academic and political personality of the Islamic Revolution. Imam Khomeini appointed him as the first supreme judge. Ayatullah Beheshti and seventy-one other members of the judiciary, thinkers, writers, and revolutionary elements were martyred by a bomb explosion at the Islamic Republican Party Headquarters perpetrated by the hypocrites on Tir 7, 1360 AHS (June 28, 1981). [Trans.]

3. Hujjat al-Islam Dr. Muhammad Jawad Bahonar: the Prime Minister who was martyred together with President Muhammad 'Ali Raja'i in the explosion of his office perpetrated by the hypocrites on Shahrivar 8, 1360 AHS (August 30, 1981). [Trans.]

4. Hujjat al-Islam Shaykh Muhammad Mufatteh, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Tehran University and a key promoter of the unity between the university and the seminary, was martyred by the terrorist Furqan group on azar 28, 1358 AHS (December 19, 1979). [Trans.]

5. The abbreviation, "r" stands for the Arabic invocative phrase, rahmatullah 'alayhi, rahmatullah 'alayha, or rahmatullah

'alayhim [may peace be upon him/her/them], which is used after the names of pious people. [Trans.]

6. Imam Khomeini issued a decree on Khordad 23, 1359 AHS (June 13, 1980) on the formation of the Cultural Revolution Headquarters. On Azar 19, 1363 AHS (December 10, 1984) he made a directive regarding the formation of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution to replace the Cultural Revolution Headquarters. [Trans.]

# Chapter 1: Our Responsibility in the Sphere of Culture (Part 1)

I thank God for giving me this opportunity to be in the company of the committed and honorable professors. I hope that this will serve as the beginning of a blessed and auspicious movement in discharging our heavy responsibilities and sublime duties in this particular period. At the outset, I beg your permission to touch on the importance of this responsibility so that in the future session, I can deal on the subject matters suggested by the dear brothers.

In the Islamic school of thought, there is a principle called the balance between capability and responsibility. That is, God the Exalted gives responsibility to every person commensurate to the extent of blessing, capability and talent endowed on him. The issue on human responsibility is an important subject with extensive discussions. Before properly embarking on this principle, I will briefly explain it.

## Responsibility Conscious or right-seeking man

Apart from the fact that through his own natural disposition [*fitrah*], man discerns that he is not like animals which are not set free and have no responsibility. Religions have also emphasized this fact. Perhaps, you might have heard that the famous Western philosopher, Immanuel Kant,<sup>1</sup> used to say, "Two things have touched and astonished me. One is the visage of stars in the sky while the other one is the voice in the natural disposition of man. In fact, this nature is the most beautiful voice that exists." Anyway, through his primary nature, man, more or less, discerns that he has a certain responsibility. However, elucidating and proving this natural discernment is not of our concern in the current issue.

In contrast to the theory of instinctive essence of responsibility, there is another theory which has existed since ancient times and has gained special prominence and momentum in the recent decades. This theory believes that to talk about human responsibility and duty is an old-fashioned and retrogressive thinking which must be discarded. Accordingly, man in the present day demands his rights and claims from the world, nature, God, and government. Today, man is no longer regarded as servant, and God as his Master. It is now the age of sovereignty and supremacy of man the age when instead of searching for his duty and responsibility, man is in pursuit of claiming for and demanding his rights which have been trampled upon and denied to him for many centuries.

Notwithstanding the second theory, intellect, conscience and natural disposition of man testify that he is responsible and aware of his obligations and duties to which he is responsible a fact that is consensually agreed upon by all religions. Many holy Qur'anic verses bear witness to the responsibility of man. Thus, the Holy Qur'an reads:

فَوَرَبِّكَ لَنَسْأَلَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ، عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

***By your Lord, We will question them all concerning what they used to do. (15:92-93)2***

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَلِتَسْأَلَنَّ عَمَّا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

***And you will surely be questioned concerning what you used to do. (16:93)***

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۗ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

***Indeed the hearing and the eyesight, and the heart, all of these are accountable. (17:36)***

وَلَقَدْ كَانُوا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ قَبْلُ لَا يُولُونَ الدُّبَارَ ۗ وَكَانَ عَهْدُ اللَّهِ مَسْئُولًا

***And pledges given to Allah are accountable. (33: 15)***

وَقَفُّوهُمْ ۗ إِنَّهُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ

***[But first] stop them! For they must be questioned. (37:24)***

ثُمَّ لَتَسْأَلَنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ

***Then, that day, you will surely be questioned concerning the blessing. (102:8)***

## **The Principle of Balance between Responsibility and Capability**

In principle, there is no dispute that man is responsible, but the point to which we must pay attention is that responsibility to all individuals at all times and places is not fixed and identical as it has variance depending on different factors.

One of the factors that make the difference in the degree of obligations is the capability of each person.

This is the same principle of the balance between capability and responsibility we have earlier mentioned. Since capabilities of individuals in terms of mental aptitude, physical or bodily prowess, emotional or psychological strength, social status and standing, and the like are not identical, it follows that their responsibilities are also not alike. Every person is responsible according to his or her capacity:

اِكْلِفُ اللّٰهُ نَفْسًا اِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

***Allah does not task any soul beyond its capacity. (2:286)***

Undoubtedly, things that a president or a prime minister can do on account of the position he occupies is not equal to what a common employee can do, and thus, the responsibility of the former cannot be compared to that of the latter.

Another factor that makes a difference in the degree of carrying out the duties is the extent of danger that an individual or a community may face. The greater the danger, the bigger the responsibility. If the society is totally secured and everything is under control, you may relax at night with peace of mind. But if insecurity is prevalent and the security forces are too weak to protect people while thieves and evils are free, you will feel a bigger sense of responsibility for protecting your wife, children, house, and properties. If it is rumored that there are poisoned meat and food stuffs in the market, one may make inquiries and particularly think of what one is going to do.

In sum, when danger is more rampant, feelings to do something about it become much more prevalent in the inner selves. Of course, such feelings cannot be perceived if danger is not anticipated by means of evidence. But sometimes, danger actually exists, but because we are not aware of it and it is not proven to us, no matter how serious it might be, we will have no reaction to it. Thus, we have to sense first the danger so as to realize our corresponding responsibility.

## **The Extent of Capability and Responsibility in the Sight of University and Seminary Professors**

Dear brothers! For different reasons, you are more responsible than others are. One reason is the capabilities and talents that God the Exalted has endowed in you. If your talent were just like the others', you would not become university professors. The fact that you have been able to pursue higher education and research shows that your God-given talent and skills are greater than the others' are. Another reason is your social ranks and the influence that you could have on the youths and the students.

Ordinary people and even heads of offices and ministries cannot play the role of yours. By training the young generation and imparting ideas and views to them, you are actually charting the future of the country. In the future, administrators and heads of the community as well as those who will occupy the

most important positions in the country, ranging from the position of the Supreme Leader and the president down to the deputies in the Majlis (Parliament), and other administrative posts, will be none but these youths of university and seminary students. For this reason, the responsibility of the professors, whether teaching in the university or in the Seminary, is greater and more crucial than the others’.

A third reason for which your and my responsibility is greater than anyone else’s responsibility is related to the existing state of affairs. At the present, we are experiencing dangers imposed by our enemies in different aspects, the most serious of which is the cultural one and, as a result, we can sense the enemies’ cultural attacks. If until yesterday, some people used to describe such cultural attacks as attempts of cultural exchanges and ideas, and claim that the so-called conspiracy was nothing but a pigment of imagination, today I do not think that those who have a bit of political understanding, insight and awareness will doubt that a serious cultural danger is threatening our community in general and the young generation in particular.

If we do not make haste to stop the cultural influence of the enemies, we will soon experience total cultural degeneration. Today, the information and communication technology as exemplified by the satellite and the Internet have provided unprecedented tools to the wicked ones. By using them, the enemies are extending on a daily basis the scope of their destructive activities and in an unimaginable speed, they are overrunning the cultural strongholds one after the other.

## The Present Cultural and Moral Degeneration

The moral and cultural corruptions that are being witnessed in these days are so critical that even the Westerners themselves are suffering from them while shouting in protest. Definitely, you yourselves know it better and more specific than I do. Here, I will cite one case as an example:

In the Holy Qur’an, the story of the people of Prophet Lut (‘a)<sup>3</sup> is emphatically highlighted. The Qur’an strongly condemns the people of Prophet Lut who used to commit wicked acts and extremely abominable practices of having sexual intercourses with others of the same sex (i.e. homosexuality). Describing this wicked deed as the peak of indecency, the Holy Qur’an says,

وَلَوْطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ

***And Lut when he said to his people: You indeed commit an indecency none in the world has ever committed before you! (29:28)***

In the end, because of their persistence in this extremely abominable practice and not paying heed to the admonitions and warnings of Prophet Lut (‘a), the divine chastisement was sent upon them and all of them perished. This story is related to a small city in one corner of the world with a limited number of people that existed thousands of years ago. As for today, look what is happening in the world! According

to statistics Westerners themselves have given, more than fifty percent of the prominent figures in all countries in the world are afflicted with this repulsive act. Moreover, they have become publicly indulged in this wicked act in streets and staged demonstrations and rallies in support for homosexuality.

In some of these countries, members of the parliaments have declared it legal and officially given credence to it by approving pertinent bills. Today, in many countries of the world, the homosexuals have their own exclusive clubs, organizations, cultural centers, libraries, and magazines. I would not have believed in it if I myself had not seen it from a close distance. In one of my trips to the United States for a speaking engagement in Philadelphia, it was an opportunity for me to visit some cities like Washington.

I took a car together with a gentleman who is presently a deputy minister. We reached a crossroad where a handsome and elegant library could be seen in a corner. I said, "It would be better if we could pay a visit to this library." The gentleman said, "No, it is not advisable for us to get out of the car here." As I asked for a reason, he explained, "This is a library for the homosexuals and if we get out of the car here, we will be accused of being among them." Right in that crossroad, I saw handsome men who wore short female dresses while behaving like women.

This is today's state of affairs in the world. How impudent and insolent this is! Now, by using the data communication technology and the Internet, just imagine how fast and easy this contagious moral virus could be spread. It is not without reason that psychologists and educators in the West are warning against and deeming seriously dangerous the children watching immoral articles through the Internet. Today, by employing advanced technology, the Hollywood movie making is producing very interesting films and distributing them throughout the world, even though the most immoral articles are promoted in these films.

We wish that corruptions would have ended there, but the more serious menace is still the mental one. Just as moral corruptions in the present day are unprecedented, mental corruptions that are currently prevalent are still exceptional. If Satan has been the greatest agent of human mental and ideological corruption from the beginning of creation, today he himself is amazed by the misleading topics and skepticisms put forth by some wicked people! These people are now so well-rooted and established that if one expresses belief in something, they will answer, "What a foolish and stupid person this one is!"

Yes, indeed! The source of pride and intellectuality in the conception of the present man is to say, "I have doubt and skepticism in everything, and there is not a certain, fixed and absolute thing in the universe or anything that can be proved to be so!"

## **Preservation of the Relative Balance between Elements of Guidance and Deviation in Every Age**

The fact that we should keep in mind is that the divine wisdom dictates that in every age when mental and moral blemishes, corruptions and deviations grow and increase, the means, instruments and

opportunities for true guidance and reformation will also be made available at the disposal of mankind. That is, God always keeps the balance between reformation and corruption, guidance and deviation, and He allows corruption and deviation to permeate the society in such a magnitude that if there were those who want to be guided and to tread the right path, they would not succeed in doing so. Today, if the communication technology grants new opportunities for corruption and deviations, the same technology also gives mankind opportunities and means for reform and guidance, which had been unknown before.

Today, many people have become acquainted with and converted to Islam through the Internet. If ever the radio, television, film and cinema, satellite, and Internet have wrong usages and are used to promote mental and moral deviation and corruption, there are also many people who have become familiar with Islam, the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini, and Iran through the same means, and have inclined toward them and embraced Islam. There are many Muslims in the different parts of the world who embraced Shi'ism when they became familiar with the name, path and words of Imam Khomeini (*r*) through satellite and television. I was once a guest of a businessman in Singapore whose business was related to the computer. He said, "At the beginning, I was a Wahhabi,<sup>4</sup> but when I became acquainted with Imam Khomeini (*r*), listened to his speeches, and witnessed his movement, I had the conviction that the true Islam is what Imam Khomeini (*r*) is saying, and in this manner, I became a Shi'ah.

During my trip to some Latin American countries, in one of these countries, probably Chile, the officials and heads of a university there said to me, "We are concerned of the young generation of our country and their future, and we do not know exactly what we have to do. We are placing at your disposal the youths of this university. You come here and on the basis of your own method of teaching, set a program for them and we will give you all facilities. It is because we are certain that the best method of teaching in the present day is the method of you, Muslims."

The head of the said university used to accompany us to guide us and introduce the different parts and centers of the university. When it is noontime, we said that we wanted to pray. They provided a place for us and we performed our prayer. Although he was Christian, the head of the university participated with us in that prayer. As this act of him surprised us, he said to us, "I do not know exactly what you are saying and reciting in your devotional acts, but I really appreciated this state of your prostration. I enjoyed it and I became inclined to participating with you in this prayer."

In Havana, the capital of a country ruled by Communism, a veteran Spanish-origin professor of history stood up in front of the other professors, who were our hosts, and delivered a speech in which he said, "Since youth, I had been interested in studying and conducting research about two figures; the Prophet of Islam as a world figure, and Khayyam<sup>5</sup> as an outstanding Iranian scholar. However, for some time now, I have found intense interest in something which has cast shadow upon the previous two ones. Today, I am interested in studying the person who has changed the world; namely, Imam Khomeini." At this point, the old professor of the University of Havana became emotional and lost his normal temperament. He bowed down twice in front of me and kissed my hand, asking me for a copy of the

Qur'an in Spanish. This took place in Havana after fifty years of communist rule; a professor who perhaps is the oldest one in the said university.

At any rate, my point is that we should not presume that during this time when the instruments of corruption have multiplied and permeated everywhere, it is too late and nothing can be done anymore. This is a wrong notion and we should never feel hopeless and be dejected. God is All-wise and it does not behoove Him to abandon this world which He has created for the advancement and perfection of human beings and leave it at the hands of some wicked souls. As I have said, if ever the tools of deviation and corruption have multiplied, the new ways of true guidance and reform which had never existed during the time of any prophet or Imam have also come into being.

The social conditions we have today to effect change and make quantum leaps are unprecedented, and we witnessed an example of which in this Revolution and the eight years of resistance and sacred defense. The same youths, who were trained in the corrupt environment and society during the time of the Shah, all of a sudden experienced such a change and acquired such lofty faith and gnosis. They led the eight years of sacred defense heroically, formidably, selflessly, and valiantly, and created enduring and unprecedented epics.

Even today, a deep glance proves that young men and women who are so much willing to grasp and learn mystical topics and points related to the love for God, and are covering within a day a hundred-year journey. If they are properly guided, they will be willing to offer any sort of sacrifice and selflessness and to be heedless of all materialistic enjoyments something many examples of which you witnessed throughout the Revolution and in the battlefronts. Today, the burden of guiding this young generation who has the best talents and the purest natural dispositions lies on the shoulders of you and I.

## **Most of the Great Transformations Owed to the Ideas of Thinkers**

We are talking about responsibility and the subjects I mentioned are meant to make us better understand our responsibility. If you are observant enough, you will see that perhaps more than ninety percent of those who were successful in different aspects and initiated great changes and transformations in the entire world have been scholars from the university and '*ulama*' from the seminary. In the different fields economic, sociology, politics, religion, and the like you will observe that it is like that; the initial source of change had been the idea of a single person and it has been gradually spread, and finally led to a great transformation. Of course, transformations have not been always positive as there have been also negative ones.

The cases that led to the emergence of moral or intellectual deviations have multiplied exceedingly and become extremely dangerous. Among these deviations, one may refer to the current sexual and moral deviation in the West. As acknowledged by Westerners, the most crucial factor of this deviation was the theory of the famous German psychologist, Sigmund Freud. In studying the causes of psychological disorders, Freud concluded that these ailments are the effect of suppressed desires and cravings,

especially sexual desires. Based on this analysis, Freud said that in order to prevent the spread of psychological disorders, sexual freedoms must be granted without restrictions in the community.

Freud may not have had bad intentions and motives in explaining this theory, but whatever the case might be, this theory became the root of sexual promiscuity and moral corruptions that are witnessed in the West. Of course, whims and caprice of people and greediness of the profiteers and opportunists also contributed to the intensity of this wave, but the theory of Freud, anyway, made the first shoot. Nowadays, one of the most profitable industries in the world is focused on sex and sexual matters. The bestseller films in the world are pornographic films, and the most viewed TV channels are those showing more sensual programs and films. The origin of all that has been an idea of a psychologist.

In the perspective of intellectual corruption and decadence, one may also refer to the Marxist thought and its catastrophic consequences. It is a philosophy which ruled approximately a half of the globe in more than seventy years, and as acknowledged by the countries and nations that professed it, it brought about multiple destructive outcomes to them. The Marxist thought which nurtured millions of atheists and deniers of God and violently waged war against religion and God was also a mental product of another German scholar named Karl Marx.

Of course, one must not be heedless of the positive transformations brought about by scholars and *'ulama'*. The great Islamic Revolution of Iran which, as confessed by both foes and friends, was the greatest event of the 20th century, and was also the product of the ideas of a religious scholar named Imam Khomeini. The Imam was no more than a single person and had no money, armament or power. The only thing he had was a sublime idea an idea which at the beginning, perhaps, ninety-nine percent of his close friends and well-wishers did not believe to be realizable. Yet, all of them were witnesses that this man in one corner of the globe at a humble and simple house was able to render helpless the two superpowers of the East and West.

This happened while he was not seeking after power or fame. Although it is normal that after the end of a class session of a professor, the students escort him along the way, the Imam never allowed anybody to escort him along the alley and street, and if ever he found someone doing so, he would emphatically dissuade him from doing it. He was a *marja' taqlid*<sup>6</sup> yet for a long time he did not permit his treatise on practical laws [*risalah 'amaliyyah*] to be published, and when he finally gave consent, he did not will to spend a single penny from the share of the Imam [*sahm Imam*]<sup>7</sup> to be spent on it. I myself know who raised the fund, for the first time, for the publication of his *risalah 'amaliyyah*. He was far away from power and fame, as he kept aloof from them. By relying only on an idea, he was able to affect such a great transformation a transformation that disrupted all global equations. All of these were positive impacts of an idea.

At any rate, I want to emphasize that a person, a professor in a university or a seminary, can bring about even a global change, whether it is positive or negative. If we pay attention to this fact, we will then realize more the importance of our responsibility and be willing to spend time. And if it is needed, we are

ready to postpone our class sessions and sit together to tackle these issues, think about our society and youths, and undertake our mission in relation to Islam and the Muslim community. Now, in view of these matters, the fundamental question can be as follows: In discharging this responsibility, what should be done?

In reply to this question, allow me first to deal with the following preliminary point:

## Importance of the Cultural Revolution

I do not know, dear fellows, to what extent you remember, but during the first years of the Revolution, the late Imam mentioned the issue of Cultural Revolution, and most of the universities in the country were closed for a few years. Some people from different parts of the world came here to see what paradigm this Cultural Revolution the Imam is saying; for, a cultural revolution has a historical precedence and that is related to the cultural revolutionary experience of China which had been founded by Mao Zedong (Tse-tung). Anyway, numerous statesmen and scholars around the world set off and came here to see for themselves what the Imam wanted to do. I can remember it well that a Jewish professor from Australia had come to Qum and I discussed with him some points. He wanted to know what exactly the Imam's cultural revolution was, which I explained to him.

Unfortunately, the state of affairs was such that the Imam failed to properly elucidate his ideal and to materialize it, because the Revolution had been still fresh and there were multiple problems and concerns. Then, it did not take long when the eight-year war was imposed on us that emerged as the most serious problem of the country and so many resources, facilities and thoughts were invested in it. However, the wicked ones inside and outside the country joined together and did not allow the Cultural Revolution that the Imam had in his mind to be put into action.

Thus, if one had such an analysis that all these economic and military pressures and sanctions and other problems were meant to hinder the realization of the Imam's Cultural Revolution, he had indeed not missed the point, and his analysis should not be regarded as improbable. Take a look at Bosnia! Why did they commit all those crimes, mercilessly and brutally killing and beheading thousands of men and women, young and old, and even infants, while those who constitute the associations for the protection of animals and were staging demonstrations for the sake of certain animals sat idle in this case and shamelessly shut their mouths? Was it nothing but a cultural issue at stake? Were these Muslims more than two or three million?

They have neither a large population, nor land, nor wealth, nor armament, nor technology, nor anything else important. Yet, why was this heavy assault brought upon them? The reply is only one thing: Islam and culture! They witnessed that at the end of the twentieth century, a Muslim country at the heart of Europe had come into being and announced its existence. They feared lest Islam and Islamic culture would gradually spread in the neighboring countries and then in the entire Europe, and change everything in the long run. So, they decided to nip this movement in the bud, and they did the same thing

in Algeria, Turkey and other Muslim countries.<sup>8</sup> Why was that? It is because they fear Islam. What is Islam by the way? It is nothing but an idea, a culture. As such, they are afraid of ideas and culture.

The conclusion of this relatively long preliminary remark is that in reply to the question, “What should be done?” we have to say, “A cultural movement must be launched.” These discussions should make us realize more than ever our responsibility, and we should not think that intellectual discussion and cultural activity are worthless and that every problem in the country is related to economic issues, foreign policy and the like.

## **The Role of Cultural Movements in the Perpetuity of the Revolution**

We also need to plan for a cultural movement. We have to make clear our path and the form of our movement, understand the conditions we are in, and identify proper solutions. Also, we have to predict the vulnerabilities of this movement and path and to think of the necessary measures to deal with them. The first step along this direction is that we have to think anew, enhance our studies, reconstruct our way of thinking, and commence our work with formidable and fundamental infrastructure.

During the early days of the Revolution, we had an overall idea that global arrogance and its agents must be vigorously resisted, and on the basis of this overall idea we staged action and the Revolution triumphed and reached this point. Now, many people are still attached to these principles, but we have to bear in mind that such an overall understanding is no longer enough for the consistency and perpetuity of the Revolution. For the commencement of the movement and the victory of the Revolution, it was more anchored in emotions and feelings and it then fruited.

However, to continue the movement, the same method can no longer be adopted. Rather, from then on, we have to transfer the essential basis and gravity of the movement from the emotional and psychological aspect to an aspect of understanding and insight. Today, people are no longer kept in the scene through beast-beating, lamentation, slogan, and agitation. Of course, those things must be preserved and kept intact, but the point here is that the essential catalyst of the movement must be designed and focused on cognizance, understanding and cultural engineering. Today, the enemies have also found out the physiognomy of this point, and instead of focusing the gravity of their movement on economic, military and political pressures, they are spending most of their resources, facilities and forces on cultural activities and movements. In doing so, they are trying to penetrate into the camp of the Revolution and gradually besiege it again.

If we want to prevent this cultural penetration and hinder the infiltration of the enemies, we have to desist from this indifference, lack of planning and dissension. If we want university professors to undertake cultural work and inculcate Islam and Islamic values to the minds and hearts of the students and the youths, we have to arm ourselves first intellectually and culturally, and we have to understand the

principles and foundations of Islamic thought and culture as well as the principles and foundations of Western thought and culture and the skepticisms they are casting, so that we can be responsive to the community in general and the young generation in particular, and attend to their intellectual and cultural concerns, problems and doubts.

Of course, God the Exalted is the protector and guardian of His religion:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

***Indeed We have sent down the Reminder and indeed We will preserve it. (15:9)***

In the midst of all hostilities and darkness, God will anchor the ship of religion and Islam off the shore of salvation:

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

***It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it prevail over all religions though the polytheists should be averse. (61:9)***

Yet, we have to ask why this preservation of the religion [*din*] should not be through us; and why we should not be among those who have been chosen by God for the exaltation of the word of monotheism [*kalimah at-tawhid*]<sup>9</sup> and the protection of His religion.

We hope that God the Exalted will give such an opportunity to all of us. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that, today, we have to realize our very sensitive and historic responsibility, and in undertaking this responsibility, we must acquire the necessary readiness by eliminating our intellectual and philosophical shortcomings. We have to bear in mind that if, God forbid, in discharging this crucial duty we are negligent and we act listlessly, we will be held responsible before God the Exalted the Prophet (S), The Holy Imams (‘a), and the martyrs [*shuhada*] who preserved this blessed tree [*shajarah at-tayyibah*] by offering their blood, and they will not easily forgive us.

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): the German philosopher considered by many as the most influential thinker of modern times. Describing in the *Metaphysics of Ethics* (1797) his ethical system which is anchored in a notion that the reason is the final authority for morality, actions of any sort, Kant believed, must be undertaken from a sense of duty dictated by reason, and no action performed for expediency or solely in obedience to law or custom can be regarded as moral. [Trans.]

<sup>2</sup> In this volume, the translation of Qur’anic passages is adapted from Sayyid ‘Ali Quli Qara’i, *The Qur’an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2004). [Trans.]

<sup>3</sup> The abbreviation, ‘a stands for the Arabic invocative phrase: ‘alayhi’s-salam, ‘alayhim’us-salam, or ‘alayha’s-salam [may peace be upon him/them/her], which is used after the names of the prophets, angels, Imams from the Prophet’s progeny, and saints. [Trans.]

4. Wahhabi: follower of Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi sect. For information on Wahhabism, see Ayatullah Ja’far Subhani, *Wahhabism* (Tehran: Naba’ Organization, 1996), <http://www.al-islam.org/wahhabism>; [13] Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (New York: Islamic Publications International, 2002). [Trans.]
5. Ghiyath ad-Din Abū’l-Fatah ‘Umar ibn Ibrahim al-Khayyam (1044–1123) was an outstanding mathematician and astronomer as well as a celebrated poet, philosopher and physician. In *The History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell remarks that Khayyam was the only man known to as both poet and mathematician. He reformed the solar calendar in 1079 CE with his calendar, *At-Tarikh al-Jalali*, which is superior to the Gregorian calendar and is accurate to within one day in 3,770 years. His work on Algebra, *Maqalat fi’l-Jabr wa’l-Muqabalah*, was highly valued throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. In the West, he is best known for his poetic work, *Ruba’iyat* [quatrains], which was translated by Edward Fitzgerald in 1859. For an overview of his contribution in other fields of science, visit: <http://users.erols.com/zenithco/khayyam.html> [14]. [Trans.]
6. Marja’ taqlid: a scholar of proven learning and piety whose authoritative rulings one follows in matters of religious practice. [Trans.]
7. Share of the Imam [sahm Imam]: one half of the khums duty (the other half being the share of the Sayyids/Sadat (descendants of the Prophet) [sahm as-Sadat]) to be paid to the living Imam, and in the Age of Occultation [asr al-ghaybah], to the most learned living mujtahid who is the giver’s marja’ taqlid [source of emulation]. For more information, see Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Khums: An Islamic Tax* (Toronto: Islamic Education and Information Center, 1992), <http://www.al-islam.org/beliefs/practices/khums.html> [15]. [Trans.]
8. It alludes to the acts of sabotage done against the victories of Islamists in the electoral processes in recent years. [Trans.]
9. Kalimah at-tawhid: the recitation of la ilaha illallah [there is no god but Allah].

## Chapter 2: Our Responsibility in the Sphere of Culture (Part 2)

All thanks be to God for giving me the opportunity to be in the company of the honorable university professors and to talk to them. In the previous session, we talked about the responsibility we should undertake and I shared with you some subjects. In the said meeting, I said that in initiating a cultural movement, we must have a set of preliminary analyses and understandings among which is the analysis of the present state of affairs.

All of us have a sense of responsibility and it is the same feeling that urges us to gather together and make a collective move, but in a better and deeper understanding of this responsibility, we should have a cogent analysis of the socio-political conditions prior to and during the Revolution so as to have a clearer picture of the current state of affairs and be able to move more consciously toward the ideal state. Of course, it is proper to have a detailed and extensive discussion on this issue, but on account of the limitations you and I are engaged in, there is no opportunity to embark on it, and the only alternative is to deal with it briefly to cover this session.

## **An Image of Iran Prior to Bahman 1357 AHS (February 1979)**

All of us know that the essence of this movement actually originated in the year of 1342 AHS (1963) and fifteen years prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Throughout these fifteen years, difficult conditions were experienced by the Iranian nation while there was instability in all dimensions of the country. The state of economic difficulty, international pillage, administrative corruption, moral bankruptcy, the Royal Court and its affiliates, unrestrained bribery, intolerable social gap, and the like issues had indeed put the people out of patience. Alongside it, the deep-rooted influence of the imperialists, especially the US, in all aspects of the society could be seen so much so that the highest ranking officials of the countries were also tools in the hands of the US.

In practice, it was the American embassy that ruled and decided for the country. The Americans used to humiliate our nation and even the highest figures of the country. As the effect of these persistent acts of humiliation, more or less, a sense of abjectness had also developed in our nation for thinking that the Americans are really civilized and progressive people while we are backward and worthless people. Along with all these things, there was another pressing issue the anti-religious policy which had expanded and gained momentum on a daily basis. In the recent years, it had gone to the extent of totally uplifting the veils and they had officially declared war against all religious sanctities. Given such situations, the occurrence of a vast change was not unpredictable.

## **The Most Serious Menace of the Monarchial Reign**

In my conception, if we intend to analyze the situations at that time, the most serious menace was that by implementing the imperialist designs, especially during the fifty to sixty years of the Pahlavi regime, they expelled the masses of the Muslim people and religious figures from the political scene. We can remember a lot of things of that period. Yet, perhaps, our colleagues do not pay attention or could not recall the point I have just mentioned. This was a serious calamity given to our nation. They had designed in such a way that political works and social affairs of this country fell to the lot of a number of those whom they called “elite” an elite perhaps more than eighty percent of which were educated in American or Iranian universities under the supervisions of the Americans. Among these universities were the University of Shiraz and the Tehran School of Management (located at the present site of Imam as-Sadiq University).

A president of the University of Shiraz used to be appointed with the approval of the American embassy and his academic programs came from there. The academic programs of many other universities were also indirectly made by the Americans. In sum, policymaking in the country was practically in the hands of the “elite” the absolute majority of whom were trained by the Americans. Of course, the essence of this policy which was so calculated and well-planned belongs to the British, and the Americans learned from them. In a bid to continue their presence for long time in the countries under their control and administer their affairs, they tried to educate the “elite” in their own country and indirectly brainwash them

and inculcate in them whatever they wanted.

The outcome of this policy was that the Muslim masses did not see any practical role for them in administering the affairs of the country. The only place where people had any apparent role was in the Majlis (Parliament). Even this was in such a manner that a list of the deputies had earlier been made by the Royal Court and approved by the American embassy, and those in the list were the same who would occupy the seats in the Majlis.

Of course, among the elite personalities of the country at that time, some were not amenable with the current policies. For whatever reason, they were not willing to come to terms with the rest, and they laid down the edifice of struggle and formed their own groups and organizations. One of these groups was the Tudeh Party.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, at a certain point in time, the Tudeh Party was really an agent and tool at the hand of the imperialist East and it had members who inclined toward the Soviet Union and wanted Iran to become a socialist country and a satellite of the Soviet Union, but there were also sincere individuals among them who really knew no way but attaching themselves to the Soviet Union in order to be free from the yoke and domination of Britain and America.

That is, what was inculcated in them was that there were no more than two ways for the Third World countries such as Iran; they should either be under the banner of America or under the banner of the Soviet Union so as to resist against the other. The second group was not many in number, but at least they were present. In sum, a number of the elite during the time rallied behind the Tudeh Party and used to organize themselves. Now, one should not be negligent of the danger to be posed by this party because it still seizes any opportunity and its members have secretly been engaged in reorganizing themselves.

Among those who had leftist inclination, apart from the Tudeh Party, there were other groups such as the Guerillas Devoted to the Masses [*Cherik-ha-ye Fada'i-ye Khalq*],<sup>2</sup> Labor Party [*hizb-e kargar*], *Rastegar*, and different local groups and parties in such regions as Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Khuzistan whose common feature was inclination to Marxism. Yet, it should not remain unsaid that some of those so-called parties had no more than ten or twenty members.

Opposite to this leftist faction was the faction of the parties and groups that belonged to the rightist parties which were supportive of the Shah's regime and, so to speak, they were seen as pawns of the West.

What was lacking then was the activity of the religious parties. Through various means, they kept the religious figures away from the political scene and made such propaganda that anyone who is faithful and religious would never get involved in political affairs. I myself remember that at the time whenever they wanted to accuse and tarnish the image of a cleric, they would say that he is a "political *akhund*" [*akhund-e siyasi*].<sup>3</sup>

They manipulated the culture in such a manner that “*akhund-e siyasi*” was a form of vilification. As such, the religious figures and at the head of whom, the religious clerics and ‘*ulama*’, used to strongly avoid entering the scene of politics until such time that by acquiring inspiration from other Muslim countries (where the ‘*ulama*’ were getting involved in politics) and some other factors, small political groups among the religious people also emerged. The popular society of the *Fada’iyan-e Islam*<sup>4</sup> was among these groups. Of course, it was a very small group yet so firm and determined.

Another example was the Islamic Nations Party [*hizb-e milal-e islami*] which came into being after the Mordad 28, 1332 AHS (August 19, 1953) Coup d’état. This party did not have many members who also finally betrayed the ideals of the party. At the same time that the political activities of the late ayatullah Kashani were at its peak, we had the group of the *Mujahidin-e Islam* whose founder was Shams Qanatabadi.

The Mujahidin Khalq Organization (MKO)<sup>5</sup> which we now called as *Guruhak-e Munafiqin* [splinter group of the hypocrites] actually emerged from this group founded by Shams. Later on, as you know, they inclined toward Marxism and finally fell prey to America and the West.

At any rate, this was a portrait of the political ground of the country and the active groups prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution, which were confined to these small groups, while the masses of the devoted Muslim people concerned with the country who constituted more than ninety percent of the population were totally away from this scene of action and there was no way for them to be in the scene. Among the ninety percent of the population, there were many informed individuals who used to understand the reality of the situations and currents. They were not satisfied with the state of affairs in the country and were deeply afflicted by it, but practically they could not do anything and had no hope in sight.

Among the limited number of Islamic groups at the time which were truly devoted to Islam and they neither accepted the regime nor showed inclinations toward the leftist and Marxist groups, the Freedom Movement [*Nahdhat-e azadi*] can be mentioned. The Freedom Movement in reality was a product of Muslims who gathered and started collective actions and gradually took the form of the Freedom Movement. Among its founders, one may mention Engineer Bazargan<sup>6</sup> and Dr. Yadullah Sahabi.

The mosque in the Faculty of Engineering of Tehran University was constructed by Engineer Bazargan. Similarly, at that time, they used to publish magazines periodically, an example of which was a magazine entitled “*Ganj-e Shayegan*” [Immense Treasure]. Like the initial *Mujahidin-e Khalq*, the Freedom Movement had interest in Islam and its members offered their ritual prayers and observed fasts and even some of them were early night-worshippers [*sahar khiz*] (to perform the night supererogatory prayers and other devotional acts).

Yet, like the *Mujahidin-e Khalq*, the Freedom Movement in the long run experienced deviation and eclecticism. Finally, its members viewed that for their political safety, they would act as one of the pillars

of the National Front [*jebheh-ye milli*] which they regarded as relatively 'cleaner' when compared to the rest of the political elite. This was the landscape of the political condition of our country prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

## **Imam Khomein's (r) strategy in initiating political change**

Under such circumstances, the late Imam with such high political perspicacity, understanding and insight had from the beginning realized that these political activities of the different groups among the elite, even if they would succeed, would finally not serve the interest of Islam. This included those who worked in the name of Islam. The only way in the view of the Imam which actually bore fruit was to draw the masses of the Muslim people toward the scene of action. The Imam believed that these parties and groups could not launch a strong and comprehensive Islamic movement which would lead to the establishment of an Islamic government.

Of course, the theory of the Imam was not and still not acceptable in the contemporary political philosophy. The contemporary political philosophers believe that wherever political activity takes place in whatever form and ends up in something, it will definitely assume the form of party and factional organization with certain specific formulas and relations. Such a movement in which all people are involved and everybody feels responsible and moves under a single banner has no place in the classical political theories. Had the Imam wanted to talk about his ideas in the form of a theory and argue about it, no one would have listened to him. Instead of advancing this political matter in the form of a scientific theory, he put it into action and he was determined to draw the masses toward the scene of action. He inculcated to the entire people this sense of responsibility that as Muslims they are duty-bound to get involved in the political affairs of their country.

This work, like many other works and ideas of the Imam, was a novelty. If the Imam had had chosen another path, he would not have been able to initiate a considerable change. It was through bringing the great masses people to the scene of action that the Imam succeeded in launching this unprecedented movement something that none of those political groups, whether leftist, nationalist, or religious, was able to do as acknowledged by both friends and foes.

It was the Imam who, by identifying the hidden power in the great masses of the nation and by making use of their Islamic and religious motives, put into motion a current with a specific direction. We have not yet forgotten and we personally witnessed that the delinquent and idle youth who used to moon around the streets and alleys were so reformed and given direction in life by the Imam that they emerged in the process of the Revolution, and in the middle of the street, they used to stand in front and say to the soldiers of the Shah's regime, "Shoot!"

By inciting the sense of religious duty of the people and the sincere intention he had, the Imam did something that, instead of the limited and uninteresting party relations, created deep-rooted emotional relationship with the people. The people used to love and the moth of their love flew around the candle

of his being. This was the unmatched leadership of the Imam, and we can still witness the effect of such a deep emotional attachment. Though many years have passed since his demise, whenever his name is mentioned, it is always accompanied by different gestures of honor and reverence to him.

In any case, the movement of the Imam was something beyond the current political formulas and frameworks. When the street demonstrations began in 1356 AHS (circa 1977), even the most optimistic individuals did not think that this movement would bear fruit in less than twenty years. By these people, I mean such individuals as Martyr Dr. Beheshti individuals who were well-known and well-experienced in political analysis. Yet, even a person like him thought prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution and during the last moments of the movement that we should wait for another twenty years.

We all witnessed, however, that the movement of the Imam bore fruit after less than two years and the Islamic Revolution obtained victory something which I myself could not believe and if ever somebody would tell about it, for me it was like a dream. Let us set aside my case. Many of those who were older than me had the same thought. In sum, if we say that the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1357 AHS (1979) was a divine miracle, this will not be exaggeration.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, apart from the seditious groups that had no place in the heart of the nation and whose commission of some of the illogical and deceitful measures and cold-blooded assassinations led to their annihilation while some of their members fled the country, the other groups remained. Such groups as the Tudeh Party, Guerillas Devoted to the People, Pan-Iranians, National Front, and the Freedom Movement remained active after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and no one obstructed them while their life and properties were protected.

Up to this point, more or less you know the issues and there was nothing very new. This was merely a survey of the issues and currents prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution and it was more of an introduction. Our main subject which is my focus and to which I would like you, my dear colleagues, to pay more attention is the rest of the succeeding discussions.

## **The Degree of Conviction of The Officials of The Islamic System to the Pristine Precepts and Values of Islam**

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, naturally the discussion about managing the country and forming the government was raised. The first government to be formed was the provisional government under the premiership of Engineer Bazargan and thereafter, other figures and governments came. Apart from the expected shortcomings and problems as a result of inexperience and immaturity of the governmental officials and the peculiar condition of the initial days and years of every revolution and movement, the following question is raised: Did all the members of those cabinets and their staff think like the Imam? Did they all perceive the role of religion in the society in the same manner that the Imam used to perceive?

Among the high-ranking decision-makers and policymakers of the country at the time were figures like Martyr Beheshti, Martyr Mutahhari, Martyr Bahonar and some others who were trained for many years under the tutelage of the Imam and were completely familiar with his views and ideas. Besides, they themselves were good and through their extensive and profound research on the teachings and references of Islam had acquired a good understanding of Islam and its fundamentals and laws. Such people knew the thoughts and ways of the Imam and had faith in them.

Indeed, what they wanted was the same thing that the Imam was pursuing. Yet, they did not last for many years. During the very first or second year of the Revolution, most of these people were taken from us. First was the assassination of the late Mutahhari (on May 1, 1979) and thereafter the event on Tir 7,<sup>7</sup> and that of Shahrivar 8<sup>8</sup> and other incidents in which we lost most of these individuals who knew well the ideas and views of the Imam and believed in them and then played key role in the political and administrative posts in the country. The enemies, due to thorough investigation, had identified the importance of these figures even before we did; they therefore took them from us.

Apart from these individuals and some others, all those who came after the Shahrivar 8 incident and the cabinet of Martyr Bahonar and assumed the key and high-ranking administrative posts in the country did not know the thoughts of the Imam to such extent. They were not familiar with the psychological makeup and spiritual aspects of the Imam, either. In different degrees, more or less, they were influenced by the Western civilization and teachings, and had gap with the Islamic culture and precepts, and this gap widened day by day in every cabinet compared to the preceding one and its officials. Yet, as long as the eminent Imam was alive, because of his spiritual greatness and celestial prominence that cast a shadow upon the entire country, less people would express their intentions.

Even those who had fundamental and deep-rooted oppositions to the path, thoughts and fundamentals of the Imam and Islam would never regard the condition as propitious in expressing their opposition. In practice, they could not express their hostility and they had nothing to say. In any case, after the demise of the Imam, naturally the ground for abandoning the thoughts and ways of the Imam widened, because the mentor was no more there, and the spiritual and celestial prominence did no longer exist.

The Imam was a figure engrossed in almost eighty years with bitter and sweet sociopolitical events. Through spiritual and moral struggles, he molded himself and obtained a valuable experience of long years of political struggle. Therefore, anyone who would come after the Imam, though he was nurtured by the Imam and was competent and well-experienced, could never be the Imam. This fact is a factor which naturally exists along with other different factors, which cannot be dealt at the present. All these factors assist one another in gradually undermining the Islamic thought and values day by day, and we have a duty to prevent this phenomenon by setting appropriate strategies and approaches.

## Program of the Enemies of the Revolution in Undermining the Islamic Values

In addition to the factors related to the nature and essence of such movements, there are also significant and effective external factors that may contribute to undermining the Islamic values. If during the initial days and years of the Revolution, the Americans and other Western and Eastern states and statesmen thought that this revolution, like other revolutions in the contemporary time, would not have much enduring and extensive impacts, today, twenty years<sup>9</sup> after its victory and initiation of global changes, they realize that Islam is a constructive and dynamic school [*maktab*] with strong and abundant potentials in managing not only the community but also the whole world.

Today, they feel this fact practically and take it very seriously and urgently. For the same reason, by using huge budget and extensive programs, they have risen up to confront this movement and are in pursuit of undermining its impacts and ultimately extinguishing it. Today, their analysts have identified the points of weakness and strength of our Revolution and the cracks through which they penetrate into, and through programs and activities some of which are even beyond our imagination, they are busy weakening the foundations of the Revolution. Of course, to unravel some of these points and pertinent programs is not much difficult.

In a simple analysis, it can be identified that the engine of the movements and activities of man consists of two things: perceptions and inclinations. Therefore, whenever we want to change the direction of a person's movement, it is enough to try changing his perceptions and inclinations. For the same reason, the enemies of Islam and this nation are trying, on one hand, to weaken the religious beliefs of the people, and on the other hand, to promote as substitute the Western materialistic values in a bid to change the orientations and inclinations of the society.

This strategy, that is, the attempt to change the perceptions and inclinations especially of the young generation, is so effective because the beliefs and intellectual foundations of this generation are not yet well-entrenched and internalized as they believe on a set of things on the basis of what they see and hear without solid research and demonstrative support. In terms of inclinations, young age has specific demands, and in terms of the storm of different desires, it is regarded as the most critical stage in the human life. Naturally, a young has special inclination and attention to the different material manifestations of life.

The West uses this strategy not only with the Muslim nations and the Third World, but also with their own people. It has amused most of the Western youth with pornography and sexual issues, alcoholic beverages, fashions on bags, wallets, shoes, dresses, hairdo, and face that change every day, sports, cinema, superstars and the like. Among these youth, they have identified only a limited number of talented ones and hired them in academic and research centers. By investing on these youths, they make use of their skills, talents and mental faculty for advancement in different spheres.

Now, in a country whose constitution has been ratified on the basis of Islam, where the dynamic principle of *wilayah al-faqih* [guardianship or governance of the jurist] exists, where the Islamic values prevail, and where the highest post is occupied by a *faqih* [jurist] who is well-versed on Islam, free-minded, and possesses the highest degree of piety and divine-human values, what should be done so that the imperialistic objectives of the enemies be realized? The answer is clear. It must be penetrated through various cultural means such as lecture, school, university, periodicals, film, cinema, radio, television, book, sports, and the like.

The impact of these ways in changing the perceptions and inclinations is decisively proven and undeniable. You may remember when a reporter in a radio interview asked a woman, “Who is your model?” and the woman replied, “Ushin.” The late Imam made a phone call to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and while expressing his protest against it for airing such a program, he said that the woman is on the verge of apostasy [*irtidad*]. You can observe that in the country of Fatimah and ‘Ali (‘a), during the lifetime of the Imam himself, something can be done in which the ideal role model of an Iranian Shi‘ah woman is not Zaynab or Zahra (‘a) but Ushin! What is important is the first step. Once the hump is removed, the rest of the road will be level.

## **The Enemy’s Infiltration In to the Executive and Planning Organs in the Country**

The other significant program of the enemies in weakening the beliefs and values is run through infiltration into the decision-making organ of the country, they station in the different posts individuals whose beliefs, intellectual foundations and moral values are somehow apart from that of the Imam and are under the influence of the Western culture, values and ideas. In a bid to remove the road bump, they begin to attack Islam and Islamic values by direct and indirect infiltration into some newspapers. With the aim of casting doubt upon the laws of Islam, they insult religious sanctities, tarnish the image of the proponents, supporters and advocates of Islamic values, promote nationalistic values instead of emphasizing Islamic and religious values, and create tens of such cases which you can observe today. In all these dimensions, they make gradual advancements. It is not that they would make the final shot and express their ultimate agenda all at once.

But if the newspapers would like to publish those things, they will encounter legal problem. In order to solve the legal problem and to observe their intended freedom of the press, the law must be amended. In amending the law, the first step is that the “moderates” as they call it, should rule. In the beginning, they cannot say that there should be no Islam. They have to find first individuals who, to some extent, have some vulnerability, not so “fanatic” and are willing to somehow compromise some Islamic issues. In making the moderates attain power, they work for magnifying the weakness of the past devoted executive officials, most of which was due to the early stage of the Revolution and the huge problems thereof. By capitalizing on these weaknesses, they undermine the mass base of these officials so as to

pave the way for the coming of individuals who are to some extent away from the devoted forces and are more or less willing to make some compromise and concession.

In this connection, the university and its students should never be neglected because they constitute an influential stratum of the society and the future managers of the country. They must be given special attention and specific programs must be formulated for them. In sum, this is a detailed and well-calculated scenario whose curtains are about to be lifted one by one by the enemies. In this scenario, you, strange individuals, and those who clearly recognize the enmity of the enemies toward Islam and the Revolution, will not observe many things. Most of the roles must be played by elements from within and those who have outward beliefs in Islam. In other words, there is no need for a person to come from the US and the CIA in particular. Rather, you will observe that a certain minister or deputy minister offers prayers regularly, observes fasting, performs the *Hajj* and the pilgrimages to Karbala' and Syria (at Zaynabiyyah), pays his religious taxes, and even retains the Qur'an, but his stances are 180 degrees opposite of that of the Imam.

Sometimes, you will even observe a person whose stance some years ago is 180 degrees different from what he presently believes in. For example, there is a person who had a pivotal role and share in the occupation of the American Den of Espionage (American embassy in Tehran),<sup>10</sup> but now he himself condemns the act and shakes hand with the same spies in a TV show at a Western country, sitting together with them in an atmosphere of reconciliation! The same person who, two or three years ago, used to protest against a deputy in the Majlis for uttering something in a trip to Britain and accuse him of being pro-American, is now proposing for negotiation and establishment of relations with the USA, and regarding the slogan, "Down with America!" and those who chant it, he says that they are a bunch of rascals!

Today, you can see people who, during the time of the Iraqi-imposed war, had been supporters of the continuation of the war perhaps more than what others used to do, but now they have become among those who criticize the prolongation of the war. Of course, the truth of the matter is that most of these people who used to chant such radical slogans during the early years of the Revolution did so not more on the conviction of the heart, but under the influence of the temperament, feelings and ardor they had at the time.

Today, such individuals are so-called under the influence of convincing arguments and as they themselves imagine, they have passed from the ebb of emotionalism to the height of rationality, saying that their past statements and acts were wrong. Such deeds were aimed for having revolutionary record and being among the followers and supporters of the Imam during his time.

We have to unconditionally submit to the beliefs, views and ideas of such people, because we can observe that at the present, some of the old friends of the Imam cast doubt upon some of the basic principles of his thought, regarding them as incorrect. There are also individuals and cases where our difference with them is more on taste, and difference in taste must not lead us to discredit people and

exclude them from the group of supporters of the Revolution, branding them as foreign agents and politically confronting them.

## Summary and Conclusion

If we want to summarize the subjects of the previous and present sessions, the result will be the following:

At the beginning of the Revolution, understanding and thought had lesser role. The main factor that led the people to follow the Imam, stage the Revolution, and preserve it, was their religious feelings and sentiments. This was the greatest art of the Imam, giving direction and guiding these emotions and taking proper benefits from them. The perpetuity of the movement and Revolution, however, lies more on intellectual and cultural activities. Nowadays, it is wrong to imagine that we could preserve the Revolution and continue the movement through the same reliance on the religious sentiments of the people, breast-beating and chanting, “Husayn! Husayn!”

In essence, the Imam, with such spiritual greatness and mystical and celestial personality, had such a rule over the hearts and drew the feelings of the people toward him. And it is something we cannot do even if we work hard. Today, many people who bear mistaken thoughts and do actions do not really have the intention to commit so and their weakness is the product of lack of understanding. During their period of studies in the university, even if they were devoted Muslims, they at most used to offer the ritual prayers and observe the ritual fast, and had no more time and opportunity to study and understand the foundations of Islam and, later, when they have been engrossed with executive and administrative activities of the country, they were too busy, let alone have time to search about the fundamentals of Islam.

Now, it must be thought of how they could understand Islam better, and in this regard, there is no room for any formality or complimentary words. We should not think that these teachings are only for the students of elementary and high schools and freshmen and sophomore university students. Rather, the different strata of our society are in urgent need of them. Of course, it cannot be said to the minister or deputy minister to attend the class session and study their lessons, but they could be informed of it indirectly and be acquainted with these discussions. Apart from those who are presently occupying policymaking and executive posts in the country, we must think about those who will occupy those posts in the future. I mean these students who are currently at schools and universities. We have to think and plan for the future managers and officials.

For instance, the president of a certain large Muslim country with a greater population than ours was asked, “Why have you become so attached to the USA?” He replied, “The USA had granted scholarships to two thousands of our country’s cream of the crop during the different periods. In every political term, forty of these scholarship grantees become high-ranking officials of the country, and this scholarship continues as before. What do you expect from a country two thousand of its high-ranking

policymakers have been trained in the lap of the USA?”

America formulated this policy fifty years ago, and today, it reaps its fruits. If you and I want Islam to rule over this country fifty years from now, we have to plan now and initiate intellectual and cultural activities on the future administrative forces. For us, just to sit idle and wait for the calamity to descend upon us and think that that is the time for us to think for a way out, is irrational and illogical.

Thus, it is due to this sense of urgency that we are taking your time, honorable professors, in these discussions, and it is because among these students who are at your disposal, the future administrators of the country from the president and ministers down to the deputy ministers, deputies in the Majlis and general managers will be trained. As such, if you yourselves have good information and profound knowledge of Islam and its fundamentals, you can impart the same to the students. However, if a student asks you a question and you fail to give a convincing answer to him, he will say that since a veteran university professor failed to give an answer, it is evident that there is no available answer to this question. And if he contacts a cleric like me and I fail to give a reply, it will become certain for the student that there is indeed no available answer for it; and for him, “The words they are mentioning to be from God, the Prophet and Islam have no basis and foundation.”

The final conclusion is that as for this humble servant, as a cleric, and you, as university professors, because of the pivotal role we could have in nurturing and training the future generations of this country, our responsibility is far greater and heavier than that of others, and we have to strive hard in accomplishing our sensitive mission by enhancing and expanding our knowledge and understanding of Islam and its fundamentals.

1. Tudeh [Masses] Party was formed in 1320 AHS (1941) on the remnants of the ‘Idalat [Justice] Party, which was founded in 1299 AHS (1920) after the entry of the Red Army to Rasht. Following the attempt on the life of the Shah in Bahman 1327 AHS for which a Tudeh assailant was identified, martial law was declared, members of the Party apprehended, and the Party considered illegitimate and dissolved.

By announcing Marxism–Leninism as the Party’s platform in 1328 AHS, it completely revealed its policy. With the beginning of the nationalization of the oil industry, Tudeh Party assumed two factions—that of Kiyānī and Qasimi. Later, by keeping silent in the face of the Mordad 28, 1332 AHS coup and behind–the–scene activities, it played a pivotal role in the fall of Musaddiq. With the arrest of officers of military network and other networks of the Party by the Shah’s regime in Mordad 1333 AHS, so many expressed disgust for their party’s backgrounds and collaborated with the Shah’s regime and its security organization. In the Party’s Congress itself in early 1950s, the Party appreciated and praised the regime and discouraged resistance.

From 1350 to 1356 AHS when the clergy started the struggle with new methods, the Party reorganized itself, and after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, it held its 16th Party Congress in Tehran and announced its support for the Islamic Republic. The Party’s objective after the Islamic Revolution was to gradually incite dissension among the revolutionary forces and infiltrate in the economic and cultural posts of the country.

Finally, with the arrest of the principal leaders and cadres of the Tudeh Party, a wave of confessions on espionage and endeavor to destroy the Islamic system commenced and the true nature of this party became known to everyone and its 42 years of treacherous existence in Iran came to an end. [Trans.]

[2.](#) The communist organization, Cherk-ha-ye Fada'i-ye Khalq [Guerillas Devoted to the Masses], was organized in 1349 AHS by the youth who were dissatisfied with the policies of the Tudeh Party of depending on the Soviet Union. They chose the Alborz mountain ranges, Siyahkol jungle in particular, as their center of operation and incited the villagers of the region to rise up against the regime. [Trans.]

[3.](#) Akhḡnd: a word of uncertain etymology that originally denotes a scholar of unusual attainment, but was later applied to lesser-ranking scholars, and then acquired a pejorative connotation, particularly in secularist usage. [Trans.]

[4.](#) Fada'iyān-e Islam organization was established in 1323 AHS (circa 1944) by Martyr Sayyid Mujtaba Nawwab Safawi and was one of the religious parties and organizations in Iran at the time with a long record of sound faith in Islam and in the role of the 'ulama' in leading the people. The assassination of 'Abd al-Husayn Hajir and General Razmara (the Shah's Prime Ministers) was one of this group's militant undertakings. Nawwab Safawi and other members of the group were arrested by the Shah's agents in 1344 AHS (circa 1965) and were expeditiously tried and executed. [Trans.]

[5.](#) Mujahidin Khalq Organization (MKO): established in 1344 AHS (1965) to fight against the Shah. Because of the ignorance of its leaders on the comprehensive principles and teachings of the school of Islam, the organization chose an eclectic ideology, and in a very short time after the victory of the Revolution, rose against the Revolution and its forces and martyred a good number of the true servants of the people. The group spared no effort in overthrowing the Islamic government.

After several stages the group was suppressed by the revolutionary forces. Some of them fled from the country. Those who claim to be anti-imperialists and feared revelation of their identities are now passing their last shameful days in the laps of the imperialists. In the public vernacular the terrorist group, Mujahidin Khalq, has been named and known as munafiqin [hypocrites], which indicates their inner crooked quality. It is to be noted that during the Iraqi war against Iran this group, alongside the Iraqi army, fought against the Islamic forces. [Trans.]

[6.](#) Engineer Mahdi Bazargan (1908–1994) held different public positions in the administration of Dr. Muhammad Musaddiq. He was among the main founders of the Freedom Movement of Iran. Upon the culmination of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, he was appointed as the head of the provisional government; however, he decided to step down one day after Iranian students stormed the US embassy (Den of Espionage) in Tehran. [Trans.]

[7.](#) This date refers to the bomb explosion at the Islamic Republican Party Headquarters in Tir 7, 1360 AHS (June 28, 1981) that led to the martyrdom of Dr. Beheshti and seventy-one other prominent political and religious figures of the Islamic Revolution. [Trans.]

[8.](#) This date refers to the bomb explosion at the Prime Minister's Office in Shahrivar 8, 1360 AHS (August 30, 1981) that led to the martyrdom of Prime Minister Bahonar and President Raja'i. [Trans.]

[9.](#) It is now almost thirty years. [Trans.]

[10.](#) This is an indication of the occupation by Muslim students following the line of the Imam of the US Embassy in Tehran on Aban 13, 1358 AHS (November 4, 1979) in protest to the USA's interference in Iran and its support of the anti-revolutionary elements in which the discovered documents revealed many facts about American, British and Israeli crimes committed against the Iranian nation. See the six-volume collection entitled, Documents Discovered from the US Espionage Den. [Trans.]

## Chapter 3: Religious Pluralism (Part 1)

### The Great Crisis of our Age

If we called the age in which we live, especially the past decades, the age of cultural crisis, we would not

have chosen a bad label. In the history of human civilization, there are different periods which have been described variedly depending on the unique occasions in each period. But, perhaps, in no period before when in most countries in the world a cultural crisis, which is likewise called the identity crisis, had been to such extent as it is now. Nowadays, if we take a look at the cultural problems in the advanced countries, we will witness an astonishing confusion, bewilderment, uncertainty, and finally, intense intellectual skepticism whose extent has been unprecedented throughout history.

During the distant past, a group of “Sophists” emerged in the cultural sphere of ancient Greece and existed for some time, but this movement was soon relegated to oblivion. During the first two centuries of the Common Era, once again the wave of skepticism or agnosticism appeared through Pyrrho<sup>1</sup> and some of his advocates which also did not last long. The third wave of this movement appeared after the Renaissance which had, more or less, greater influence and wider scope compared to the first two waves, but again, it was still not very widespread as to encompass all of the cultural and academic centers of the world. In recent decades, however, a new wave of skepticism has surfaced whose extent and intensity surpassed that of all the previous waves so much so that we have to say that with the exception of a few cases, all cultural, intellectual and academic centers of the world have been subjected to cultural agitation and bewilderment.

Different philosophies and schools of skepticism, subjectivism and the like, though outwardly may not imply “skepticism”, their essence is nothing but elements of skepticism, have mushroomed. The cultural atmosphere of the world has become such that if a person claims objectivity and certainty, this act is treated as something reproachable and negative, and if someone is to be belittled, he will be branded as an objectivist and a votary of dogmatism. Today, objectivism is regarded as an abusive language in the academic parlance while skepticism, relativism and negation of absolutism have so pervaded in the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of the world in that if some people claim having certain convictions, saying that they believe in certain things and perfectly understand them, they will be accused of simple-mindedness, improvidence, silliness, and lack of deep understanding and knowledge.

I have said once elsewhere that if we call this age the age of modern ignorance [*jahiliyyah*], this will not be inaccurate, for it is a source of pride now to say, “We do not know.” It is said that we have to reach the stage where we will understand well that everything is doubtful and that no certain thing ever exists. That is to confess ignorance and doubt with respect to everything. This is modern ignorance we are facing today in contrast to the ignorance that the Holy Qur’an describes as the “former Times of Ignorance” [*al-jahiliyyah al-ula* (33:33)].

Anyway, according to them, dogmatism and objectivism cause one’s crookedness of understanding and silliness, but according to us, skepticism and belief in relativity in everything which the world today is defending are nothing but ignorance and unawareness. We have learned from the Qur’an that we have to be in pursuit of certainty and certain knowledge and of drawing the curtains of doubt and uncertainty. In its very first page and at the beginning of *Surah al-Baqarah*, the Qur’an states:

وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ..

**...and are certain of the hereafter. (2:4)**

The culture of the Qur'an is such that whenever it wants to reproach, rebuke and criticize certain individuals and groups, it brands them as "people of doubt." It is the opposite of what exists in the world today; if certain individuals are supposed to be branded with something unwholesome in the academic parlance, they will be called as "people of certainty!"

## **Pluralism, Indulgence and Negligence: Tools at the Hands of the Crisis-Mongers**

In any case, according to us, belief in relativism and skepticism is a great menace for the human society, or at least to our society, and it causes the fading away of the values, culture and beliefs for the sake of which we offered sacrifices and for centuries we longed their realization until finally the same has been materialized during the recent decades. Now, the question is: What shall we do with this wave of skepticism in the world which, in our view, is a pervasive crisis and hazardous disease? As an Islamic government and country, what Iran has to do in the realm of culture, apart from the tasks to be done in the spheres of economy, industry and science? Of course, by culture we do not mean its modern implication which only includes dancing, singing and music.

Instead, we mean the religious beliefs and values. In our view, Islam possesses a set of definite, pristine and fixed principles and values. Our duty is firstly to preserve them and secondly to invite others to get to know them, and not to withdraw and be passive in facing the waves of secularism, liberalism and hundreds of other isms. Today, by adopting diverse cultural schemes, the enemies of our nation are trying to cast doubt upon the beliefs, values and convictions of our people, especially the youths. One of these schemes is the promotion of an idea called "pluralism" which is so dangerous, and because of its importance, there is a need for us to address it.

The pluralists claim, "Human beings have different ideas and diverse opinions, and every idea and opinion that is acceptable to a person or society is worthy of respect, and we have to treat them with respect. Of course, if we have also certain idea and opinion, others should respect them. We should not oppose the ideas of others nor refuse to replace our idea with that of others. No one should regard as absolute his own idea and opinion. It should be borne in mind instead that there are others who have different ideas and opinions. What is the basis that your idea is correct while the ideas and views of others are not?"

On what basis are you charging as erroneous the ideas and views of others while considering yours as the truth? If you are Muslims and are professing Islam, there are also others who accept Christianity, Buddhism and other creeds. There is no reason at all that your Islam is superior to the other creeds. We

have to respect one another and treat as respectable each other's belief. We should not have bigotry and endeavor to definitely bring others to the fold of our creed and faith. We have to treat the ideas and beliefs of others with indulgence and negligence, and also entertain in our mind the probability that others are true and say what is right.”

As indicated, this idea is actually a tool in the hands of the imperialist powers in the world firstly, to prevent the spread of the Islamic culture in general and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in particular, and secondly, to pave the way for the penetration of the materialistic and atheistic culture of the West. As of the moment, we witness that in some publications, tribunes and speeches, the same way of thinking is promoted and its scope of influence is such that even some figures and personalities who have never been expected to succumb to such concepts have been under the influence of this idea.

## Our Heavy Responsibility to the Youth

During the lifetime of the eminent Imam (*r*), because of the greatness of his personality, he had exerted such influence upon the minds and feelings of his followers that the people were passionately fond of him, and his behavior, views and words were unconditionally and undoubtedly the paradigm for the thinking and action of all people and officials and the criterion of their movement. But this matter necessitated his exceptional personality, and since such a thing will not remain always for all generations, we have to think that if those ideas and ways were indeed correct, as they were, we have to defend them through argument and logic, consolidate their foundations and promote them.

For the future generation, it is not enough to say that the Imam has said or done so. It is natural that the zeal and ardor that we used to see on the first generation of the Islamic Revolution and in those volunteer mobilization forces [*Basijis*] who were fond of martyrdom, battlefield and war will not exist in the future generation and those who have not seen from a close distance the celestial countenance of the Imam nor listened every day or every week to his speeches that are full of wisdom. For them, we have to think of logical explanations and strong and convincing arguments.

Surely, if we put ourselves in the place of these youth who have newly attained puberty, acquired independent thinking, and encountered diverse and contradictory claims, views and cultures, we will see that the issue is not as simple as we think. For these youths, this question is actually posed: In the midst of all these various and contradictory ideas and views, what is the proof that only the opinion, view and way of the Imam Khomeini (*r*) are correct? What is the ultimate reason that Islam is the best religion and way of life?

Is there no multitude of followers of Christianity and other religions? How to know that their religion and beliefs are not better than Islam and that of the Imam? Why should I accept Islam, the Revolution and the Imam? These and other similar questions are the issues existing in the minds of our youths and are troubling them. There are even times when they explicitly pose and express them. Having said this, it is evident that the necessary ground and favorable condition for the propagation for pluralism are

completely present in the realm of religion and culture.

In reply to the above and similar questions, pluralism states thus: “You may choose the one you like from among the different existing religions. All of them are similar and equal to one another. They have differences, more or less, but they are all good religions! If there are one billion in the world today, it is not a proof for the superiority and more credibility of Islam, because another five million believe in another thing than Islam.”

In various countries of the world, I myself encountered people who were Christians but had a good idea about Islam. Whenever I would ask them, “So, why don’t you embrace Islam?” they would say in reply that Christianity is also a good religion. Even higher than them, today, the Pope himself acknowledges that Islam is a progressive and excellent religion. Of course, he never says that Christianity is bad, or that Islam is better than Christianity. When the “leader of the Christian world” announces that Islam is a very good religion, it automatically implies that we have two good religions; one is Islam while the other is Christianity. If you would meet the leader of the Buddhists Buddhism being a religion followed by millions of people in the world probably he will also say that Buddhism is good and so is Islam.

This is called religious pluralism. That is, we do not have a single good and authentic religion; rather, we have many. No one should unreasonably insist that to become Muslim is the prerequisite for admission to paradise and attainment of bliss. Rather, a Christian, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and others may also be admitted to heaven and attain felicity. Similarly, within a religion, the different schools of thought [*madhahib*] have no preference over one another, since all of them are good and in truth. In Islam, for example, Sunnis and Shi’ah should not charge each other as erroneous, or in Christianity, the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox should not accuse one another of being misguided.

## What Pluralists Say?

With the aim of proving religious pluralism, pluralists cite other examples outside pluralism. For example, they claim that today the countries in the world are administered through various political systems and regimes. In some advanced countries such as the UK and Japan, constitutional monarchical system exists. In many others, it is republicanism. Among the republican countries, some are presidential while others are parliamentary. In political philosophy, whenever the different political systems are discussed, a definite answer will not be given in reply to the question, “Which of these systems is the best?” Instead, it will be said that each of them has its peculiar advantages and limitations.

Therefore, none of them could be considered bad. All of them are good in one way or another. This is what is called political pluralism. That is, in choosing the political system, there is no need to say that a certain system is good and right, while the rest are wrong and defective. In the same vein, the multiplicity of parties and party coalitions in forming a government or cabinet is another example of political pluralism. Among the various parties with diverse and varied political views and stances existing in a country, it cannot be said that only one specific party is right while the rest have to be set aside.

In principle, in the world today, if the overwhelming majority of people in a country support only a single party, it is regarded as sign of backwardness and retrogression. It is believed that the advanced countries and civilized societies have definitely multiple political inclinations, and each group of people supports a particular party. Basically, it is this contradiction and disagreement in the stance of the different parties that fosters competition among the parties and makes the non-ruling parties watchful of the performance of the ruling party or parties and for every party to report the mistakes and weaknesses of the other party. In this manner, all parties are watchful of their own performance and trying to improve their performance by minimizing their deviations, weaknesses and errors so that they could win the vote of the people.

All of these, in the end, lead to the improvement of the entire performance of the officials and statesmen of a country, which in turn, is beneficial to the public. For this reason, we can see that political pluralism and multiparty system is a desirable and beneficial affair, and one-party political systems and tendencies are usually less effective in comparison to multiparty systems and tendencies.

Also, in the economic sphere, it is so evident that the multiplicity and diversity of the economic poles and powers is desirable, and the single-pole economy has ample disadvantages and loopholes and is indefensible. In the sphere where there are numerous economic poles, there is competition among them, and as a result of this competition, higher quality, and at the same time, cheaper goods and services will be given to the costumers and consumers while the economic growth and development will have also desirable trend. Whereas, in a single pole economy, monopoly arises, and as the effect of the absence of competition, usually, there will be less motive to improve the quality or lessen the price, and the trend of growth and progress is slow. Therefore, economic pluralism is also desirable, beneficial and justifiable.

By mentioning such cases, pluralists conclude that just as pluralism and multiplicity in such spheres like politics and economics is desirable and beneficial, there must also be pluralism in the sphere of religion and culture, and the way for the emergence of religions in the society must also be completely paved. With respect to belief and conviction of the heart, we also have to believe that no religion is superior, and that acceptance of any of them is as valuable as acceptance of the rest.

To divide them into true and false, perfect and defective, good and bad, and other similar differentiations is totally baseless and meaningless. Islam and Christianity, Shi'ah and Sunni, Catholic and Protestant, and all religions, sects and schools of thought are ways toward the truth and paths leading to the destination and the shore of salvation. Fanaticism and rigidity on any of them is a sign of illogicality and imprudence. Just as he accepts economic and political pluralism, a rational and wise person has also the same belief in the realm of religion, and for him, multiplicity of religions is a totally natural, rational and acceptable matter.

In any case, this is an idea which is promoted today in our society through various means. As we have indicated earlier, for our youth there is really the right to pose question. Just as we accept multiplicity in

the domains of politics and economics, and for instance, in the economic domain economists have no consensus of opinion on implementing the policy of expanding exports and minimizing imports to attain growth and development of a certain country and that this difference in opinion is totally a natural phenomenon and there is no need at all for them to arrive at a consensus, what is wrong then if this becomes the case in matters of religion and culture? By the way, why do I have to profess Islam and not Christianity? What is the need for professing a religion and believing in the existence of God? Many people deny God or are doubtful and skeptical of His existence. This is also a form of belief which is equal to the rest of beliefs, and why should I not accept such a belief, too?

In this manner, we can observe that the issue is indeed serious. It is far beyond an article, an author and a book. It requires us to fasten our seatbelt, and by presenting logical and reasonable answers, we have to entertain the inquiries of our young generation and solve for them this doubt.

## **A Critique of the First Proposition of the Pluralists**

In refutation of the above proposition in support of pluralism, firstly, we have to state that logically speaking, acceptance of multiplicity in politics and economics does not necessary mean acceptance of multiplicity in religion and culture. In other words, in the said proposition, it is argued that “Since pluralism in economics and politics and some other affairs is desirable and beneficial, it follows that the same is desirable and beneficial in the realm of culture and religion.” Our main contention is that this proposition is a mere claim and no proof is presented to support it. It is similar to the case when one says, “Since the presence of eleven players in a soccer game is desirable and beneficial, it follows that the presence of the same number of players in volleyball is desirable and beneficial!” Exactly just as the second claim is baseless and unbelievable, so is the first claim. Let us elaborate on this.

It is true that we have questions in such fields like economics and politics that have more than one answer, and that multiplicity and diversity concerning them is possibly desirable. Yet, there are also questions in other fields like mathematics, physics, geometry, and the like that do not have more than one answer, and multiple correct answers for them are inconceivable and unacceptable. In mathematics, for instance, two times two does not have more than one answer and that is four.

In geometry, the aggregate of triangular angles in a plane surface does not have more than one answer and that is 180 degrees. Computation of the distance covered by a moving object at a specific time with a determined speed does not have more than one answer which is computed by using the formula,  $v(t)=d$ , where  $v$  stands for velocity,  $t$  represents time and  $d$  as distance. Could anyone say that as in the case of economic problems and political issues where there are various opinions and there is no such thing as a single correct answer, the same is true in the case of two times two, and every mathematician could give an answer different from the others, and that in fact, there is the probability that each of them is wrong or correct? It is important to note that mathematical problem or something similar to it may have two or many ways of solving it, but the point is that finally, all these ways of solving will arrive at the

same correct answer. Having many solutions is different from having many answers.

Therefore, in the realm of knowledge and human phenomena, we have problems which could have more than one answer. We have also other problems each of which has no more than one answer. The main question regarding religious pluralism is that how it could be determined that religion does not belong to those problems having no more than one answer. If you say that religion is like economics and politics in which there are many answers and pluralism is desirable and beneficial, we can also say that it is not so. Religion is like physics and mathematics in which every problem has no more than one answer. We claim that the question, "Does God exist or not?" is like the arithmetic problem, "Two times two is equal to what?" which has one and only one answer.

## **The Pluralists' Resort to another Basis**

Trying to prove their claim, the proponents of religious pluralism resort to a different proposition, saying, "Human affairs can be divided into two. Some affairs are real and true while some others are extrinsic and conventional. Real and true affairs are those you claim having no more than a single answer. They are things which could be proved and perceived through senses and experience. But regarding the extrinsic and conventional affairs, as their name implies, they have no truth and reality other than agreement, relish and taste of human beings. For this reason, they change according to the agreement, relish and taste of individuals and societies. This is contrary to the real affairs; for example, the dimension of a certain room does not follow relish, taste and what is conventional.

Instead, in truth and in fact, the dimension of the said room is equivalent to the mosaics spread in its floor. In extrinsic and conventional affairs, there is essentially no point in using descriptions such as better and worse, good and bad, right and wrong, and the like, and in case we want to use them anyway, we have to say that all of them are good, right, excellent, and that there is nothing bad, wrong, and poor among them. If someone is attracted to pink color while another is interested in green, none of them can charge the other of being wrong and use the descriptions such as bad, incorrect and false in describing the other's taste. It must be said instead that both pink and green are good and beautiful. In a nutshell, extrinsic affairs and issues do not have a single answer as they can have more than one answer.

Pluralists claim that religion, culture and moral values belong to the extrinsic affairs and they follow taste, liking and what is conventional. Just as there is no single reply to the question, "Which color is better?" and to be more exact, such a question is meaningless in reply to the question, "Which religion, culture, or set of moral values is better or correct?" a single choice cannot be specified. In other words, in essence such a question is meaningless. If someone prefers Islam as religion, so be it! If another one accepts Christianity, so be it! If someone says that God is One, that will be correct; and if another one claims that God assumes the form of a trinity, that will be correct, too.

And more serious than this, if someone says that there is God while another claims the opposite, both

statements are correct and truthful. I would like to pray facing the Bayt al-Maqdis (in Jerusalem) and there is no problem if you would like to pray facing the Ka'bah (in Mecca). Both ways are good. Just as I may prefer a certain food while you like another food, I profess Islam as religion and you Buddhism. None of which can be regarded as more preferable to the other, neither is there any dispute between us because both religions are good. In the Western culture, thumbs up are a symbol of approval, success and triumph, while in the Iranian culture, the same is treated as a sign of abuse and disparagement. Nevertheless, on account of such a gesture, we cannot condemn the Westerners because it is merely a conventional affair. The same is true in the case of religious affairs.

The issue we have mentioned above and cited by the pluralists in their attempt to prove religious pluralism is technically called "moral relativity." The gist of argument of moral relativity is that good and bad, as well as moral and ethical issues have no reality but taste and what is agreed upon. There may be difference among various societies and individuals. Just as the taste of food and ideal and pleasant color vary among different people, good and bad and moral values have the same ruling. Just as we do not have absolute good regarding food and color, and every food and color are good for some people while unacceptable for others, acceptability and unacceptability of values and moral issues may also vary among different peoples and societies.

So, the trend of the discussion has so far assumed this form: In the beginning, pluralists say that since pluralism in such fields as economics and politics is desirable and beneficial, we believe that pluralism in the realm of religion is also desirable and beneficial. In reply to this contention, we say that there are also issues such as that of physics and mathematics each of which has only one answer. Why should religious choices not be like the solutions in mathematics and physics? Here, pluralists raise the issue of moral relativity, and by citing some moral and social customs and traditions, we firstly want to prove that the general feature of moral issues is relativism so that they can conclude that religion, which belongs to moral issues, is also a relative and subjective matter.

## **The Third Attempt to Prove Pluralism**

In continuation, pluralists take a step further and claim that in essence, all knowledge and human issues in all fields of life succumbed to relativity in one way or another and that in principle, there is no such thing as non-relative or non-subjective knowledge. Yet, in some cases, this relativism is perfectly clear and everybody can notice and easily confirm it while in other cases, it is not so clear and people imagine that in those cases they have acquired absolute and inalterable knowledge though that is not the case. This is the same thing we have mentioned at the beginning.

We have said that the truth of the claim to relativity in knowledge is nothing but the same skepticism or agnosticism, which have appeared among the philosophers and scholars in two or three waves before the recent decades, and before and after the Common Era. Yet, it was not widespread and it did not have much influence then. Its last wave has been so widespread and pervasive, encompassing the

intellectual and cultural centers of the present world. The source of pride of a scholar is to say, “I do not know and I am doubtful.” If one claims knowledge and certainty, such an act is regarded as a sign of one’s silliness as a result of one’s poor level of knowledge and understanding.

In sum, if the entire human knowledge is relative, religion and religious knowledge will not remain safe; rather, they will become relative and changeable. The result will be for us to say that according to society A, Christianity is good, correct and rightful; while in the view of society B, it is the religion of Islam. In relation to the same society, it is possible that at one time a certain religion is good and rightful while at another time, it is another religion. And it is also uncertain which one is the true. Indeed, the truth is the issue of relativity, and with respect to a certain time and society, the truth is one thing while in relation to another time and society, the truth is another thing.

In their attempt to prove religious pluralism, Muslim pluralists (or to be more exact, pluralists who are feigning Islam) sometimes cite verses of the Qur’an and traditions. At another time, they resort to some passages from the statements and poems of Mawlawi,<sup>2</sup> Hafiz,<sup>3</sup> ‘Attar,<sup>4</sup> and others who have said that the Ka’bah, idol-temple, mosque, and synagogue, in spite of their outward differences, are all manifestations of search for God, worship of God and a single truth:

*My purpose in [going to] the Ka’bah and the idol-temple is to enter in You.*

*To come inside the Ka’bah and the idol-temple is just a pretext.*

In this manner, the trend of the discussion in pluralism begins with multiplicity in social issues and followed by discussion on moral relativism, and it finally reaches relativism in human knowledge. It is so evident that through acceptance of pluralism, there will be no more need to cling to Islam, the Imam, the Islamic Revolution, and moral values, and any belief, deeds, behavior, and moral corruption can easily be justified. In the sequel to this discussion, we have to meticulously study and assess each of these subjects, and reveal the truth of the matter concerning them.

<sup>1</sup>. Pyrrho of Elis, whose primary concern was ethics, maintained that human beings can know nothing of the real nature of things, and that consequently the wise person will suspend judgment. [Trans.]

<sup>2</sup>. Mawlawi, Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi (1207–1273) was the greatest mystic poet in the Persian language and the founder of the Mawlawiyyah order of dervishes (The Whirling Dervishes). He is famous for his lyrics and for his didactic epic, Mathnawi-ye Mathnawi (Spiritual Couplets). [Trans.]

<sup>3</sup>. Khwajah Shams ad-Din Muhammad Hafiz Shirazi (ca. 1325–1391) was the 14th century Persian lyric bard and panegyrist, and commonly considered as the preeminent master of the ghazal form. [Trans.]

<sup>4</sup>. Farid ad-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-‘Attar al-Nayshaburi (1145?–1221?): a Sufi Persian poet, whose most celebrated work is Mantiq at-Tayr (The Conference of the Birds), a poem consisting of 4,600 couplets (two successive lines of verse that rhyme, forming a single unit). [Trans.]

# Chapter 4: Religious Pluralism (Part 2)

To continue the discussion on pluralism, it is appropriate in this session to examine the rational motives behind the rise of religious pluralism and see, apart from the political motives that may possibly be behind this thought, what motivates some to raise this issue with rational and logical motives (at least according to them) and really free from any spite and rancor. In analyzing this issue, we have to say that excluding the political motives, at least two motives for it can be taken into account.

## Involvement of the Psychological Factor in the Emergence of Pluralism

The first motive is a psychological one: At the present, almost six billion people are living in the world having different sects, creeds, and faiths. Their inclination to a certain religion, sect and denomination is not out of enmity to the other religions and denial of their rights; rather, most of them have accepted a particular religion and sect merely because they have been born in a certain geographical region and country, and/or their parents have professed the said religion and sect. Many of them are also really devoted and faithful to the ordinances and laws of their respective religion.

Given this explanation, if we believe that all religions apart from Islam are false and those who profess them will be thrown to hellfire, and that among Muslims all schools of thought [*madhahib*] and sects apart from Shi'ah Ithna 'Ashari Islam are false and all their followers will be thrown to hellfire, then we have to say that with the exception of only twenty million people in the world (and even this number depends on each individual's level of faith and good deeds), the rest who are nearly five billion and eighty million people, are misguided, deviants and dwellers of the hell where they shall be chastised.

Can such a thing be accepted? What is wrong with the blind who merely because of being born in Christian countries, having Christian parents and having accepted Christianity to which they are so much devoted and committed that they ought to incur the divine wrath and chastisement?

This issue is compounded by the fact that even among the Shi'ah 'Ithna 'Ashari Muslims, many are sinners, transgressors [*fasiq*] and debauchees [*fajir*]. They have correct faith but because of their wicked and wrong actions, they will also have to face the divine torment in hellfire. If it is really such, then everybody will be thrown to hell! As the famous Persian proverb says, "Only 'Ali and his pond (of *kawthar*) shall remain!" That is, in the Hereafter, nobody will remain (in the list of those who will be admitted to paradise) to drink from the Pond of *Kawthar*!

As such, this psychological issue, which exerts pressure on the mind and spirit of man, annoys him and makes its acceptance difficult, prompts him to think that all are good and people of salvation. Muslims, the Shi'ah 'Ithna 'Ashari in particular, are in truth while the religions of others are also good and rightful.

Indeed, some of them are more pious and sincere and more faithful to their respective religions than we are. In any case, the acceptance of multiplicity of religions being correct and rightful relieves man of spiritual trouble and psychological agitation.

## The Social Factor in the Emergence of Pluralism

The second factor that perhaps enhances religious pluralism in the mind of individuals is a social one. Throughout history, numerous destructive wars and conflicts had religious and sectarian underpinnings. Human beings have fought with one another and engaged in war, murder and pillage merely on account of religious and sectarian differences. An illustrious and famous example of these wars is the Crusades in which thousands of Christians and Muslims were killed, so much destruction it brought and so much wealth, resources, and facilities were spent in conducting the wars wealth, resources and facilities could have been used for the development and welfare of humanity.

Even today, in one of the progressive countries and in the so-called civilized world; namely, the United Kingdom, we witness bloody conflicts between the Catholics and Protestants. Moreover, in India, Pakistan and some African countries, at the beginning of the 21st century, we still witness religious wars and sectarian conflicts and the subsequent destructions, killing and pillage though these problems could easily be solved. If we believe that both Islam and Christianity are good, both the Catholics and Protestants in truth, and both the Sunni and the Shi'ah on the straight path [*sirat al-mustaqim*], the ill-tempered Devil's hand called "religious wars" and "sectarian disputes" will be severed from the lap of human society.

By the way, is it not proper that the civilized humankind of today, instead of violent and aggressive attitudes toward faiths and religions, observe coexistence, peace and sincerity, set aside dogmatism and absolutism, treat with respect all religions and creeds, and regard the beliefs and views of others as rightful just like our beliefs? War and conflict is the work of ignorant and uncivilized human beings. The present-day man is supposed to be civilized and intelligent!

Apart from political and selfish motives, there are at least two rational motives for the rise and acceptance of pluralism. One is the emotional reason, arguing that it is inconceivable for all human beings to go to hell, while the second one is meant to prevent war and bloodshed. Now, the question is: Is this the solution to these problems? If we want to prevent religious wars and sectarian conflicts, is the only way to say that all religions are correct and truthful? And if we want to avert innumerable people who have no fault and merely because of some social problems and their views that they have failed to identify the right path which in our view is Islam from going to hell, is the only way to say that the idolatry of the Hindus, the doctrine of Trinity of the Christians and the monotheism [*tawhid*] of Muslims are all correct and rightful? Is there no other way?

## Assessing the Psychological Motive in Presenting Pluralism

In reply, we have to say that regarding the going to hell of all people who have not accepted the Shi'ah 'Ithna 'Ashari Islam, it must be stated that this matter has no validity and Islam does not say so. It is true that we say that the correct school of thought is only one, but people whom we deemed as people of hell and chastisement are the obstinate ones [*ahl al-'inad*]. That is, although the truth is clear for them, they do not accept it on account of enmity and other motives. If a person failed to identify the truth for whatever reason, the ruling about him is different from that of a person who identifies the truth but does not accept it. The root of this issue is traceable to the discussion on the mentally downtrodden [*mustadh'af fikri*], weak (or excusable) ignorant [*jahil qasir*] and culpable (or inexcusable) ignorant [*jahil muqassir*], which is a discussion on jurisprudence [*fiqh*] and scholastic theology [*'ilm al-kalam*].

The term *mustadh'af* is sometimes applied to the persons who are socially under the dominance of the powerful tyrants, and are deprived of the truth [*haqq*] and their rights [*huquq*]. But the same term is also related to scholastic theology and it refers to a person who, due to weakness in understanding, is deprived of arriving at the correct and right path. Weakness of understanding may be caused by different factors. For example, Islam is never introduced to him and nothing about it reached him; or, it is introduced to him but because of the weakness in understanding, he fails to grasp its proofs; or, he can grasp the proofs but he lives in a society where doubts about these proofs are brought forth which he himself could not answer nor could he consult somebody to clarify those doubts; and many other factors.

Similarly, ignorance of the truth is sometimes culpable ignorance [*jahl taqsiri*], and at other times, faultless (or excusable) ignorance, and accordingly, the ignorant can be classified into two, i.e. culpable ignorant [*jahil muqassir*] and weak ignorant [*jahil qasir*]. *Jahil muqassir* is applied to a person who in spite of the access to all the facilities and faculties such as intellectual maturity, mental power, social freedom, and access to the information, and others, he has slackened and procrastinated and not gone to conduct research and study about the truth. *Jahil qasir* refers to the person who, for whatever reason, has no access to the truth and it has not been possible for him to identify it.

Thus, we have actually three types of people:

- (1) those who have recognized the truth but do not submit to it because of spite, fanaticism, enmity, and other factors;
- (2) those who do not know the truth but all means to discover it are at their disposal; and
- (3) those who do not know the truth and do not have the means to discover it.

According to the teachings of Islam, as it is obvious, the first group shall be the people of chastisement and dwellers of hellfire. The *jahil muqassir* shall also be punished commensurate to the extent of his fault but he may not dwell in hell forever. The *jahil qasir* who can also be regarded as mentally downtrodden

[*mustadh'af*] shall be dealt with peculiarly on the Day of Resurrection as indicated in some traditions. In any case, it is not correct that he shall directly and unconditionally be thrown to hellfire. Therefore, there is no correlation between the belief on the oneness of the true religion and the belief on the overwhelming majority of people on earth as inmates of hell.

## Assessing the Social Factor in Presenting Pluralism

With respect to the second motive, i.e. wars caused by religious and sectarian disputes, we also have to say that we believe and agree that the followers of the different religions, schools of thought and sects should not fight one another on the ground of religious and ideological differences. Instead, they are supposed to live together peacefully. However, for us to believe in all the religions as true is not the only solution to this problem. Rather, there are other ways, and Islam has offered another solution to it. Firstly, Islam invites both Muslims and followers of other religions to hold intellectual discussions and logical discourses with one another about their beliefs:

وَالْمَوْعِظَةُ الْحَسَنَةُ

### ***And dispute with them in a manner that is best. (16: 125)***

Secondly, in practice, in terms of the Muslims' treatment of and dealing with non-Muslims, the latter are also divided into groups:

(1) **Followers of monotheistic and heavenly religions:** Islam gives special treatment to the followers of religions like Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism notwithstanding the distortions of the correct root and essence that have taken place in them, dealing with them with much civility. Their lives, properties and honors are respected; they can put up their synagogues, temples and churches in the Islamic society and worship therein; they may conduct marriage, divorce and other transactions according to their religious laws; similar to such religious taxes as *khums* and *zakat* that Muslims have to pay to the Islamic state, Islam also levies a tax which is technically called "*jizyah*" and in exchange for that, their lives and properties are protected and other social services are rendered to them. In many of the rights, they are equal to Muslims, having no difference at all. We have all heard that the learned and just leader of Islam, 'Ali (‘a), in reaction to the injustice done to a non-Muslim subject of the Islamic state and Mu'awiyah's army's confiscation of a Jewish woman's anklet, said, "If a Muslim dies out of grief for this incident, it is not surprising and he cannot be blamed."

(2) **Contracting unbelievers** [*kafir mu'ahid*]: Another group of non-Muslims, the contracting unbelievers are not followers of the monotheistic religions, but on the basis of contract and treaty with the Islamic government, they can live along with Muslims and even within the Islamic society. Of course, their rights, statuses and conditions are not identical; they differ depending on the types of contract they have concluded with the Islamic government, but Islam deals well with this group of non-Muslims, and their

lives, properties and honors are protected.

(3) **Hostile unbelievers** [*kafir harbi*]: The third group of non-Muslims consists of those who, as it is commonly called, are not in any “straight path” [*sirat al-mustaqim*] and are not willing to abide by any sort of agreement or treaty, and if ever they sign a treaty, they will violate it:

لَا يَرْفُقُوا فِيكُمْ إِلَّا وَلَا ذِمَّةً

***They will observe toward you neither kinship nor covenant. (9:8)***

Regarding this group, Islam says that if they are not inclined to any kind of discussion and debate and to observe any type of treaty, we have to wage war against them and make them submit by force. Of course, even in this case, Islam does not say that they have to be killed and exterminated along with their descendants. Rather, war must continue until they are ready to condescend and come to their senses and do not incite sedition anymore.

Therefore, in relation with non-Muslims, Islam at the initial stage calls for discussion and debate so as for them to realize the truth through logic and argument and know to whom the right is. In the second stage, even in case of absence of an individual or group’s acceptance of it, Islam does not unilaterally wage war against them. It rather invites them to peace and peaceful coexistence.

## **Historical Account of Islam’s Treatment of Non-Muslims**

At this juncture, it seems appropriate to narrate an account of the Christians of Najran with whom the Prophet (S) had a reason-based discussion and defeated them, but in spite of that, they did not submit and did not will to become Muslims. The Prophet (S) was ordered by God to invite them to an imprecation [*Mubahalah*] and the following day, they were supposed to meet at a certain place where to curse one another so that whoever was on the wrong side would incur the divine wrath. Initially, the Christians of Najran accepted the imprecation, but when the following day came and they saw that the Prophet (S) came along with his dearest and nearest of kin, viz. his daughter Fatimah, ‘Ali, Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (‘a), they withdrew and did not will to accept the challenge of imprecation. They instead forged a treaty and paid *jizyah* to the Islamic government.

In any case, we can see that to regard as truthful all the religions and sects is not the only way to prevent religious wars and sectarian conflicts. In fact, there are other ways and Islam itself has a logical and very advanced solution to this problem.

Let us now return to the main discussion and engage in examining, analyzing and criticizing the proofs of pluralism. At the outset, we have to note that, as mentioned earlier, pluralism is presentable in the different areas. Presently, we are examining religious pluralism and we are not dealing with other areas

such as political pluralism, economic pluralism and the like, and their validity or invalidity and other aspects are beyond the scope of our discussion.

It is true that in the contemporary period, John Hick is regarded as the founder of religious pluralism and has written many works in this field, but there is no single interpretation of religious pluralism and what it means. There have been different interpretations of it, and at least three ways of interpreting it can be identified.

## First Interpretation of Religious Pluralism

The first proposition is that “All religions are an amalgamation of truth and falsehood, and there is no pure truth or falsehood among them.” To explain this position, it is advanced that if you study the different religions in the world, you will observe that we have no thoroughly authentic or false religion. There are so many common elements among them. Many laws, beliefs and moral values of a religion are also affirmed by another one. For example, the Qur’an says that “***We have also ordained to you whatever we have ordained to the Children of Israel.***” For example, regarding the issue of retaliation [*qisas*],<sup>1</sup> it explains that “It is the decree that We have set for the Jews and Christians.”<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, you can also find superstitious issues and wrong beliefs in all religions. Therefore, in all areas of beliefs, laws or moral values, there are truths in the world, but their totality is not found in a single place. Rather, there is a parcel of truth in every religion. For this reason, there is no need for you to abide by and believe in only a particular religion. In fact, you may be a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist, and others at the same time in the sense of believing in and submitting to the good elements found in each of them.

You can also find positive elements such as peace of mind, concentration, deliverance from the world, and the like in Buddhism in which there is no belief in God. Of course, this proposition has also dogmatic underpinning when it holds that the amalgamation of truth and falsehood in each religion has reached such a proportion that it cannot even be said that one is better than the other but rather they are of the same degree.

This proposition’s somewhat moderate tone is that there are both truth and falsehood in all religions but the percentage of truth and falsehood in all of them is not the same as there is difference among them which makes some relatively superior to others. Yet, in any case, none has absolute superiority and all of them have both positive and negative points.

## Assessment

In assessing this proposition, first and foremost, we have to state that in view of the same general information about the different religions, every fair-minded person will confirm that it cannot be said that there is no preference among the different religions and that all of them are equal. There are practices

and beliefs in some of these religions about which the tongue and pen are ashamed to mention and write. By the way, can worship of such animals as a cow and a dog be treated equal to the worship of God?

Is the creed and belief of the idol-worshippers in India who worship a genital organ and bow down in front of it and of the barren individuals who drink and bode well in its semen equal and the same with the salvation-giving school of Islam which is a set of innumerable excellences and goodness and teaches the worship of the One True God?! At any rate, in our opinion, it is so evident that to talk about the equality and sameness of all religions and claim about the parity of values and to choose any of them is a subject which is not convincing to any rational person.

Secondly, especially according to us, Muslims, who believe in Islam and the Qur'an, such a subject can never be acceptable. We cannot accept a part of the Qur'an while denying another part. To deny a part of the Qur'an is like denying it in totality, no one can regard himself as a Muslim while not accepting a part of the Qur'an. In this regard, the Qur'an says:

مَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرَجُونَ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ تَظَاهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَإِنْ يَأْتُوكُمْ أُسَارَى تَفَادُوهُمْ وَهُوَ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ ﴿٤﴾ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ ﴿٥﴾ فَمَا جِزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ﴿٦﴾ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَى أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ ﴿٧﴾ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

***What! Do you believe in part of the Book and defy another part? So what is the requital of those of you who do that except disgrace in the life of this world? And on the Day of Resurrection, they shall be consigned to a severer punishment. (2:85)***

Elsewhere, it also says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلًا أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ حَقًّا ﴿٤٠﴾ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا

***Those who disbelieve in Allah and His apostles and seek to separate Allah from His apostles, and say, 'We believe in some and disbelieve in some' and seek to take a way in between—it is they who are truly faithless. (4: 150–151)***

According to us, Muslims, whatever has been conveyed to the people as Islam and the Qur'an from God and His Apostle (S) is thoroughly correct and truthful, and no falsehood and superstition have crept into it:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِالذِّكْرِ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ ﴿١٠٠﴾ وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ

لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ ۚ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

***Indeed it is an august Book. Falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it. (41:41-42)***

Of course, there is nothing wrong in believing, as we do, in the existence of some elements of the truth in other religions, and it will not create any problem at all. For example, this famous Zoroastrian motto, “Good speech, good thinking, good deed” is a good motto and nobody rejects it. This is especially true in the case of such religions as Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism which have divine origins and are rooted in divine revelation though in our belief, they have suffered from distortions.

Yet, beliefs and elements of the truth still exist in them. It must be noted, however, that this does not mean that we have to believe also that Islam, like other religions, is an amalgamation of truth and falsehood, and to say that it makes no difference if you are a Muslim, a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian. Rather, as stated earlier, according to our belief, Islam which God has revealed through the agency of His Apostle (S) is the absolute truth and does not contain an iota of falsehood.

## **Second Interpretation of Religious Pluralism**

The second proposition being advanced among the points and subjects in elucidating religious pluralism is that “All religions are diverse ways leading to the single truth.” The first proposition argues that the truths are divided among the different religions and every religion contains only a part of it. The second proposition, however, holds that the truth is not more than one thing and there are various ways to arriving at it which refer to the different religions. For example, there are different passageways to Tehran, and people go to Tehran through various ways from east, west, north, and south. The truth that people are searching for is nothing more than a single thing, but one may arrive at it through various ways such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions.

Like the first proposition, this one has also dogmatic and moderate versions. The dogmatic version maintains that in terms of quality and quantity, all these ways are identical and there is no difference among them. The moderate version is of the opinion that these diverse ways converge at a single point but they have differences in terms of distance, farness and nearness (quantity) and in terms of straightness or curviness (quality). One is a longer route while the other is shorter; one is straight while the other is curvy. For example, compared to Christianity, Islam is a straight and shorter route, but if one professes Christianity and faithfully observes its ordinances, one will also arrive at the truth.

In a bid to prove and consolidate this second proposition, sometimes poems and parables and allegories in the poems of mystics are cited.

In sum, if the veil of fancy is lifted, the countenance of the Beloved can be seen and “*Our words are diverse and different but in reality they are nothing but a description of the same Beautiful*

Countenance.”

## Assessing the Second Interpretation

Is this claim acceptable and based on which religious pluralism can be accepted and said that all religions including Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc. will draw man toward the truth, perfection and felicity?

To answer, of course in theory and principle, such an assumption is possible. Take for example a circle; its various radiuses lead toward the center and meet at a single point. Yet, can it be proven that the same is true in the case of the existing religions? Through a bit of reflection, it will become clear that the answer to it is negative.

The first issue taken into account in Islam is the issue of monotheism [*tawhid*] and the acceptance of One and Only God:

*Say, ‘There is no god but Allah’ to attain success.*

But the view of Christianity regarding the same issue is this:

*Verily, Allah is the third [person] of a trinity.*

That is, we have three persons of God. One is the Father who is the main person of God. Another is the Son, while the third one is the Holy Spirit. Some also say that the third person of God is Maryam (Saint Mary). This belief which is technically called Trinity is strongly condemned and confronted by Islam and the Holy Qur’an, regarding as unbelievers those who believe in it:

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ ۖ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ ۚ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

***They are certainly faithless who say, ‘Allah is the third [person] of a trinity,’ while there is no god except the One God. If they do not relinquish what they say, there shall befall the faithless among them a painful punishment. (5:73)***

The Qur’an describes as extremely astonishing the Christian belief in God and that ‘Isa (Jesus) is the son of God:

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا لَقَدْ جِئْتُمْ شَيْئًا إِدًّا تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْهُ وَتَنْشَقُّ الْأَرْضُ وَتَخِرُّ الْجِبَالُ هَدًّا

***They say, ‘The All-beneficent has taken a son!’ You have certainly advanced something hideous! The heavens are about to be rent apart at it, the earth to split open, and the mountains to***

### ***collapse into bits. (19:88–90)***

It is indeed a very emphatic description. Belief in the Trinity and that Jesus is the son of God is so corruptive and destructive that as the effect of which the heavens, the earth and mountains are about to be ruined and extinguished. Keeping in view of such descriptions, can it be said that both the belief in the Trinity and belief in monotheism will arrive at the same truth?! One religion (Islam) says that pork is unlawful and filthy while the other says that it is so good and delicious, and there is nothing wrong to eat it. Islam says that alcoholic beverage is the worst of things and a handiwork of Satan, while Christianity says that some wines are the blood of God.

During the Eucharist,<sup>3</sup> the priest offers bread and wine to you, saying that once this wine is mixed with your blood, it will become the blood of God!<sup>4</sup> Given these diverse beliefs, rational and mature people, even the children, will understand that these two religions will never end up at the same point. One says that so long as you do not drink wine, you will not become Godly while the other says that drinking the same is a satanic work. Yet, we are still saying that both of them are leading to the same truth! It is evident that it is an unpalatable statement and that it is more akin to fiction and poetry than to the reality unless we also take as identical both God and Satan and say, “You are my goal in going to the Ka‘bah and the idol–temple!”

It is indeed not surprising and unexpected that notwithstanding the undeniable facts, some are still insisting on the existence of “straight paths,” thinking that in spite of all these apparent contradictions and contrasts among religions, all of them will arrive at the same conclusion. How could Islam which says that “There is God” and Buddhism which holds that “God does not exist” be both true?! How could both ‘Ali (‘a) and Mu‘awiyah, Imam al–Husayn (‘a) and Yazid and Shimr ibn Dhu‘l–Jawshan<sup>5</sup> be both in truth, and to follow any of them means to tread the straight path that leads to the same point?! One is toward the east while the other one is toward the west; one is toward the north while the other one is toward the south, and the two directions are totally opposite to one another and they are two opposing poles. Yet, we are still insisting that all are straight paths leading to the same truth!

*O Bedouin! I’m afraid you would not arrive at the Ka‘bah because the way you are treading is leading toward Turkistan (and not Mecca)!*

In any case, this second interpretation of religious pluralism that all our religions and sects will arrive at the same destination is of course good and attractive as a poem, but is devoid of reality and truth, and its falsity is more vivid than sunlight.

## **Third Interpretation of Religious Pluralism**

The third proposition for religious pluralism is actually based on a certain epistemological foundation according to which all insensible and non–empirical experiences are meaningless and cannot be negated or posited. Of course, lengthy explanation of this foundation is related to epistemological

discussions, but in this volume, what we could say in explaining this foundation is the following:

On the discussion about knowledge and epistemology, some (i.e. the positivists) say that knowledge and gnosis we have are generally divided into two: one category consists of the knowledge and information that can be objectively experienced by the senses. For example, I say that this lamp is switched on. This case can be experienced by senses. Just turn off the switch and everywhere will become dark and nothing can be seen. Again, when you turn on the switch, there will be light everywhere and you will be able to see the things around you. Or, when we say that fire can burn, this claim can be experienced by senses. You place your hand near fire and you will see that it will burn it. This set of cases and knowledge that can be sensed and experienced is said to be true and false, correct and wrong. The way to discover it is also made through experience and senses.

Meanwhile, the other set of our cases and knowledge consists of those that cannot be sensed and experienced. This is the group of things that cannot be objectively and empirically negated and proved, or is said to be devoid of any meaning, or is said to have truth and false, and as such, one cannot give judgment about it. The radical positivists say that this kind of things has no meaning at all and it is like saying that the light of this lamp tastes sour, or that the light of this lamp is the King of England!

Just as these two accounts are meaningless and ridiculous, the same is true in the case of all the non-empirical and imperceptible accounts. Religious accounts belong to this category. Accounts such as "There is God," "God is One and Only," "God consists of a trinity," and "God does not exist" are meaningless and pointless statements, and to dispute about their validity or invalidity is of no use. It makes no difference which statement you will make. Whether you say, "God is One and Only" or "God consists of a trinity," these two accounts in terms of value are perfectly identical because in reality, they have no value, meaning and sense at all. None of them is a garment to be worn, a food to be consumed, and none of our problems in life can be solved by them!

However, regarding the unperceivable and unempirical accounts or the so-called metaphysical, the positivists who are moderate to some extent say that these accounts are not meaningless, but anyway, since they are beyond the scope of human senses and experience, we can neither negate nor posit them. The outcome of this view is a kind of skepticism and relativism. That is, with respect to the unperceivable and unempirical accounts such as religious ones, either we say that we do not know their truthfulness or falsehood, or that their truth or falsehood, correctness or incorrectness differs according to the difference of times, individuals and societies. All of them are true and false, correct and incorrect at the same time, depending on whose person, which period, society and environment we assess them.

It is also sometimes said that moral concepts and things pertaining to good and evil, dos and don'ts have nothing to do with validity or invalidity, truth or falsehood. Such accounts as "One must act justly," "One should not oppress others," "To tell the truth is good," and "It is bad to tell a lie" are feelings, tastes, emotions, and the like. Similar to them is one's color preference, which though a sensible matter has no argumentative and evidential basis and foundation.

At any rate, according to this third interpretation of religious pluralism, the difference among religions and religious accounts is either like the difference between green and yellow about which it cannot be absolutely said that one is an unattractive color while the other is beautiful, but it must rather be said that both colors are good and beautiful, or that in the end, since their reality and essence are not known to us, and presently we cannot discard or accept any of them, we are not supposed to dispute about them. They are the same, and it makes no difference which of them we would believe and abide by.

## Assessing the Third Interpretation of Religious Pluralism

In examining this interpretation of religious pluralism, there is no option but to scrutinize and tackle its epistemological foundation. In doing so, initially, we have to bear in mind that in the realm of epistemology, we shall be dealing with the following questions:

1. Are the accounts which are not suggestive of perceivable and empirical reality meaningless as the radical positivists claim?
2. Can't the accounts consisting of moral values and dealing with good and bad, dos and don'ts be characterized as valid or invalid, and that truth and falsehood are not at stake about them?
3. In general, is any knowledge, whether in the sphere of dos and don'ts or in the sphere of is and is-not is relative, and that we have no absolute, fixed and certain account? Or, is it not so and that we can also have certainties both in the spheres of being and ought-to-be?
4. With respect to religious knowledge, do we have anything certain, fixed and absolute? Are all kinds of religious knowledge depending on our interpretations and so-called readings? This is the same hermeneutic discussion and hermeneutic interpretation of religious text.

In examining the validity or invalidity of the third interpretation of religious pluralism, the reply to the above questions must be clarified. We shall deal with them in the future discussion, God willing.

1. Qisas (literally means retribution or retaliation) in the Islamic jurisprudence is to be executed against a criminal, according to the legal decree, who committed such crimes as murder, amputation of a body limb, or laceration and beating in case the victim or his guardians are seeking retribution in lieu of receiving fine or blood money. [Trans.]

2. S<sub>ū</sub>rah al-Ma'idah 5:45-48:

“And in it We prescribed for them: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and retaliation for wounds. Yet whoever remits it out of charity, that shall be atonement for him. Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down—it is they who are the wrongdoers. And We followed them with Jesus son of Mary, to confirm that which was before him of the Torah, and We gave him the Evangel containing guidance and light, confirming what was before it of the Torah, and as guidance and advise for the God-wary. Let the people of the Evangel judge by what Allah has sent down in it. Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down—it is they who are the transgressors. We have sent down to you the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it of the Book and as a guardian over it.”

3. Eucharist: the central and most solemn Christian liturgy, which is called the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion in most Protestant churches; the Divine Liturgy in Eastern Orthodoxy; and the Mass among Roman Catholics and some Anglicans.

[Trans.]

4. The Christian notion of the miraculous transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ during the Eucharist is called “transubstantiation”—an idea most elaborately formulated by the 13th-century Italian theologian St. Thomas Aquinas and has been the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church since the Middle Ages. During the 16th century, Martin Luther advanced the notion of consubstantiation as an alternative interpretation of the Eucharist by teaching that Christ is present “in, with, and under” the elements (bread and wine). [Trans.]

5. Shimr ibn Dhī‘l–Jawshan is the notorious ‘Umayyad general who actually murdered Imam Husayn (‘a) during the battle at Karbala’. [Trans.]

## Chapter 5: Religious Pluralism (Part 3)

### A Review of the Psychological Motive in Presenting Pluralism

In the previous session, we pointed out that one of the motives in presenting and promoting pluralism is a psychological motive which is in the mind of many individuals, especially the youngsters. When they see that there are different religions and sects in the world and that there are individuals who in outmost sincerity, truthfulness and seriousness believe in these religions and faithfully observe their ordinances, this question comes to their minds: Is it possible for all of these people to be dwellers of hell and only a few Muslims from a particular sect (Shi‘ah) be the inhabitants of paradise?

This is true if it is taken into account that among the Shi‘ah, only those who we are sure to be admitted to paradise are those who have either not committed any sin or in case of committing any sin they have repented afterward. Since this matter is, in a sense, so improbable for people and could not accept it, the same thing gives more credit to the notion that the followers of other religions, at least those who are faithful to their own religion and abide by its commands, are also people of salvation and will be admitted to paradise.

We explained during the previous session that in order to remove this probability, we have to bear in mind that when we say that the only true religion is the religion of Islam and following it will lead to the felicity and salvation of man, it does not necessarily follow that all other human beings will be thrown to hellfire. In general, other people (non-Muslims) can be divided into two groups. Of course, as to which of these two groups is in majority or in minority is a statistical discussion which has nothing to do with our concern.

The first group refers to those who have strived hard in recognizing the truth and really wanted to attain it but for whatever reason they have failed. The second group consists of those who, in spite of the presence of the suitable conditions to search for the truth, they have not pursued it, or in spite of their recognition of Islam as the true religion they have decided not to accept it. Those who will be thrown to hellfire are the latter group, but the former group that has strived in searching for the religion of truth but

committed errors in identifying it or failed to attain it shall be dealt with differently.

In case those who in the science of jurisprudence [*fiqh*] and scholastic theology [*kalam*] are technically called “downtrodden” [*musta’af*] that is, mentally downtrodden abide by the truths they have found through their own intellects or through the teachings of a certain faith, they will receive the reward of their good deeds. Of course, as to whether on the Day of Resurrection these people will be placed at the lowest level of heaven or in an intermediary world between heaven and hell, or the scene of trial on the Day of Resurrection will be held for this kind of people is another issue. At any rate, this group will not be subjected to the eternal punishment.

## Explaining the verse, “Should anyone follow a Religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him”

The question which is posed here and the reason behind reviewing a part of the previous session’s discussion is actually to deal with this question is this: The Holy Qur’an states, thus:

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

***Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter. (3:85)***

This Qur’anic verse is explicit in stating that no religion other than Islam shall be accepted from the people. This is while your line of argument maintains that the other religions, more or less, will somehow be accepted also. How will you solve this problem?

This verse has an exegesis–related discussion and if we lengthily embark on it here, we will drift away from the main discussion. Nevertheless, the general point is that the religion sent down by God the Exalted to the people during the time of Ibrahim (Patriarch Abraham) was the religion of Islam and the people were obliged to act upon its commandments until such time that a new set of laws [*shari’ah*] would be revealed. When Prophet Moses was commissioned to the apostleship, the law of Abraham was abrogated, but the religion of Moses was the same religion of Islam with the only difference that some of its laws abrogated the pertinent ones in the *shari’ah* of Abraham (‘a).

The *shari’ah* of Musa (Moses) was also abrogated with the coming of ‘Isa (Jesus) and the people were commissioned to act upon the new *shari’ah* which was different from that of ‘Isa (‘a), but the religion of ‘Isa (‘a) was the same Islam (which is submission to God’s will). And finally, with the advent of the Prophet of Islam (S), all the previous *shari’ahs* were abrogated and thereafter the people were ordered by God to act upon the *shari’ah* of Muhammad (S), and as we know, the *shari’ah* of Muhammad (S) is the same Islam. Of course, this *shari’ah* has peculiar laws, decrees and features which makes it superior to the past *shari’ahs*. Here, Islam acquires a certain meaning as we refer to it today. Given this

explanation, it became clear that Islam is conceived differently.

It was once referred to as the *shari'ah* of Ibrahim (‘a); at another time as the *shari'ah* of Musa (‘a), and so with the other *shari'ahs*. The meaning of the verse, “Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him” is that every person at the time of any of these representations of Islam must follow it and any religion other than it shall not be accepted from him. Anyhow, there is no doubt that the religion of those who have accepted the religion of Ibrahim, Musa or ‘Isa (‘a) will be accepted by God the Exalted. So, the meaning of this verse that at this time, any religion other than Islam will not be accepted is that at this time, you have to accept whatever God has sent down through the other prophets (‘a).

Besides, you have to accept as well the particular laws brought by the Prophet of Islam (S). Of course, abrogation of laws is not only confined to a certain *shari'ah's* abrogation of some laws of the earlier *shari'ah*. In fact, it is also possible in a certain *shari'ah* for a new law to abrogate an old law. For example, in Islam, as you know, during the early years of the Prophet's prophethood, Muslims used to pray facing Bayt al-Maqdis (in Jerusalem) and this decree remained even after the Prophet's migration [*hijrah*] from Mecca to Medina. However, after sometime and during his lifetime, the *qiblah* [direction in prayer and other rituals] was changed from Bayt al-Maqdis to the Ka'bah (in Mecca). Therefore, the abrogation of some laws [*ahkam*] does not change the essence of a religion, which consists of the belief in monotheism, prophethood and the Day of Resurrection. Belief in prophethood means to believe in all the prophets (‘a):

﴿ آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾ كُلُّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ﴿ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

***The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each [of them] has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles. [They declare,] ‘We make no distinction between any of His apostles’. (2:285)***

We do not have the right to deny any of the prophets (‘a) as we regard it as obligatory to obey [*wajib al-ita'ah*] all of them. Of course, if Musa or ‘Isa (‘a) would have lived at the present time, they would have definitely behaved according to the *shari'ah* of the Prophet of Islam (S).

## **Our Responsibility toward Freedom of Religion and the Ruling on the Followers of Other Religions**

Thus, during this time, we are obliged to act upon the injunctions of the Qur'an, and the orders of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Immaculate Imams (‘a) and if we do anything other than this, it will not be accepted from us. But this does not mean that our religion is in essence different from the previous

religions. Rather, all of these are (monotheistic) religions. If individuals do not have the power of discerning and recognizing the truth, they are (mentally) downtrodden [*mustadh'af*] and they have to act upon the extent of their understanding and they are blameless in the sight of God. But those who have recognized the truth at any time and in spite of it, they have opposed and been hostile to it, such individuals shall abide forever in hellfire, and this is the purport of the statement we read in the *Du'a' Kumayl*: [1](#)

[O Lord!] *You have sworn that You will fill it (hell) with the unbelievers, both jinn and men, and that You will place those who stubbornly resist therein forever.*

Anyway, eternal chastisement is applicable to those who stubbornly resist. If a person does not have that stubbornness, even if he will ever be chastised, it will only be commensurate to the faults he has done while the mentally downtrodden are excused to the extent of their failure to recognize the truth, and as such, they shall not incur punishment. The important point is to pay attention to the fact that in any case, if non-Muslim and non-Shi'ah individuals are not to go to hell, it is because of their being blameless and not because of their respective religion or sect being not the truth and correct one.

Of course, we have mentioned earlier that those who had lived during the times of the previous *shari'ahs* such as that of Musa and 'Isa ('a) were obliged to act according to the *shari'ah* of their own times. At any rate, the true religion and straight path is not more than one, and the fact that other people outside this path will not be thrown to hellfire does not necessarily mean the multiplicity of the true religion and straight path.

## **A Psychological Point**

Another point is that man is not always such that at the beginning, being a good reason and proof of a thing or subject, or its correctness is clear for him, and in establishing this proof and evidence, he becomes adherent to the thing or idea; rather, it is sometimes the contrary. That is, at the outset, man is attracted to a thing and likes it, and then, he looks for a reason to prove it as good and true. In such cases, man is actually in pursuit of what he likes, which of course sometimes is something really good and correct, while at other times bad and wrong. Many people are like that. Initially, they are attracted to a certain thing. Thereafter, they will try in one way or another to rationalize their liking.

This fact is true in the case of many of those who believed in the Prophet of Islam (S). That is, people were not such that at the beginning they came to conduct research and study about Islam and its doctrines, and as the result of the investigation, the truth about God, monotheism and the like would be proved for, and believed by them. Instead, by merely observing the behavior and manner of the Prophet (S), they wished to be like him and be in his company. First, they accepted him by their hearts and then they looked for reason behind it. This issue is also true in the case of falsehood.

That is, since a person inclines toward a certain false thing and wants it, he tries in one way or another

to justify it for himself. Many people are used to commit sin and enjoy unrestrained freedom, and they want to be free in all aspects and do whatever they want. Naturally, such individuals do not want the reckoning, the book of account, the grave, and the Day of Resurrection to be existed.

They neither want to acknowledge that at every moment and the most trivial act and gesture of theirs are under surveillance and they will be held accountable for it. Therefore, firstly, a person wants to have no reckoning and book of account, and in line with such desire, he tries to coin a justification to deny the Day of Resurrection and the Reckoning. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an says:

أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَلَّنْ نَجْمَعُ عِظَامَهُ بَلَىٰ قَادِرِينَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنَانَهُ بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ

***Does man suppose that We shall not put together his bones? Yes indeed, We are able to proportion [even] his fingertips! Rather, man desires to go on living viciously. (75:3-5)***

“Does one who denies the Day of Resurrection really thinks that We cannot resurrect him?” If he thinks a bit and makes use of his mind, he will understand well that the One Who at the beginning created man from nothing can also revive him, and incidentally, this work is easier because in the past, He created man from nothing, but there is now at least an array of decaying or decayed flesh and bones.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the human mind easily admits that the same Hand that created man for the first time has also the power to gather the decaying or decayed flesh and bones and revive that man. Thus, why do the deniers of the Last Day insist on their denial? The reason for this is that *“Rather man desires to go on living viciously.”*

That is, he wants to have no restraint and be free to do whatever he wants to do, and that there should be no reckoning and book of account. So, here, the heart suggests that there is no Day of Resurrection and Reckoning, and then, the mind tries to look for its justification. Social issues are mostly like that. Instead of the heart following the mind, it is the mind following the dictate of the heart. An illustrious example of this fact in our present time was some people's inclination toward Marxism. Those people who became Marxists were not such that at the beginning they discussed about the principles of dialectical materialism, and through proof and evidence, it was proved to them that nothing exists beyond matter and that the Marxist conception of economics and other issues pertaining to Marxism are correct. I myself knew persons who were Muslims and used to pray and fast, but were Marxists.

They thought that one might be a Muslim and a Marxist at the same time. Why had they inclined toward Marxism? It is because they had seen these oppressions, discriminations and tyrannies in the society, and witnessed how a clique of the affluent did not know how to spend its wealth while there was a group of people who lived in extreme poverty and starvation. Then, they used to imagine that one has to accept either capitalism or Marxism and that the outcome of capitalism is that wide class gaps and lamentable state of affairs. So, they started inclining toward Marxism. After accepting Marxism, they also gradually conceived of a so-called scientific proof and held fast to materialism and the primacy of

matter.

The same is also true about pluralism in many cases and regarding many individuals. Initially, this idea came to their minds: How could we say that the overwhelming number of people will go to hell and only a very few will attain salvation? No, this is unacceptable; we have to look for ways so that the rest will also be admitted to paradise. Along this frame of mind, the issue about the truthfulness of all religions is advanced and effort is also made to coin a basis for this.

## Which philosophical or Epistemological Foundation Can Logically Lead to Pluralism?

There are also individuals who begin with certain intellectual and philosophical foundations and then arrive at pluralism on the basis of the said foundations, and it is not that his heart desires for it and then his mind follows the dictate of the heart. Here, we would like to examine which philosophical foundations will end up in pluralism which a person begins with.

In understanding the reality and discovering the truth, if a person believes that the intellect can obtain the truth, he will naturally not accept the existence of numerous truths about a single subject. Instinctively, such a person regards the truth as one, and it is in pursuit of it that he would discover this single truth through proof and evidence. If he is given a mathematical or physics problem, he believes that the correct solution is not more than one, and if ever he solves it, he knows that this solution is either correct or not, and it is possible to have many 'correct' solutions.

In recognizing the truth, if a person believes that man has no way of knowing the truth and no matter which instrument he uses the intellect or experience at most he will become nearer to the truth, but never attain the truth itself, it is here that the way will be opened for the different theories of relativism, agnosticism and pluralism. Today, many people throughout the world advocate the theory that the truth is beyond human intellect, knowledge and understanding, and that no matter how he strives, he will only acquire some manifestations of the reality and only some aspects and dimensions of the truth will be unraveled for him. Various schools such as Kantism, Neo-Kantism, agnosticism, and relativism are common in saying that "We can never grasp the truth as it is."

According to such a philosophical foundation, the correctness or falseness of accounts will become relative. That is, every account shows only a certain percentage of the reality and embodies only a certain part of the truth, and the account that shows the truth completely simply does not exist. All scientific accounts possess such characteristics and, in essence, knowledge is actually nothing other than this. One should not imagine that knowledge exists in order to say, "This is it and there is nothing but this."

No, knowledge does not have this claim and it can never be such. In scientific theory, the point is to confirm and falsify, and not to ravel and unravel the reality. At most, what could be claimed by a

scientific theory is that “So long as no gross defect is found in me, I am acceptable. The moment a gross defect is found in me, I shall be falsified and another theory will replace me.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, this trend continues unabated. Scientific theories evolve one after another, and the theory that does not change and is fixed at all times does not exist at all in science.

Those who, in the discussion of epistemology and the value of understanding, advocate such a way of thinking somehow despise the so-called metaphysical logic, philosophy and arguments, regarding them as unscientific and devoid of any credibility. Whenever such discussions are raised in a certain sarcastic manner, they will say, “Let them be; they belong to the domain of philosophy.” They say, “We only give value to science and science does not mean that it will unravel the reality in totality.” Rather, every theory shows one aspect, and not all aspects, of the reality. Newton’s law on gravity unravels for us one aspect of the reality, while Einstein’s law of relativity shows another aspect. None of them unveils to us the whole reality and since it is such, both of them are correct.

It is in this manner that we arrive at a sort of pluralism in epistemology which in itself is a kind of relativism or agnosticism. Of course, some people do not will to associate this theory to agnosticism, saying that it logically belongs to relativism and not agnosticism (or skepticism). At any rate, it is not important whether we shall call it relativism or agnosticism. The main premise of this theory is that reality will not be attainable by us and science can never give us a certain belief (in the sense of total discovery of the reality).

## **Explaining Pluralism by Using the Similitude of a Prism**

As we have said, this theory can serve as the intellectual foundation of pluralism because, according to this interpretation of science, every scientific theory is like a reflection and angle of a prism that shows a part of the reality. Depending on the angle he is looking at, a person can only see that part of the reality. The whole reality cannot be seen by anyone as it is distributed in the different sides of the prism. If we interpret pluralism in this way, we can then say that the truth is one; of course, the only truth as it is manifested to every person. That is, the only truth is actually the whole prism which has different sides and angles, and every scientific theory is like one of these sides and angles. And the final conclusion is that none of these sides and angles embodies the whole truth.

If we consider the same similitude and allegory of the prism and want to have a clearer exposition of pluralism and its various interpretations, one interpretation is for us to say that there is only one truth but there are various ways of arriving at it. Similarly, prism is no more than a thing but since every person looks at it from a certain angle, one’s perception of the reality may possibly be different from that of the others, because its different angles may possibly have diverse colors and properties.

Take for example a prism whose one angle is convex, the second one concave and the third one neither convex nor concave. If three persons look at the prism from these three different angles, they will definitely have three distinct imageries of it. This is while we as outside viewers know for certain that all

of them are a portrait of the same thing. Because of the difference in the angles of perspective and where they are standing, they imagine that they are looking at three different things.

In any case, this is the same pluralism's interpretation of the 'straight paths' while arguing that we have nothing more than a single truth though there are various ways of arriving at it. The aspiration and goal of all religionists, nay all humanity, is nothing more than one thing, and everybody is looking for the identical truth. The only difference is that one does it through the path of Christianity while another through the path of Islam, and yet another through the path of Judaism. Finally, all these ways will end up in a single point of destination.

The other interpretation of pluralism is for us to say that there is no such thing as a single truth. Rather, it is as numerous as the angles of a prism. For every person, the truth is whatever he sees of the prism from any angle he is looking at. The diversity of colors and properties of the different angles of the prism is the reason why one person sees the truth as green and convex; the second blue and conclave; the third yellow and neither convex nor conclave. And the truth is nothing but these imageries, and imageries are also extemporaneously diverse. Accordingly, the truth is also diverse. It is evident that this interpretation of pluralism is different from the interpretation of straight paths leading to a single truth.

The third interpretation of pluralism is that we should not treat as separate from the other accounts the truthfulness or falsehood of any account of a religion or science. Rather, we have to judge all its accounts as a whole. For example, once we ask whether the Shi'ah school is the truth or not, we have to keep in view the totality of Shi'ah beliefs. On the basis of this interpretation of pluralism, we cannot give judgment on the truthfulness or falsehood of any religion because accordingly, all religions embody both true and false accounts. In other words, all religions are right and wrong at the same time. They are truthful due to some of their precepts (which are correct) and they are false owing to some of their precepts (which are false). As such, since every religion consists of a set of correct and incorrect, true and false doctrines, ideas, laws, and values, it follows that all religions are equal in terms of value, and there is no difference in choosing any of them.

## **The Theory on the Unity of Truth in the Realm of Religious Knowledge**

In contrast to religious pluralism with its various interpretations, the other notion is to say that there is a set of religious accounts which are all correct and true, and to believe in their opposite accounts is sheer falsehood. This theory holds that there is only one truth and there is no difference between this and that person, this and that society, and this and that time. According to this theory, we have a set of beliefs, values and laws which are all true while the other sets are either totally false or an amalgamation of true and false accounts.

That which is in our mind, we the Shi'ah, is this theory. If you survey people in the streets and bazaars,

you will observe that their belief is that the only truthful and correct one is the Shi'ah belief and knowledge that emanate from the spotless and pure members of the Prophet's Household [*Ahl al-Bayt*] ('a) and the fourteen Infallibles while the rest of religions and schools of thought are either totally false or partly so depending on the proximity and concordance of their doctrines to Shi'ism. This is the thing which exists in the mind of each of us prior to the emergence of pluralism. No one had a certain notion of the truthfulness of religion and school of thought other than this.

## The Difference of the Maraji' At-Taqlid's Religious Edicts as Nothing to do With Pluralism

At this juncture, the question that comes to the mind is that in the Shi'ah school, there are also differences of opinion whether on the issues of beliefs or jurisprudence and laws. Given these differences, how could a set of coherent laws and beliefs be attributed to the Shi'ah? The difference of the religious edicts [*fatawa*] of the Shi'ah '*ulama*' and *maraji' at-taqlid* is something which is proverbial to all and sundry. For example, a *marja' at-taqlid* says that in the third and fourth *rak'ahs* of prayer, it is enough to recite once the *tasbihat al-arba'ah*<sup>4</sup> while another *marja' at-taqlid* says that the same must definitely be recited thrice. Another example is about the issues pertaining to the purgatorial world [*'alam al-barzakh*] such as the first night in the grave and others, or regarding the descriptions of the matters pertaining to the Day of Resurrection. There are differences of opinion among the Shi'ah '*ulama*' concerning these issues. Among these diverse opinions, which one is true and which one is false?

On religious matters, it is said that we have to imitate or follow [*taqlid*] the most knowledgeable [*a'lam*] *marja' at-taqlid*, and in identifying the most knowledgeable there is a difference of opinion among people and authorities. Everyone regards a certain person as the most knowledgeable and follows him, but anyway, it is not so that only the followers [*muqallidin*] of a certain *marja' at-taqlid* will be admitted to paradise. Rather, anyone who acts upon the religious edicts of any *mujtahid*<sup>5</sup> whom he regards as really the most knowledgeable shall be among the people of salvation and be admitted to paradise. It is here that this skepticism comes to the mind: If we do not accept the existence of 'straight paths' among the different religions, at least within the Shi'ah school of thought, we are supposed to believe in the existence of 'straight paths' and consider as correct and truthful the different sets of beliefs and laws. Therefore, we again end up in professing pluralism.

To answer, in this context, the domain of theory has been confused with the domain of application. Admittance to paradise does not necessarily follow proper obtainment of the real and true decree of Islam. What exists in the case of emulating the religious scholars is that if you regard anyone as the most knowledgeable and emulate him, in case some edicts of this *mujtahid* have been contrary to the true decree of God, you are excused and shall not be thrown to hellfire on account of not acting upon the true decree of Islam.

Regarding the issue of *tasbihat al-arba'ah*, the truth is not more than one and the true decree of God is

either to recite it once is enough or to recite it thrice is obligatory. The religious edict of any jurist [*faqih*] whose edict is consistent with the real decree of God is the correct one while that of others are definitely incorrect. However, it is a mistake for which both the *mujtahid* and his followers will be excused because they have strived hard in identifying the true decree of God but failed to do so for some reasons. At this point, the issue is similar to the discussion on the mentally downtrodden which we mentioned earlier.

## Absence of Difference in the Domain of the Essentials and Fundamentals of Islam

In Islam, we have a set of axiomatic, fixed, absolute, and inalterable truths, which are technically called the “essentials of Islam.” Sometimes also the scope of these truths is extended to include the definite and certain points in Islam. These are things about which all Muslims have no difference of opinion. For example, all Muslims regard the dawn [*subh*] prayer as having two *rak'ahs* and this issue is not in need of (further) investigation. It is rather among the essentials and it is also for this reason that the jurists [*fuqaha*] say that there is no need of practicing *taqlid* in matters of laws pertaining to the essentials of Islam. Some even believe that there is no place for *taqlid* in absolute things as it is only applicable to disputable matters. Everyone knows that in Islam the dawn prayer consists of two *rak'ahs*.

The issue of incumbency of prayer in Islam is something indisputable not only among Muslims but even among non-Muslims who accept neither Islam nor the Islamic prayer [*salah*] and prayer refers to the same kneeling down [*ruku'*], prostration [*sujud*] and other actions [*af'al*] and recitations [*adhkar*]. Today, is there anyone who does not know that the *Hajj* of Muslims is the same set of acts that Muslims are doing in going to Mecca on the days of the lunar month of Dhu'l-Hijjah? If one says that the prayer and *Hajj* are not parts of Islam, his claim will not be accepted and it will be said to him that they are among the essentials and fundamentals of Islam, and there is no doubt about them.

They are not bound by time and space; they are inalterable; and there is no place for *taqlid* in them, because every Muslim knows each of them (prayer and *Hajj*). For this reason, it is also said that denial of the essentials of Islam leads to apostasy [*irtidad*]. Of course, the late Imam did not say that denial of the essentials is tantamount to apostasy, which in turn is tantamount to the denial of apostleship [*risalah*], but some jurists do not regard as necessary this condition as they consider denial of the essentials as absolutely leading to apostasy.

## Difference in the Domain of the Disputable Matters in Islam and its Explanation

There is no controversy in the domain of the laws and doctrines of Islam which are called “essentials” or “absolutes” of Islam. Anyone who does not believe in any of the laws and doctrines within the boundary of this domain is not considered to be a Muslim. We have also a set of matters in Islam which are not

absolute. In the domain of the non-absolutes of Islam, the authorities and *mujtahids* may have numerous edicts and opinions. According to the reason [*‘aqli*] and religious text [*naqli*], the duty of those who are not *mujtahid* is to refer to the *mujtahids* and to emulate [*taqlid*] them.

Of course, the truth behind *taqlid* is the non-expert's referral to the expert, which is a general rule and is not confined to the realm of religious laws and issues. In fact, in every affair, if a person is not an expert, he should refer to an expert of a certain field. For example, if you are sick, you will consult a physician who is expert in diagnosing and curing diseases. In religious laws, people also refer to the experts who are the same *maraji' at-taqlid*, and there is no way other than this. Of course, when the religious edicts of the *maraji' at-taqlid* differ with one another, the practices of their respective followers [*muqallidun*] will not also be identical. It must be borne in mind, however, that the difference among religious edicts of the *maraji' at-taqlid* is like the difference among the prescriptions of doctors. If two physicians gave two different diagnoses of the same ailment, one of them is wrong, provided that both of whom are not wrong. Similarly, regarding a physician, not all his diagnoses and prescriptions are correct. Instead, among the hundreds of prescriptions he is giving, one may also be incorrect.

If the religious authorities have different opinions, assuming that all their opinions are not wrong, naturally only one view is correct while the rest are wrong. Similarly, among the hundreds of religious edicts issued by a jurist [*faqih*], it is possible that some of them are incorrect. It is true that such is the case, but there is no alternative either. Once we have no direct access to the infallible Imam (*‘a*), there is no way other than this. Should medical science be totally discarded on account of some mistakes in the prescriptions of doctors? It is evident that no reasonable person will give a positive answer to this question.

So, if what is meant by pluralism in Islam is the difference among the religious edicts of the *‘ulama’* and religious authorities regarding the non-absolutes in Islam, then this is a definite and acceptable matter. In the domain of non-absolutes, the authorities may have differences of opinion while one may follow the religious edict of any *mujtahid* whom he regards as the most knowledgeable [*a‘lam*]. And it cannot be said to any *mujtahid* that “Your opinion is definitely wrong” because our assumption is that the issue is a non-absolute one and we do not know for certain the truth of the matter. Of course, the condition in expressing opinion is that the person must be an expert or authority in religious issues. It is not the case that since the issue is a non-absolute one, everyone may come to the front and say that my opinion is so-and-so. Do the people and the Ministry of Health give permit to everyone to open a clinic and engage in treating diseases?

At any rate, if someone calls it pluralism, we have to say, “Yes, we have also pluralism in Islam.” Yet, it must be noted that no one has ever called it “pluralism” because pluralism means that the truth or the ways of reaching it are numerous whereas regarding the difference of opinion of the *mujtahids*, we said that the truth and the real decree of God is not more than one. If a *mujtahid* arrives at this decree, his opinion is correct while any religious edict apart from this is definitely wrong. Yet, as we have said

earlier, it is a mistake about which both the *marja' at-taqlid* and his followers [*muqallids*] are excused. Therefore, this cannot be called "pluralism."

## Negation of Pluralism in the Declarative Accounts and Acceptance of it in Ethical and Moral Issues

The other issue here is related to the difference between declarative and imperative accounts. In the epistemological discussion, it is said that the cases to which knowledge belongs are of two groups. One group is the declarative accounts, which are technically described as "beings and not-beings." That is, the accounts which talk about the realization and existence, or non-realization and non-existence of an affair. The second group is the accounts which are technically called "must and must-not" and not including the reports about the realization or non-realization of an affair. This kind of accounts is also called "imperative accounts."

Possibly, one would not dispute that declarative accounts could be proved and falsified and have truths and lies, but concerning the imperative accounts, he would say that this group of accounts could not possess truths and lies, and there is no such thing as incorrect or correct about them. Just as in our present discussion, it is sometimes said that in the sphere of religious doctrinal issues, truth and untruth, correct and incorrect have no meaning. An opinion can be regarded as correct while the others as incorrect, but this ruling is not true about the category of religious accounts which bespeak of values and encompassing "must and must-not" and are not revealers of objective reality for us to say that there is only one correct view and the rest are wrong.

All the laws and decrees as well as moral values of Islam are of this kind. For example, one must pray; one should not tell a lie; one should not infringe upon the rights of others; and the like. We cannot say about such things that they are true or not, correct or not, because they do not contain any objective reality for us to compare their contents with the objective realities and see if they are consistent with them or not. In principle, the truth of such accounts is nothing but taste, credence and contract. If one says that green is beautiful while another says that yellow is beautiful, each of their statements is nothing but the taste and temperament of the person which are consistent with the green color while the taste and temperament of the other person are more consistent with the yellow color. However, it cannot be said that the first person tells the truth while the other tell a lie and that, for example, green is really and truly attractive while yellow is not. In this case, to talk about truth and falsehood, correct and incorrect is totally pointless.

Anchored in this epistemological basis regarding the accounts on moral values, the way for relativism and the acceptance of different views about a single matter is opened.

One may just say that green is good and so are yellow, pink and violet, and it depends on which color a person accepts. Concerning religion or at least a part of religion (laws and issues pertaining to the moral

values), such a view can also be held. When what is at stake is the issue of dos and don'ts, we can have different acceptable pluralisms according to the diversity of time, place and persons. During the first century AH, a certain matter was treated as good but during the fourth century, the same thing is deemed as bad and both of which are correct according to their respective time.

One thing is good for the Japanese while another is good for the Britons, and both of them are correct. In the societies, we know, to be totally nude in public is regarded as an abominable act, but possibly, one day in a society, the same practice may be considered as common, desirable and even valuable practice. This issue depends on the social contract and custom and it makes no difference whatever form it assumes. The same is true in the case of the good and bad things in Islam or any other religion, and it cannot be said that the laws and values of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism are the most correct ones. Rather, whatever a person accepts is correct.

In sum, even if we accept pluralism in beliefs and the part of religion which encompasses the “being and not-being”, in laws and subjects pertaining to religious moral values, definitely we have to accept and uphold pluralism and multiplicity.

As we have indicated, in the epistemological discussion some people regard as relative all human sciences and knowledge in whatever field but some others believe in relativism only in the realm of values and ethics, or basically regard the moral and ethical accounts as true or false, correct or incorrect. Now, we have to examine whether relativism and subjectivism in moral values are correct or not.

## Critique of Pluralism in the Realm of Ethics and Moral Values

There are undoubtedly things whose goodness or badness changes, and are good at a certain time but bad at another, good in a certain environment but bad in another, good under a certain condition but bad under another. Even telling the truth or telling a lie, for example, is such and it is not that telling the truth and telling a lie are always good and bad, respectively. Kant believed that telling a lie is always bad while telling the truth is always good and there is no exception about it. But we all know that it is not so and, for example, if saving the life of a faithful [*mu'min*] requires us to tell a lie, in that case telling the truth is not only bad but even forbidden [*haram*], and one should tell a lie in order to save the life of a *mu'min*.

During the time of the *taghut*,<sup>6</sup> if the SAVAK<sup>7</sup> agents come and ask from you the whereabouts of a person, would you tell the truth so as for them to go and arrest the said person and send him to prison or execute him? It is very clear that in this context one should not tell the truth to the SAVAK agents. An Islamic precept maintains that if a certain practice causes humiliation and embarrassment to a *mu'min*, he is not supposed to do so. The logic behind this precept is that a *mu'min* should behave according to the customs and mores of the society he lives in of course, so long as it does not impinge on the religiously obligatory [*wajib*] and prohibited [*haram*] and he is not supposed to do any practice which is

repugnant to the norms and customs, and causes humiliation and embarrassment to him.

At any rate, there are many instances similar to the case we have mentioned, whose outcome is seemingly the acceptance of a sort of pluralism and relativism in the moral and social principles and values of Islam. To tell a lie and to tell the truth are good as well as bad; it depends upon the situation. Of course, it must be borne in mind that the logical consequence of this proposition is only relativism and not skepticism. That is, it is not that, for example, we have skepticism as to whether telling the truth is good or bad; rather, we certainly know that telling the truth under a set of circumstances is good while the same is bad under a different set of circumstances. In any case, by citing this kind of cases, there are those who want to say that there is moral and ethical relativism even in the Islamic thought and it has been an accepted matter. Of course, the technical and scientific statement in elucidating this issue has its own peculiar exposition, which is beyond the scope of our present discussion.

What we can say at this point is this: The truth is that if we take into account every case in all its properties and conditions, all cases are absolute, and relativism has no place in them. For instance, in issues pertaining to chemistry and physics, if you are asked, "At what degree does water boil?" you will answer, "At 100 degrees." Then, a very salty amount of water is brought to you, or let us say, a certain amount of water is brought to a place where the air pressure is more or less than the usual one and is boiled, you will see that it does not boil at 100 degrees. Its boiling point is rather greater or less than 100 degrees. In this case, the outcome of the work is not relativism. Instead, the issue is that you have made shortcoming and deficiency in stating exactly the case as you have not stated it exactly with all its conditions and properties.

The complete and exact account of the case is for us to say, for example, that in a certain percentage of salts and in a specific degree of air pressure, water boils at 100 degrees. All physicists and chemists know that under certain circumstances, water boils at 100 degrees. But in writing and stating this subject, they are usually negligent and by not mentioning those properties and conditions, they generally and briefly say that the boiling degree of water is 100. There are similar cases in many fields of science, and as we have explained earlier, the existence of such cases is not the proof of its relative nature and the lack of its general characteristic. Instead, it is merely the result of negligence in completely stating the case and mentioning all its conditions and properties. The same is true in the case of moral issues. In this kind of cases, even if we state every case with all its conditions and properties, the ruling about it will never change, and if it is good, it will be always so, and if it is bad, it will be always so.

The reason why we see that the ruling on telling the truth and telling a lie changes and sometimes it is good while bad at another time is because we have been negligent in mentioning all their conditions and properties. But ethical pluralists and supporters of relativism on moral values say that even if we mention all the conditions and aspects of moral accounts, we still do not have absolute good and absolute bad. Rather, goodness and badness are varied, depending on the taste, temperament and choice of individuals and societies, and the reason for this is that in essence, issues pertaining to values have no

concordance with the reality. As indicated earlier, they are similar to the attractiveness of the green and yellow colors, which merely bespeak of the taste and choice of people, and no truth is hidden behind them.

It is here that there is a foundational and essential debate between us and others. We have to discuss whether pluralism is applicable to values conceived as such or not. That is, can we have different and conflicting moral rulings regarding a particular issue and regard all of them as correct and truthful, or that if we state all the conditions and aspects of the case, the ruling of it will be always consistent and identical anytime and anywhere?

## **Moral Decrees of Islam as Consonant with the True Expediencies and Corruptions**

What we understood from Islam and we believe that to dispense with religious discussion can also be proved through rational proof is that regarding values and dos and don'ts, like the declarative cases encompassing "being and not-being", the truth is nothing but one, and as such, it cannot be treated as multiple and diverse. We have also an array of good and bad things, which are purely based on social contract and have no real and true foundation, but not all good and bad are like that. The morally and ethically good and bad which are credible in Islam are all consonant with expediencies and corruptions.

For example, telling a lie is unacceptable and not permitted because it brings about people's mistrust to one another, and as a result, it will end up in the collapse of the social order, and man can never live in such a society. Imagine a community whose members are liars and they all tell lies in one way or another. In such a community, the social bond will loosen and the system of living will shatter. The edifice of social life is founded on trust in one another. If lies are supposed to be rampant and everybody tells lies, you can no longer trust anybody ranging from your spouse and child to your relative, friend, neighbor and colleague, and life will break down. It is because of this tremendous and irreparable social loss that telling a lie is prohibited in Islam and is considered as a major sin.

On the contrary, telling the truth wins the trust of one another and people can enjoy the benefit of social life. If students of schools and universities do not trust what their teachers and professors tell them and have written in books, all sessions in schools and universities and textbooks there will be rendered useless. Therefore, the goodness of telling the truth and the badness of telling a lie are consistent with the expediencies and corruptions associated with them, and it is through their association with expediencies and corruptions that Islam has considered honesty as good and lying as bad.

The point we have to add is that according to Islam, goodness and badness of things are not only related to the material and worldly goodness and badness. In fact, there is a set of good and bad things which are related to the spiritual and otherworldly affairs of man. In the good and bad things that Islam has promulgated, in addition to the material and worldly good and bad things, it has also taken into

account the spiritual and otherworldly welfare and perdition.

## Summary

In conclusion, religious knowledge, whether pertaining to the doctrines or to the ethical and moral laws and issues, is consonant with the realities, and in all these fields the truth is not more than one and the true religion is only one and has no room for multiplicity and plurality. In the section about laws and values, it can occasionally be seen that the ruling about a certain thing changes; for example, telling the truth is sometimes good while at other times it is bad. The reason behind it is that we have not taken into account and stated the subject in all its dimensions. And if it is done and we consider certain limits and conditions, to be honest will be always good or bad and it will never be changed.

From the viewpoint of philosophical and epistemological foundation, we also said that the source of pluralist thought can be one of these three isms: positivism, skepticism and relativism. If, like the logical positivists, we said that metaphysical and non-empirical cases such as “There is God,” “There is the Day of Resurrection” and the like are essentially meaningless accounts, or if we became advocates of relativism in human knowledge in totality or on particular ethical and moral cases, or if we embraced agnosticism and said that no part of human knowledge is definite and certain, and all of them with varying degrees are inseparable with doubt and skepticism, through one of these three philosophical and epistemological foundations, one could lead to pluralism and the acceptance of the multiplicity of truth in human knowledge, including religious knowledge.

Of course, at the outset of the discussion we have also noted that it does not mean that everyone who has turned pluralist had initially accepted positivism, relativism or agnosticism. Rather, it is also such that at the beginning one had inclined toward pluralism, accepted it and then sometimes looked for evidence to justify and prove it. But, at any rate, if one wants to follow the logical conclusion, at the outset, he has to accept one of these three foundations in epistemology and then arrive at pluralism through it. And in essence, we have to bear in mind that the logical conclusion is that all scientific issues are in one way or another anchored in philosophical principles and premises and the philosophical issues in turn are based on epistemological issues. That is, from the viewpoint of logic, at the beginning we have epistemological discussions and then philosophical discussions and thereafter current scientific issues.

For example, when a physician or a researcher tries to invent medicine for curing a certain ailment, initially he does not come to deal with philosophy and prove the philosophical rules, but this research is definitely based on a philosophical principle; namely, the principle of causality. This researcher goes to the laboratory and spends many hours for research to invent a medicine means that he has believed that illness does not come into being spontaneously and without a cause; whenever there is a disease, there must certainly be a cause. And he also believed that there is another cause and factor that could affect and eliminate the factor leading to the disease and thus cure the same.

In this manner, without accepting the principle of causality, no researcher can conduct research. But this

does not mean that initially, he has studied philosophy and used the principle of causality by indisputable evidence and has then gone to the laboratory and conducted research. Rather, belief in the principle of cause and effect unconsciously and half-consciously exists in his mind.

1. Du‘a’ Kumayl [Supplication of Kumayl]: The supplication taught by Imam ‘Ali (‘a) to one of his loyal companions and staunch supporters of Islam, Kumayl ibn Ziyad. Usually said on every night preceding Friday [Laylat’ul–Jum‘ah] individually or in congregation after the Isha’ prayers, this supplication envisages divine teachings and solid foundations of religion in order to enable everyone to follow the right path for becoming a worthy Muslim. The Arabic text, English translation and commentary of this famous supplication are available online at

<http://www.al-islam.org/dua-kumayl-a-translation-and-commentary-husein-a...> [16] [Trans.]

2. This is for argument’s sake only vis–à–vis the disbelievers because in reality, as God is Omnipotent to create a thing from nothing and to create a thing from something else are both easy for Him. The existence or non–existence of a transient agent in His Act does not make it ‘easier’ or ‘harder’, as the case may be. [Trans.]

3. See the classic book on the history and philosophy of science, Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) in which the author argues that science is not a steady, cumulative acquisition of knowledge; instead, it is “a series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions”, which he described as “the tradition–shattering complements to the tradition–bound activity of normal science,” and after such revolutions, “one conceptual world view is replaced by another”. [Trans.]

4. Tasbihat al–arba‘ah: literally, the four tasbihs; it refers to the recital of “Subhan Allahi wa’l–hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu wallahu akbar” [Glory be to Allah; praise be to Allah; there is no god but Allah; Allah is the great]. [Trans.]

5. Mujtahid: an authority on the divine law who practices ijthad, i.e. “the search for a correct opinion in the deduction of the specific provisions of the law from its principles and ordinances.” Here, it is used as synonymous with marja‘ at–taqlid. [Trans.]

6. Taghut refers to the Pahlavi regime in Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution. [Trans.]

7. In 1957 (1335 AHS), the Shah ordered the establishment of the State Information and Security Organization (SAVAK) and in 1971 (1350 AHS) on his orders a joint committee of SAVAK and the Town and City Police was organized. Agents of this organization arrested the opponents of the regime and took them away to political prisons. In these penitentiaries, prisoners were subjected to various forms of physical and psychological torture which included abuse; whipping and beating; long periods of interrogation; sleep deprivation; extraction of nails and teeth; tying to a metal table heated to a white heat or an iron frame like a bed–frame covered with wire mesh which was electrically heated like a toaster; breaking of limbs; electric shocks; beating the soles of the prisoner’s feet with an electric cable; hanging to the roof and broadcasting the screams of torture victims by means of tape recorders. Another of SAVAK’s heinous methods of torture was placing the legs of prisoners in boiling oil. For more information on SAVAK’s activities and abuse of human rights, refer to Fred Halliday’s *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, pp. 78–90. [Trans.]

## Chapter 6: Religious Pluralism (Part 4)

In the last session, I promised to explain the relationship between pluralism and liberalism and to give answers to the questions raised therein.

## The Relationship between Pluralism and Liberalism

In order to explain the relationship between pluralism and liberalism, at the outset, we have to clarify the meaning of these two terms. In the earlier sessions, enough explanation was made regarding the concept of pluralism, but we have to explain here the concept of liberalism.

Lexically, liberalism means “freedom” and technically, it can be said that liberalism is an ideology on the basis of which, man should act the way he likes in life and no external factor or condition and circumstance should set limit on his action except in a situation when in the end, his action encroaches upon the freedom and endangers the safety of others. Liberalism has been discussed mainly in three important domains; economics, politics, and religion and culture.

Economic liberalism means that economic activity in the society should be totally free and any one can produce any commodity he likes and present and sell it in whatever way he likes. In sum, based on economic liberalism, there should be no restriction of any kind in the areas of production, determining the primary goods, advertisement, distribution, investment, and other cases related to the economic domain except that which infringes upon the liberty and jeopardizes others.

In the political sphere, liberalism means that in choosing the type and form of government, the ruling individuals, the laws governing the society, and other political actions, people must be totally free and they have the right to act in whatever way they like except in cases where they contradict the liberty and security of others.

The term “liberalism” is sometimes used in the sphere of culture especially in religion and belief. It is said that the first person who has applied the term “liberalism” in the realm of religion is Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) who made use of the term “liberal Protestantism” and from then on, this term has been more or less applied in religion.<sup>1</sup> In any case, what is meant by religious liberalism is that the people are free to choose any religion they want, or in principle, the acceptance or rejection of the essence of religion and religious laws, and no limitation and restriction should be imposed upon them in this regard.

If we discuss liberalism in the economic and political realms, we will not find any direct connection to religious pluralism. But if we broaden it and in addition to economic liberalism and political liberalism, we entertain religious liberalism, then the relationship between liberalism and pluralism will be established in the sense that the requisite of man being free to choose a religion and act according to its ordinances or otherwise (religious liberalism) is that we regard as acceptable the diverse religions in terms of their truthfulness. In this way, in terms of the existing four types of logical relations among concepts (equality, absolute general and particular, non–absolute general and particular, contrast), the relationship between liberalism and religious pluralism shall be that of absolute general and particular; that is, religious pluralism is always a manifestation of liberalism but not every type of liberalism is a manifestation of religious pluralism. For example, political liberalism is a manifestation of liberalism but not a

manifestation of religious pluralism.

Of course, if we tackle pluralism even in other areas such as political, economic and epistemological pluralism, as we did in the previous sessions, then the relationship between liberalism and pluralism will change.

At any rate, without taking into account the historical trend and the evolution of these two concepts, the relationship between them is as what we have explained. But historically, liberal thought was apparently prior to pluralism and even secularism.

## **A Review of the Motive behind the Emergence of Religious Pluralism**

In earlier sessions, some points have been mentioned about the motive behind the emergence of pluralism and we have indicated that one of the important motives behind it was to put an end to war and bloodshed as the result of religious differences and it was first mentioned in Christianity. As it is known to you, after Martin Luther, a German priest, founded the Protestant Church in Christianity and a relatively large number of Christians gradually followed him, bloody wars and conflicts between the Catholics and Protestants ensued and persisted, and it still continues in some places such as Northern Ireland of the United Kingdom. Prior to it, there was also a conflict between the followers of two Christian sects, viz. Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity.

With the aim of putting an end to the sectarian conflicts, some Christian scholars and theologians propounded the theory of pluralism in Christianity, saying that for eternal deliverance and salvation, it is enough that we are Christians, and there is no difference among the Orthodox Christians, Catholics and Protestants.

Later on, because of the perennial conflicts existing between the Christians and the Jews and in order to put an end to these conflicts, pluralism between Christianity and Judaism was also advanced and efforts were made to eliminate the ground for these conflicts. For instance, one of the Christian rituals, particularly among the Catholics, is the Eucharist which is the so-called Christian's Prayer and in which certain recitals, supplications and subjects are mentioned.

Among the things existing before in the Eucharist was the cursing of the Jews as the killers of the Holy Christ. When the Jews, the Zionists in particular, succeeded by executing some programs in Europe in acquiring power, the Vatican was forced to decide to officially and legally eliminate this part of the Christian's Prayer and the Eucharist, and in a sense, the Christian authorities issued religious edict that from then on, the Jews should not be cursed during the Eucharist. For a long period, the practice of cursing the Jews had been omitted from the Eucharist but the Christians still used to regard the Jews as the killers of the Holy Christ until such time that in the recent years, as you perhaps are aware of, the Pope ordered the Christians to remove this belief from their minds and hearts, saying that "We want to

make peace with the Jews.” In the not-so-distant future, the Holy See is supposed to officially visit the Occupied Palestine and meet the Jewish leaders.

Later on, the Christendom observed the same policy in relation to all religions and countries in the world, saying that “We are not at war or in conflict with any religion, sect or country on the grounds of religious beliefs and we accept everybody.” Some even went to the extent of acknowledging that Islam is better than Christianity, openly declaring it, but saying that Christianity is a good religion anyway.

The emphasis is then more on peaceful coexistence and avoidance of war and bloodshed on grounds of religious beliefs and sectarian differences, and as indicated earlier, Islam accepts this type of pluralism, i.e. practical pluralism between Islam and other religions of heavenly origin and the People of the Book [*ahl al-kitab*] and sometimes even those who are not People of the Book and officially recognizing them, and their life, property and chastity like that of the Muslims are honored.

Yet, as also indicted earlier, pluralism is not only practical pluralism and the proponents of this theory usually expand it to include theoretical pluralism, saying that “Not only in practice that we do not fight and wage war against each other but rather theoretically, all religions can be true in principle, and anyone who believes in any of them and faithfully acts upon its ordinances will attain salvation and felicity, and his or her belief and deeds shall be accepted.” Of course, as to how all religions might be true and on the truth notwithstanding the contradictions and inconsistencies existing among them, there are various interpretations which we discussed in the previous sessions. From here, I want to proceed to the second part of this session’s discussion and it shall be the answer to a question raised in an earlier session.

## **Founding the Universal Unified Religion**

The question is this: What is wrong in saying, “There are commonalities existing among all religions?” We can identify these commonalities and by creating a system among them, we can present the same as a universal unified religion and say that the truth of religion is this common aggregate of all religions and the existing differences among them are of secondary importance and subjective in nature, and their existence or non-existence does not render a blow to the essence of religion. The main trunk of religion is these commonalities and those differences are the twigs and leaves of that tree, and according to his taste and interest, anyone can pick up any of them.

This question is actually the fourth interpretation of religious pluralism from the theoretical dimension and is different from the three interpretations we discussed in the last meeting. At this point, it is necessary to examine it.

# An Examination of the Theory of Founding the Universal Unified Religion

In our opinion, this assumption is incoherent in terms of content and text. Besides, there is no evidence to prove it. Technically and scientifically, this assumption is theoretically and practically problematic and unacceptable.

From the practical and substantial aspect of the theory, the problem is that such commonalities cannot be found among the existing religions, or if we can ever arrive at certain commonalities, they will be so ambiguous, general and scanty such that they cannot be regarded as constituting a distinct religion. Let us explain:

Among the existing religions and denominations, we regard the four religions; namely, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, as heavenly religions although we believe that distortions [*tahrif*] have taken place in Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, and the existing religions are things other than those revealed by God. Initially, it can be imagined that among these four religions, some commonalities can be extracted. For example, it seems that the principle of believing in God is common among all of them, but after a bit of reflection, it will be clear that it is not so and even with respect to these cases which are seemingly common to all these religions, there are fundamental differences among them. Concerning this very principle of belief in the existence of God which is seemingly a common point among these religions, if we will ponder a little, its opposite will be proved to us.

God who is portrayed in Christianity is “God” that could assume a human form and then be dragged to the cross and be the ransom of the rest of humanity and thus become the atoner of their sins and the source of their salvation and felicity. Christianity describes God in such a manner that God the Father assumed the form of God the Son inside the womb of Saint Mary and was conceived by her, and lived for some years among His servants and creatures for them to put him in the gallows and He again return to heaven! The God of the Jews<sup>2</sup> is perhaps more interesting than this.

Their God is so heavenly that the heaven is His main dwelling place; He also sometimes descends to the earth and takes a walk therein.<sup>3</sup> He also sometimes entertains the idea of engaging in wrestling and fights with Prophet Jacob who overcomes Him and sits on top of His bosom! In short, Prophet Jacob wins over God Who says, “My dear Jacob! Let me go, for it is daybreak and the people will see that you overcome me [and it is embarrassing for me!]” Jacob replies, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” In order to be relieved from the yoke of Jacob, He blesses him and only then does Jacob release Him, and God again returns to heaven!<sup>4</sup>

From the viewpoint of Islam, God the Exalted is not a body. He neither ascends nor descends. The heaven and earth, yesterday and today make no difference to Him. He is the Creator of time and space and is not restricted by them. He cannot be seen and all creatures are within the realm of His power and

are accountable to Him. He neither begets nor is He begotten, and He is free and guiltless of those contemptible and absurd qualities attributed to Him by the Jews and Christians.

It is quite evident that the commonality of these three conceptions of God is only in name and nomenclature for existentially speaking, they are not identical to each other. It is thus like the case of the Persian word, *shir* (which means “milk” and “lion” among others):

*That one is shir [lion] in the badiyeh [jungle].*

*And the other one is shir [milk] in the badiyeh [cup].*

*That one is shir, which devours human.*

*And the other one is shir, which human drinks.*[5](#)

If *shir* [lion] of the jungle and *shir* [milk] of the breakfast are identical, the God of Islam and that of Christianity and Judaism are also one. Indeed, what is the commonality between the God of Islam and the God of Christianity and Judaism? One says that God is a body, and He ascends and descends. The other one says that He is not a body and He neither ascends nor descends. What is the sum of “He is a body” and “He is not a body”?!

By the way, this is within the parameter wherein we confine the scope of religion to the heavenly religions. But if we go beyond that and take into account whatever is technically regarded today as “religion”, the case will be worse than this. One of the ancient religions of the world, which today has so many adherents, is Buddhism. In principle, there is no belief in God in Buddhism. The only thing this religion upholds is that man should be relieved from these worldly and material attachments, entanglements and interests so as to find enlightenment and achieve perfection. It is only in this manner that he will be free from all sufferings and attain absolute happiness and desirable bliss.

What is the commonality between the belief and view of heavenly religions that “There is God” and this belief of Buddhism that “There is no God” that we can deduce and present as the universal unified religion?!

If we go farther and like Auguste Comte (1798–1857) believe in the supremacy of man, again the case will be worse than this. Comte says, “Yes, man wants religion, but not a religion which has God, heavenly prophets, revelation, and metaphysics, but rather a religion in which the Supreme Being is man and the prophet is the intellect. The axis of the universe is man, and the point of direction, object of worship and the object of prostration of everything should be man. The entire universe and the world of being should be in harmony with his desires and inclinations.”

Again, we ask: Between the religion in which the object of worship is man and the religion in which the object of worship is the Limitless, Unique and Eternal Being; between the religion in which the object of worship is a limited physical God and is under the yoke of Prophet Jacob; the religion in which the cow is

worshipped; the religion in which there is essentially no belief in God which one can take as the universal unified religion?! Given such a condition, to talk about the commonalities of religions and the universal unified religion is more akin to fiction than to reality, and its proponent is closer to a state of drunkenness and imprudence than to a state of intellect and sobriety ***“Do they not consider? (4:82)”***

The first and foremost element of religion is the belief in God, and since in this very first step we encounter all these contradictions, how can we find essential commonalities among religions regard the differences as secondary and proclaim them as constituting the universal unified religion? It is exactly because of the existence of this unsolvable problem that one of the writers inside the country who are inclined to this theory had claimed in one of his recent articles entitled *“Dhati va ‘Ardhi-ye Din”* [The Essential and Secondary Element of Religion] that even belief in God is not an essence and kernel for the religion but is rather one of its secondary elements, and it is possible for a person to have a religion but not believe in God! I say that if God does not exist, naturally there will be no prophet to be sent to the people.

Therefore, the result is that one can deny the existence of God and a prophet, while at the same time professing a religion! Similarly, since it is so evident in matters of belief that we do not have any form of worship which is common to all religions, and for example, it is true that there is prayer in the heavenly religions but its essence is generally different. Thus, neither identical God shall remain nor a prophet nor any form of worship. As such, where are those common elements among all religions in which we will believe as the universal unified religion?!

## **Presenting the Common Moral Principles as Constituting the Universal Unified Religion**

In order to further demonstrate the feebleness and groundlessness of this theory, let us assume that we accept that although in matters pertaining to God, prophethood and Imamate, we failed to find a common denominator, but we can propose a universal unified religion on the basis of the common moral principles of religions. In other words, one could say that “What I mean by the universal unified religion and the commonalities among religions are a set of moral principles such as the virtue of justice, honesty, and trustworthiness and the vice of injustice, lying and treachery about which all religions are in agreement. The aggregate of the same common moral principles can constitute this universal unified religion which we are dealing. What is wrong with this scheme?

The answer is that firstly, based on this scheme, religion is synonymous with ethics, and to call the set of only some moral principles as religion is an affair contrary to the conventional and common usage of the people and the intellectuals. In all lexicons and dictionaries, religion is different from ethics while ethics is different from religion. There are two distinct terms and expressions for each of them. There is no dictionary of any language in which religion and ethics have identical meaning and connotation. Further proof of this fact is that so many nonreligious people say that they do not profess any religion and sect

but at the same time we can see that they believe in and adhere to some moral principles such as the virtue of justice, honesty and trustworthiness and the vice of injustice, lying and treachery.[6](#)

In any case, the first problem is that the acceptance of moral principles does not necessarily mean the acceptance of religion and in spite of the acceptance of a set of moral principles, one may not believe in any religion or sect. Secondly, let us assume that belief in God, prophethood and the Judgment Day, and the observance of devotional rites and the like have nothing to do with the essence of religion and that religion is nothing but a set of moral principles.

The next question is this: Is religion only the belief in these moral principles, or in addition to belief, are practices and adherence to these principles also necessary? Is religious the one who defends these principles in books, articles and speeches though having no attachment to them in practice, or are the followers of this universal unified religion those who, apart from words, are also observing and acting upon these principles in the scene of action? If that universal unified religion consists of mere belief devoid of action in those principles, does such a religion have any impact upon the human life? Does its presence or absence make any difference? If words and mere claims were enough, then any oppressor and criminal could have the best articles and speeches in praise of justice, honesty and trustworthiness. Is this the truth about religiosity?!

It is so clear that belief without practice cannot constitute a religion, and definitely, in addition to belief there should also be the seasoning of action and practice so as for us to be able to call a person “religious” on the basis of this terminology. It is here that a very important question arises, and that is: What is the motive of a person who does not believe in God, the Prophet, the divine revelation, the book of account, and reckoning in not telling a lie, and what is the assurance that he would implement justice and not commit treachery?

One of the discussions being held in the recent centuries and which have been supported by some is this very separation of religion and ethics as well as ethics minus religion. According to this theory, it is said that those which have influence on human life are ethics and moral principles, and that religion has no impact on our life. Therefore, we accept ethics and moral principles which have actual effect, but we have nothing to do with religion. This is the same way of thinking which exists in some people who say that we should be “human” and as to whether we have religion or no religion at all is not that important.

I myself once witnessed right here in Tehran a conversation between two persons in which one said to the other, “So-and-so is a good fellow and he also prays.” His friend said in reply, “In my opinion, a person must be good irrespective of whether he prays or not.” This way of thinking is actually taken from the same theory of ethics minus religion on the basis of which to be good means observance of moral values; to be good means to be polite, dignified and noble. To have religion or not is not a big deal.

But the truth of the matter is that this theory will lead to nowhere and it is marred with many problems which have been mentioned in detail in the discussions on the philosophy of ethics. For example, one

problem is that according to one school of thought on the philosophy of ethics, goodness is synonymous with happiness. That is, anything which makes man happy is good and laudable. Now, keeping in view of this point, assuming that on the philosophy of ethics I uphold that theory and I believe that to be good is equivalent to be enjoyable, and anything that gives more happiness is better.

Now, if in a certain place telling a lie gives me enjoyment, is there any reason for me not to tell a lie? It is evident that according to such a way of thinking, in such a scenario I will certainly tell a lie because my happiness lies in it. If in a certain place to tell the truth will give me discomfort and trouble, to do so is thus not good and there is no reason for me to be honest. Just as in other cases which we regard as moral values, according to this way of thinking, not only are we not obliged to observe them but rather in many cases, it is trampling upon those principles which are considered good, for it brings about happiness and joy. If my happiness is assured by means of stealing, betraying, bribing, and committing crimes, all of these are good. This is the natural result of the hedonistic way of thinking.

Therefore, as to the fact that we regard a set of moral principles acceptable to all as constituting the universal unified religion apart from the fact that such general principles are not certain whether they exist in reality or not the fundamental problem is how to oblige individuals to observe those principles. If there will be no discussion about God, the Day of Resurrection, reckoning, and the book of account, why should we really subject ourselves to these moral principles and let ourselves be restrained by them?

The truth of the matter is that by not considering God and the Day of Resurrection, there will be no motivation to observe these principles and make them obligatory. Yes, of course, possibly, as the effect of inculcation, encouragement, punishment, conditioning, and social customs and mores, a child will be trained in a way that observance of these principles assume the form of a habit for him, but it can no longer be defended as a logical and reasonable theory. In other words, it is true that you have been able to make a person conform to this custom and this code of ethics, but how will you prove that what you are doing is good and logical? Just as by employing inculcation, encouragement and punishment, one can create and strengthen the custom of telling the truth in a child, by using the same means, one can also teach a child how to tell lies. Is the fact that we have been able to turn lying into a habit for a child a proof that lying is good?

Kant was well aware of the above problems and he understood that if a person did not believe in the existence of reward and punishment for his moral deeds, there would be no guarantee for their implementation. It is because although he believed that moral value and moral good is that we should perform an act with the sole motivation of obeying the dictate of reason and conscience, and if there is hope for reward and recompense, it will become void of moral value. Yet, at the same time, he used to say that if ethics wish to have executive guarantee in actuality and be observed, then we must accept certain principles, which are approximately the same principles we Muslims accept.

Kant used to say, "I can prove right here the existence of God as well as the eternity and perpetuity of the spirit and the soul of man." For, if we do not believe in God who has the Reckoning and the Book of

Account and gives reward and punishment, we will have no motivation to do good deeds. In the same manner, if we acknowledge the existence of God but do not believe in the eternity of the spirit and life of man saying that after his death man will be annihilated and if there is any reward and punishment, they will be only related to this world again we will not find much motivation to observe moral principles and values. As such, Kant believed that the existence of God could not be established through theoretical evidence but he said that “Through practical reason, I believe that God must exist so as for ethics not to remain without executive support and assurance.”

## **A Summary of the Critique of the Theory of Universal Unified Religion**

In brief, in reply to those who say that by treating the differences among religions as secondary and pertaining to the taste, the commonalities of them all can be taken together and presented as constituting the universal unified religion, we say that firstly, the most rudimentary principles of all religions is God, prophethood and the devotional rites, and through investigation it became clear that in the context of these principles, there is no common point to all religions. Secondly, assuming that we take aside God, apostleship and the devotional rites and accept that the universal unified religion consists of common moral principles acceptable to all religions, the question is: Are you talking about mere belief on these moral principles, or do you regard acting upon them also as a requisite?

If it is mere belief and declaration, it is then evident that mere claim cannot set things right and has no effect on them. If you believe in the necessity of action, the question is: By negating God, apostleship and the Resurrection, what is the guarantee for the implementation and observance of these principles? This is especially true if we take into account that in the philosophy of ethics, there are schools such as hedonism which uphold that moral good is something which gives pleasure to man. How can one who has such a conviction be persuaded to tell the truth that will give him displeasure and pain and be dissuaded to tell a lie and commit treachery which will be pleasing for him?

The point should not be overlooked that apart from the fact that there are no (absolute) commonalities among religions, if we would not say all religions, at least most of them strongly negate the other faiths' doctrines and campaign against them. Concerning the belief in God, Islam apart from regarding as essential the belief in One God has also made obligatory the negation of polytheism [*shirk*]. As a matter of fact, it commences with the negation of polytheism and it ends up in monotheism [*tawhid*]. One should first say, “There is no god...” [*La ilaha...*] and then, “...except Allah” [*illallah*]. This means that a Muslim should first negate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and then affirm the monotheism of Islam. This point makes it problematic first and foremost to find commonalities among religions.

At any rate, the final conclusion is that this hypothesis from both the theoretical perspective and that of the content of the theory is problematic. And practically speaking, there is no proof substantiating it and in our opinion, it is totally unacceptable.

1. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper, 1958). [Trans.]
2. That is, God as conceived by the Jews. [Trans.]
3. For example, see Genesis 11:5: “But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building.” In this volume, all biblical quotations are adapted from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV). [Trans.]
4. Genesis 32:22–32. [Trans.]
5. In the last two lines of the poem, with the absence of the Persian post–positional word “ra” — which is common in poems—in either the word shir [milk, or lion] or insan [man], it is not clear which line means “The lion [shir], which devours human,” or “The milk [shir], which human drinks.” [Trans.]
6. For example, Dan Barker, a famous atheist, describes himself as “a moral person without beliefs.” See Dan Barker and Hassanain Rajabali, *A Transcript of Debate on ‘Does Not God Exist?’* (New York: Islamic Institute of New York, January 5, 2003), <http://www.madressa.org/events/Debate2003/Transcript.asp> [17], accessed: June 17, 2006. [Trans.]

## 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.]

## **Chapter 8: The Limits of Attraction and Repulsion (Peace and Violence) in Islam (Part 2)**

### **Three Types of Questions about Attraction and Repulsion in Islam**

In continuation of the previous session, if we want to discuss the limits of attraction and repulsion in Islam in a more extensive manner which is relatively multifaceted, then one can discuss it in at least three forms and three areas.

One area is that we would approach the discussion in the following manner. In essence, the totality of Islamic tenets including the doctrinal, moral and legal issues, laws pertaining to the individual, society, worship, rights, politics, etc... makes man attracted to some things and repugnant to others, both material and spiritual. As such, when we say that Islam has attraction, it means that the totality of its tenets is such that they persuade man to attract certain things toward him.

Likewise, the meaning of saying that Islam has repulsion is that it persuades man to avoid certain things and keep away from them. This is the first meaning that can be taken into account for the attraction and repulsion in Islam, and on the basis of which the question could be raised. The brief answer is that among the following four conceivable assumptions:

- (1) Islam has attraction only,
- (2) Islam has repulsion only,
- (3) Islam has neither attraction nor repulsion, and
- (4) Islam has both attraction and repulsion, the fourth assumption is correct.

The second meaning is for us to say that the totality of Islamic tenets is attractive to all individuals and people and it draws the same toward themselves, or, it is repulsive to them and it makes them shun and keep distance from Islam, or, as a whole, the tenets of Islam have elements which are pleasant to all people and attract them as well as elements that some people do not accept and make them repulsive to Islam.

The third meaning is that we have to see what methods Islam employs in inviting non-Muslims to Islam and for the advancement and training of those who have become Muslims. Does it use only the repulsive method, or the attractive method? Or can both methods be observed?

## **The Development of Man Depends on Attraction and Repulsion**

Before examining each of these three meanings, let us first pose this question: For man as a moving and dynamic being that considers a certain aim in the process of his own development and struggles to attain such aim, in principle, does the force of attraction help him more along this way, or the force of repulsion, or both?

It is not very difficult to answer this question, and through a bit of reflection and analysis, it can be found. If we examine the living things such as plants, animals and man, we will find out that all of them are in need of both attraction and repulsion. The first characteristic of a living creature is nourishment. All living creatures are in need of nourishment in order to grow and subsist, and nourishment is impossible without attraction. That is, for nourishment a material from the outside should be attracted and enter the body.

Similarly, to attract everything is not useful for the living creature. In fact, to attract certain things will cause malfunctioning in the activities and suspension of growth of the living creature and even death. So, with respect to those things there is need for repulsion and for the creature to keep them away from its body. Therefore, every living creature is in need of both attraction and repulsion for its survival, growth and development. At this juncture, when we say, "The creature should attract certain things and repulse other things," what initially comes to mind is to attract and repulse a material thing.

That is, we imagine that in all cases, what is to be attracted and repulsed is a material and tangible thing, but we should bear in mind that from the Islamic perspective, the life of man is not only confined to his material and biological life; rather, man has also a spiritual life which is related to his soul. That is,

there is a stage of life, advancement and perfection which is related to the body of man and there is also another stage of life, advancement and perfection which is related to his soul. The Holy Qur'an says thus:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ ۚ وَعَلَّمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

***O you who have faith! Answer Allah and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life. (8:24)***

Certainly, the addressees in this verse “O you who have faith!” are living beings and they can hear the sayings of the Prophet (S). Yet, why it is said to them, “Answer Allah and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life”? Definitely, this “life” is not material and physical, and a different life is referred to. In another place, it thus states:

وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشِّعْرَ وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُّبِينٌ لِيُنذِرَ مَن كَانَ حَيًّا وَيَحِقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

***We did not teach him poetry, nor does it behoove him. This is just a reminder and a manifest Qur'an, so that anyone who is alive may be warned. (36:69-70)***

Does the fact that the Qur'an is guiding a “living” being refer to this material and physical life? If it is so, then all human beings have this kind of life. Thus, the Qur'an is supposed to guide all of them. Yet, we know that it will not guide the likes of Abu-Jahl and Abu-Lahab<sup>1</sup> in spite of their being outwardly and physically alive. As such, it will become clear that the Qur'an refers to a different life. It is “aliveness of the heart” and “spiritual life” that gives a person the sense of hearing for him to be able to listen to the word of God and be guided:

فَأِنَّكَ لَا تَسْمَعُ الْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَا تَسْمَعُ الصُّمَّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ

***Indeed you cannot make the dead hear. (30:52)***

What is meant by “dead” in this verse is the same people whose hearts are “dead” and it is they whose bodies are alive but their spirits are dead.

What is the sign of the aliveness of the heart and soul? Its sign is the state of “fear”:

وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۚ وَإِن تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلَىٰ جِمْلَيْهَا لَا يُحْمَلُ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ ۚ إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ ۚ وَمَن تَزَكَّىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّىٰ لِنَفْسِهِ ۚ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ

***You can only warn those who fear their Lord in secret. (35: 18)***

The sign of heart aliveness is that once it understands that you have the Creator God; He has right over you; and He has created you for a purpose and given you a responsibility, it will tremble and not remain indifferent. The outcome of fear and penetration of faith [*iman*] into the heart is this:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَآمِنُوا بِرَسُولِهِ يُؤْتِكُمْ كِفْلَيْنِ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

***He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by. (57:28)***

This light is not material and perceptible; rather, it is light related to the aliveness of the heart and soul the aliveness which is pointed out by the Qur'an in many instances and through many ways:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا ۗ فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

***Indeed it is not the eyes that turn blind, but the hearts turn blind—those which are in the breasts! (22:46)***

Material and physical eye has life and vision, but it has no vision of the soul and inner being. The muscular heart in the bosom beats and is alive but there is another heart which has the problem:

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً ۗ وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ ۗ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقُّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ ۗ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

***Then your hearts hardened after that; so they are like stones, or even harder. (2:74)***

That heart, like a stone, is hard and impenetrable, nay it has become more solid than stone:

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً ۗ وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ ۗ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقُّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ ۗ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

***For indeed there are some stones from which streams gush forth, and indeed there are some of them that split, and water issues from them. (2:74)***

From many verses in the Qur'an, it can clearly be deduced that it refers to certain eyes, ears, hearts, and life of men which are different from the physical eyes, ears, hearts, and life. Just as the physical life

and its growth and development are based on attraction and repulsion, so also does the life of the soul depend on attracting certain things and repulsing some others. Just as there are things that have effect on the physical life of man and for which they are either useful or harmful, so also are there elements which are influential in the spiritual life of man for which they are either useful or harmful.

Just as the physical life has different stages and has imperfection and perfection as well as strength and weakness, the spiritual life is also an uncertain affair and has different stages. The first stage of spiritual life is that in face of the primary invitation of the prophets (‘a) to faith and monotheism, man would be affected and attached to it. Of course, later on, as the result of the guidance of the prophets (‘a) and acting upon their teachings and orders, the spirit will become more perfect and man will attain a loftier station of spiritual life. It is here that the topic on self-purification and self-refinement will be discussed.

## **Self-Purification as Attractions and Repulsions Necessary for the Perfection of the Soul**

The issue of self-purification in reality is the same issue of attractions and repulsions. For a tree to grow well, apart from attracting materials from the air and soil, its surplus branches must also be cut, and pests and simoom must be kept away from it. Regarding man, similar measures must be taken and something must be done in order for the soul to be polished. The groundwork of this venture is for man to become aware of and be able to identify that which is useful for his spiritual life and must be attracted, and that which is harmful and must be repulsed. Therefore, the first step is knowledge and understanding and abandonment of negligence and ignorance. Man should know that his soul is such that:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

***Look! The hearts find rest in Allah's remembrance! (13:28)***

The nourishment of the soul is thus remembrance and glorification of God and there is a relationship between the aliveness of the heart and remembrance of God. The same heart is such that if it is not protected and not kept away from pests and simoom, it will become so corrupt and disgusted with God:

وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ اشْمَأَزَّتْ قُلُوبُ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ ۗ وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِذَا هُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ

***When Allah is mentioned alone, [thereat] shrink away the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter. (39:45)***

Albeit that to know God and to search for Him is a natural disposition of man and that our primordial nature has been created in such a manner that it loves and knows God, the simoom has corrupted and

perverted it so much so that whenever the name of God is mentioned, it will be annoyed. Similarly, the primordial nature of the human body is such that whenever smoke enters its throat and lungs, it will be annoyed and through the natural reaction of coughing, it emits the smoke.

Yet, by smoking cigarette, calamity is brought to this body in that this time, whenever no smoke enters the throat and lungs, it will not remain at ease! And even more serious than this, sometimes he smokes and is totally satisfied but once his cigarette pocket is empty and no cigarette is available at home, he cannot sleep! The same irritating smoke which was against his primordial nature and used to annoy him destroys so much his temperament in that it becomes the alpha and omega of his life and he becomes so addicted to it that without it he cannot sleep at night.

Among things that are influential in the spiritual life of man is the feeling of love toward God, the friends of God and the friends of the friends of God, for the attainment of which one should strive. On the contrary, with respect to sin, Satan, and love for the enemies of God and religion, one should repulse them and keep them away from the heart. For the spiritual life of man not only sin but also to think about and remember it are harmful, and if a believer wants his faith to be more perfect and his spirit to be loftier, he should not even entertain the idea of sinning in his mind.

Perhaps, these words during our time and under the conditions and circumstances prevailing in our society are like fiction and it is problematic for us to imagine it and it is even more difficult for us to affirm them. Yet, these are existing realities. I personally do not believe in some of the stories being narrated and it is usually not my style to prove my points through stories, but sometimes in order for the mind to grasp the idea, to narrate some of the stories is useful. Thus, I shall mention one of the stories which have been narrated in this connection.

## **An Outstanding Example of Spiritual Attraction and Repulsion**

There is a famous story related to Sayyid Murtaza and Sayyid ar-Razi. Sayyid Murtaza and Sayyid ar-Razi are brothers. Sayyid ar-Razi is the compiler of *Nahj al-Balaghah*,<sup>2</sup> while Sayyid Murtaza is one of our prominent and outstanding '*ulama*'. When these two brothers wanted to go to their teacher, Shaykh al-Mufid<sup>3</sup> for the first time, the preceding night the late Shaykh saw in a dream that Lady Fatimah al-Zahra' (*'a*) was holding the hands of Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (*'a*) who are kids, brought them to the Shaykh and said, "O Shaykh! Teach jurisprudence to these two." The Shaykh woke up. He was astonished. What does it mean? "Who am I to teach something to Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (*'a*)?" The following morning, as he went out to teach his pupils and students, he saw a woman coming, holding the hands of her two male children and as she turned to him, she said, "O Shaykh! Teach jurisprudence to these two." These two kids were no other than Sayyid Murtaza and Sayyid ar-Razi.

In any case, my point in narrating this story is that it is said that one day, these two brothers wanted to pray together. It is recommended [*mustahabb*] that the one leading the prayer is more virtuous than the

one following him, and the spiritual stations of these two brothers are so exalted that not only were they observing the rules pertaining to what is obligatory and forbidden, but they also were particular of the rules pertaining to which acts are commendable and abominable.

Sayyid Murtaza wanted to observe the said recommended practice (of letting the more virtuous lead the prayer). And on the other hand, he did not want to explicitly say to his brother, “I am more virtuous than you. So, I have to lead the prayer and thus both of us will receive greater reward.” As he wanted indirectly to let his brother understand the fact, he said, “It is better that the one who will lead the prayer is he who has not committed a sin so far.” He wanted to indirectly point out that “From the day I reached puberty, I have not committed any sin. So, I am more qualified to lead the prayer.” Sayyid ar-Razi said, “It is better that the one who will lead the prayer is he who has so far never thought of committing a sin!” He indirectly wanted to say that “From the day I reached puberty, I have not even thought of committing a sin.”

At any rate, whether this story is true or not is not important. What matters is that it is a fact that the high degree of faith is that even the thought of sinning is not entertained in one’s mind:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ ۖ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا ۚ وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا ۚ أَيُحِبُّ  
أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ

***O you who have faith! Avoid much suspicion. Indeed some suspicions are sins. (49: 12)***

The faithful should shun even the practice of thinking of anything bad and keep aloof from it. To think of a sin and to imagine some of the scenes of sinning may insinuate a person gradually and drag him to sin. The faithful should remember God at all times:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا  
سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

***Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides. (3: 191)***

You have lied on your sides and closed your eyes in order to sleep. In such a condition, you also remember Allah and try to sleep while remembering Him so that your soul at the time of sleep will soar toward the Divine Throne and travel to the celestial world. There are also those who at the time of sleep entertain other things in their minds and these things corrupt them, and once they fall asleep they travel to the world of evils and see bad dreams.

These are effects and outcomes existing in the realm of the spiritual life of man. Just as in the realm of his material and animalistic life, man has to eat good and wholesome food and avoid poisonous stuffs and harmful things in order to grow and remain healthy, in the realm of spiritual and humane life, he also

has to take in things which are beneficial to his soul and shun those which are poisonous and harmful.

## Interpretation of the Verse, “So Let Man Observe his Food”

The Holy Qur’an says:

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ

### ***So let man observe his food. (80:24)***

Of course, considering the preceding and succeeding verses, this verse is related to the material food and physical nourishment because they talk about the following: O man! Think as to where this food has come from; how We poured down water from the sky and how We let the plants grow; and how the plants sustained the sheep while the meat of these sheep is sustenance for you. This is a blessing which God has provided for you in this manner.<sup>4</sup> In sum, that is the purport of the verses and as such, the word *ta’am* in this verse apparently refers to material food, but under this noble verse there is a narrated tradition which actually serves as the esoteric interpretation and meaning of the verse, stating that the meaning of the verse in question is as follows:

*Let man consider his knowledge from whom it acquires.*

Knowledge is the soul’s nourishment and in consuming it one must observe caution. That is, just as you sometimes want to eat your food outside, you ask and then look for the restaurant which is clean and whose foods are better and higher in quality, knowledge is also a nourishment of your soul. It cannot just be taken from everywhere and everybody. You have to consider that this professor from whom you want to acquire knowledge possesses the necessary spiritual hygiene or not. You should not trust every item of knowledge in whatever medium it is presented, be it book, speech, lecture, etc. You have to see through the channel of whom that this knowledge is transmitted because the effect of knowledge on your life and soul is not less than the effect of food on your body. Just as you see that the food you want to consume is clean, the fruits and vegetables are antisepticised, and then consume them, you should also be careful of the knowledge which is the nourishment of your soul; lest they were polluted and spoiled. Here, you should also practice attraction and repulsion.

We have to avoid things that weaken and corrupt our faith, beliefs and values, and we should not look after them except when we attained the station wherein we have immunity from them. Just as by injecting vaccine, we immunize our body from some ailments and we make sure that the microbe and virus will no longer harm our body, by strengthening the mental faculty and acquiring certain knowledge, we can also possibly immunize our soul from some corrupt ideas and misleading doubts to the extent that those doubts and wrong ideas no longer affect us. Of course, there is nothing wrong to read or listen to subjects that bring about doubts, but as long as one has not yet attained such degree of immunity and

intellectual growth, he should avoid such subjects:

وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَقْعُدُوا مَعَهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثِ غَيْرِهِ ۚ إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا مِثْلُهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَامِعُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْكَافِرِينَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ جَمِيعًا

***When you hear Allah's signs being disbelieved and derided, do not sit with them until they engage in some other discourse, or else you [too] will be like them. (4: 140)***

We should not say that we are faithful and we believe in God, the Prophet and the Qur'an, and these words have no effect on us. So long as we are not yet immunized, there is the possibility that participating in their meetings and listening to their statements, this mental virus will gradually affect us and rob us of our faith and beliefs:

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ الَّذِينَ يَخُوضُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثِ غَيْرِهِ ۚ وَإِمَّا يُنسِيَنَّكَ الشَّيْطَانُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ الذِّكْرِ مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ

***When you see those who gossip impiously about Our signs, avoid them until they engage in some other discourse. (6:68)***

The order of God, Who is the Physician of your and my souls and the medicine He injects is that prior to the acquisition of immunity through the vaccination of necessary knowledge and understanding, you should not participate in any meeting where mental doubts are infused, and not read any newspaper, article or book in which religious sanctities are vilified and insulted while the fundamentals of religion are questioned. What will happen if we participate and read so? This is the reply of the Qur'an:

وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَقْعُدُوا مَعَهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثِ غَيْرِهِ ۚ إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا مِثْلُهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَامِعُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْكَافِرِينَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ جَمِيعًا

***Or else you [too] will be like them. Indeed Allah will gather the hypocrites and the faithless in hell all together. (4: 140)***

If you do not accept and pay attention to our admonition, and sit together and mingle with such people, you will gradually join the group of those who vilify religious sanctities and undermine the religious values and beliefs, and you will be thrown to hellfire.

Just as you keep away from a person who has a contagious disease so as for it not to transmit to you, you should also keep aloof from people, gatherings and subjects which are transmitters of mental sickness, unless you are equipped with safety and anti-microbe devices and instruments. In that case, not only should you not isolate yourself but you should also strive to cure their sickness and save them.

Like physicians and nurses, by using sterilized instruments and systems of protection, they do something to save the lives of patients.

Of course, it is the duty of a physician to approach the patient and interact with him, but he does so with utmost caution and observance of necessary preventive measures. Because of lack of necessary knowledge and equipment, not only could others do nothing but rather if they approach the patient, they themselves will get sick. Thus, they are not supposed to interact with him. The soul, mind and heart of people may also be afflicted by a dangerous contagious disease and in case of absence of necessary caution, it is possible that the disease transmits to us.

## Spiritual Ailment and Wellbeing

The sign of perfect soundness of the soul is fondness of God; to remember and glorify God is pleasant for it; and the soul loves anything and anybody who in one way or another is inclined toward the obedience and submission to Him. Meanwhile, the sign of the ailment and lack of wellbeing of the soul is that once there is talk about prayer, supplication, and religious discussion and gatherings, it resents them and deals with them unenthusiastically and out of compulsion. If a person who has not eaten any food for a couple of hours is not hungry, and a wholesome and delicious food does not stimulate his appetite, this is a sign of sickness and poor health.

We should know and be cautious that the heart has also diseases: ***“There is a sickness in their hearts, (2: 10)”*** and if a sickness is found in the heart and is not treated, it will deteriorate: ***“Then Allah increased their sickness. (2: 10)”*** And if its deterioration is not checked and it engulfs the entire heart, it will become incurable and there is no more hope for recovery and relief, just like one who is located at a very steep slope and cannot control himself from running down:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَارِهِمْ ۖ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْعَاغِلُونَ

***Allah has set a seal on their hearts, and on their hearing and their sight [as well], and it is they who are the heedless. (16: 108)***

Sometimes, while our sickness is turning cancerous and incurable, we are still heedless and in many cases, we are instead very glad, imagining that day by day we are progressing and getting closer to perfection:

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا

***Shall we inform you about the biggest losers in regard to works? Those who endeavor goes awry in the life of the world, while they suppose they are doing good. (18: 103–104)***

Our soul is in need of attraction and repulsion, and to choose which thing is to be attracted and which one is to be repulsed has also been delegated to us. Like the smokers and drug addicts, we may “inject” smoke and poison into our soul, and like the mountaineers and athletes, we may also provide fresh and clean air as the breathing space for our hearts and souls:

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَدْحُورًا وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا كَلَّا نُمِدُّ هُوَآءًا وَهُوَآءًا مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا

***Whoever desires this transitory life, We expedite for him therein whatever We wish, for whoever We desire. Then We appoint hell for him, to enter it, blameful and spurned. Whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it with an endeavor worthy of it, should he be faithful the endeavor of such will be well-appreciated. To these and to those to all We extend the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined. (17: 18–20)***

Those who yearn for the transient life and enjoyment of this world and do not think of anything else will naturally strive to attain them, but they will not acquire everything they desire because in essence, desires of man are boundless, and whenever he attains a certain level, he will aspire for a higher level. In any case, God helps this group so as for them to attain some of their desires, but their final destiny will be perdition and hellfire.

There are also people who desire for the Hereafter and its blessings and pleasures. The description of this group mentioned in the Qur'an is noteworthy when it says: They are those who, firstly, “are desirous of the Hereafter” but it is not a desire for which they do not will to pay the price. In fact, they do not fail to exert efforts and pay the price worthy of what they desire, but again, it is not enough. Thirdly, action and endeavor should be supplemented by the proof of faith. Not only will these people obtain what they aspire for, but also God will appreciate them. Of course, as to what His appreciation is, only God the Exalted knows.

The most important and noteworthy part of these verses is this:

*To these and to those to all We extend the bounty of your Lord.*

That is, “We will assist both groups to attain their desires and We will provide them with the necessary means and tools.” The choice of which thing is to be attracted or repulsed is your decision, and there is no difference whichever you choose good or bad. You will be provided with Our assistance in obtaining it. The Holy Qur'an also reads:

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا ۗ وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

***Whoever brings virtue shall receive ten times its like; but whoever brings vice shall not be requited except with its like, and they will not be wronged. (6: 160)***

That is to say, “As to those who choose the perverted and noxious things, We shall make these things effective only to the extent of their capability, but We shall increase the effect of chosen good and desirable things up to ten times.”

## **Summary of the Discussion**

In conclusion, apart from the physical dimension, man has spiritual and celestial life, in which, like the physical dimension, he is in need of attraction and repulsion. That is, he is in need of a power through the assistance of which he can attract elements such as faith, love for God and beneficial knowledge which are useful for his heart and soul and they strengthen and increase his humanity. Also, he needs a power through which he can keep certain things such as Satan, sin and love for the enemies of God and His religion, which are harmful to his spiritual life, away from his soul.

Of course, we should not forget that our main topic, as indicated at the beginning of this session, is attraction and repulsion in Islam, which can be tackled in three ways. One way is to ask: Does the totality of the teachings of Islam be they in the realm of beliefs, laws, or ethics persuade man only to attract certain things, or only to repulse certain things, or both? The second way is to ask: Is the totality of the teachings of Islam attractive or repulsive to all people? And the third way is to ask: In inviting people to Islam and training them, does Islam use attractive, repulsive, or both methods? Whatever we have said in this session is actually an introduction to the main subject, and our three initial questions still remain unanswered. God willing, in the next meeting we will deal with them.

## **Question and Answer**

**Question:** Regarding the body, the issue is that it has a specific capacity in taking foods. If foods beyond that specified capacity are consumed, it will be harmful to the body and this state of affairs will become repulsive for it. Do the soul and its nourishment have the same limitations?

**Answer:** This is an important question and it has connection with one of the famous schools in the philosophy of ethics called “School of Moderation.” The proponents of this school believe that concerning moral virtues, the criterion of virtue is moderation, and extremism and profligacy are harmful. Naturally, this question comes to mind: Certain things have no specific limitation and the more there is the better; for example, love of God, worship, knowledge, and many others. Is moderation in this context also sensible? This question is similar to the previous one and its answer is also as follows: It is true that to acquire virtues has no bounds and limits, but the problem here is that in this world man has a limited power and capability, and if he wants to spend his entire power and strength in one aspect, he will lag behind in all other aspects. If we only engage in worship and not pay attention to food, rest and health, we will get sick and also lose the strength to worship. That is, our worship will be suspended and our

body will become sick. Or is it that, for example, what God wants is the perpetuity of the human generation and this issue also requires family formation, sexual relations, rearing of children, and in sum, management of a family and meeting the needs of its members to which we should naturally spend much of our strength and time?

If man only thinks of his spiritual and moral growth, and not exert efforts for his family, wife and child, the human generation will become extinct or corrupt. Or, for instance, if a person wants to go to the battlefield and wage war, he cannot engage much in optional and supererogatory forms of worship.

Therefore, since man has various responsibilities in this world while his power and strength are limited, he is supposed to divide this strength among them and engage in every area as much as necessary and in such a manner that it does not infringe on other areas.

Of course, man can do something in that his entire life ranging from his prayer and reading of the Qur'an to eating, sleeping and the most trivial of his daily activities will become forms of worship, and from time to time, he can climb higher up the ladder of proximity to God.

1. Abū-Jahl, the nickname of 'Amr ibn Hisham al-Makhzūmi, and Abū-Lahab (see the Holy Qur'an, 111:1-5) are the bitter opponents of the Noble Messenger (S) from among his relatives. [Trans.]

2. Nahj al-Balaghah (Peak of Eloquence) is a collection of speeches, sayings and letters of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali ibn Abi-Talib ('a) compiled by Sharif ar-Radhi, Muhammad ibn al-Husayn (d. 406 AH/1016). Contents of the book concern the three essential topics of God, man and the universe, and include comments on scientific, literary, social, ethical, and political issues. Except the words of the Glorious Qur'an and of the Holy Prophet (S), no words of man can equate it in eloquence. So far, more than 101 exegeses have been written on Nahj al-Balaghah, indicating the importance of this treatise to scholars and learned men of research and investigation. For more information, visit:

<http://www.al-islam.org/nahjul> [18]. [Trans.]

3. Shaykh al-Mufid: the common designation of Abū-'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu'man al-Harithi (d. 413 AH/1022) who was a great Shi'ah jurist, traditionist and scholar of scholasticism. Notable among his disciples were Sayyid Murtadha 'Alam al-Huda, Sayyid ar-Radhi, Shaykh at-Tūsī, and an-Najashi. Around 200 works are attributed to him, from which we can cite Kitab al-Irshad, Ikhtisas, Awa'il al-Maqalat, 'Amali, and Muqni'ah. See Shaykh al-Mufid, Kitab al-Irshad: The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams, trans. I.K.A. Howard (Karachi: Islamic Seminary Publications, n.d.), introduction, pp. xxi-xxvii; Martin J. McDermott, The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid (Beirut: Dar al-Mashreq, 1978), introduction, pp. 8-45. [Trans.]

4. Sūrah 'Abasa 80:25-32:

"We poured down water plenteously, then We split the earth into fissures and made the grain grow in it, and vines and vegetables, olives and date palms, and densely-planted gardens, fruits and pastures, as a sustenance for you and your livestock." [Trans.]

# Chapter 9: The Limits of Attraction and Repulsion (Peace and Violence) in Islam (Part 3)

## A Review of the Previous Discussion

In the previous two sessions about the attraction and repulsion in Islam and their limits, we have discussed many subjects. Of course, they served more as an introduction to and a background of our main discussion. The point which we highlighted in the previous session was that man as an evolutionary being faces two groups of elements along the course of his perfection: One consists of useful while the other is constituted by harmful elements, and like any other living creature, he has to attract useful elements and repulse harmful elements. In doing so, the first phase is that he has to identify these two groups of elements and distinguish one from the other.

Thus, the first step is recognition. Since this attraction and repulsion is not deterministic and is undertaken by the will and choice of man himself, the second step is that he has to strengthen his will so as to be able to perform good deeds and abandon the bad. It is not so that whatever is good and useful for man is interesting and pleasant for him and that whatever is bad and harmful is repulsive and unpleasant. In fact, in many cases it is incidentally the contrary and, for example, an element which is so harmful is very attractive for man like the fondness of some individuals to smoking or alcoholic beverage. As such, on the issue of attraction and repulsion, in addition to recognition, willpower of man also plays a pivotal role.

## The Reference in Identifying the Useful and Harmful Elements in the Spiritual Perfection of Man

Now, concerning the recognition of useful and harmful elements, the question is: What is the reference that identifies and says which element is useful for our soul and spiritual perfection and to be attracted and which element is harmful and to be repulsed? Similarly, regarding the strengthening of will, which methods strengthen this will?

We, Muslims and religious ones, believe that it is God Who is supposed to solve this problem because it is He Who created man and is totally cognizant of the laws and properties of his body and soul and their effects on one another, and He knows what is useful and what is harmful for man and which actions strengthen or weaken our will in the affair of spiritual and religious attraction and repulsion. God does it through the Prophet (S) and the fundamental *raison d'être* of the mission of the prophets (*'a*) has been this affair, and religion and the aggregate of its precepts are nothing but this thing. That is, if man wants to attain spiritual and religious perfection and growth, and recognize the useful and harmful elements

along the way, he must turn to religion and the prophets (‘a).

## The Overall policy of Islam in the Affair of Propagating Religion

Now, this question is posed: What should be done to attract people to religion? Merely the fact that the prophets (‘a) possess the prescription for the spiritual and religious perfection of man and that they know its correct path is not enough. Rather, in addition to it, you have to think of a way people can take and act upon. It is here that the issue of attraction and repulsion is again raised. But it is attraction and repulsion in this sense: To which method should the prophets (‘a) resort in inviting people toward religion and convincing them to accept it? Do they use attractive methods and through kindness and gentleness, should they try to attract individuals? Or, should they ask people to act upon their teachings through force and violation? Or, should they employ both methods? In sum, is there any specific law and rule in this context or not?

This is one of the three questions we have previously promised to deal with in this session. Of course, comprehensive and complete discussion of this issue or close examination of it requires many sessions, which are presently not possible in our program. Therefore, we shall try to state the gist of that which is related to this discussion.

### 1. Using Evidence and Preaching

The first stage of the mission of the prophets (‘a) is to invite people to the religion. At the outset, they had to see that people would like to listen to their speeches and see what the prophets say to them. Thereafter, it is the time for bidding and forbidding things. In this stage (i.e. the stage of invitation), there is no doubt that one should approach through the means of logic, proof and argument, and the text of the Qur’an also bears witness to this fact:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۚ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

***Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice. (16: 125)***

Invitation [*da‘wah*] must be accompanied by wisdom, proof and logic in order to be attractive, and in this stage, repulsion is never discussed.

Yet, people are not equal in that they can properly understand signs of wisdom, logical proofs and philosophical evidence. Nevertheless, if we examine ourselves, we will see that from the day we became cognizant of ourselves, we heard that there is a religion called Islam and there is a school of thought known as Shi‘ism and we accepted them. Yet, are we really trying to find out their rational proof? The truth is that most of people have accepted Islam and Shi‘ism only under the influence of social factors,

upbringing of their parents, instructions of their teachers, and the like, and they have never been in pursuit of finding out their proof.

Rather, sometimes they have read or heard something in the pulpit, or school and lecture. But it is very rare that at the beginning they had the motive to conduct research and act upon it. People are influenced more by feelings and emotions, and they move pursuant to some motivations and material and apparent things. They pay less attention to proof and evidence. Regarding human beings in general, the main stimulant is profit and loss as well as hope and fear the same thing which is known in the Islamic terminology as *khawf* [fear] and *raja'* [hope].

That is, man has to fear something or gain something in order to move. Either there must be a talk about money, position and popularity or about starvation, unemployment, lashes, and prison in order to be persuaded to act. A famous maxim says that man lives by means of fear and hope. The usual case is that if someone studies, it is either because he wants to have a job with a high salary and as such, to be rich, or he does not want to lag behind his friends and relatives and not to endure the despises and contempt of his father, mother and others. Since human beings in general are like that, just as stated in a noble verse, the issue of admonition [*maw'izah*] is raised alongside and after wisdom [*hikmah*] “*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice.*”

That is, in addition to proof [*burhan*] and argument [*istidlal*], the prophets (‘a) say, “If you do this, you will receive these rewards and if you don’t, you will incur these losses. On the contrary, if you do this, you will suffer from these harms, and if you abandon it, you will acquire these benefits.” If you examine closely the descriptions of the prophets (‘a) in the Qur’an, you will see in many instances that the prophets (‘a) are “givers of glad tidings” [*mubashshirin*] and “warners” [*mundhirin*] and that they have come for “giving glad tidings” [*basharah*] and “warning” [*andhar*]:

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾ فَمَنْ آمَنَ وَأَصْلَحَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

***We do not send the apostles except as bearers of good news and warners. (6:48)***

In the work of invitation [*da'wah*], the prophets (‘a) do not suffice themselves in merely showing proof and argument (wisdom); rather, because of the reason mentioned above, they say to the people, “If you accept what we say and act upon it, boundless and eternal blessings of paradise shall be bestowed upon you, and if you do not accept what we say and oppose us, chastisement and hell are waiting for you.” It is here that we can see people showing reaction. The impact of this warning becomes greater if practical and real examples which had happened before are brought to the attention of man.

For this reason, you can observe that in many instances the Qur’an narrates the final destiny of the previous communities and the chastisement sent down upon them, giving warning, thus: “Be careful not to meet the same fate of those people!” It is here that man will experience a sense of inner agitation and

anxiety, and he will be stimulated. Of course, between hope for profit and fear of loss, perhaps that which induces man more to move is the latter.

That is, if he enjoys material and worldly blessings to some extent and he is told, “If you strive and exert efforts, you will acquire more blessings, wealth and fame,” since he is not in the mood to strive hard, he will possibly say, “Whatever I have so far is sufficient for me.” However, if he is told, “Should you not strive hard, your assets and wealth will be lessened and your position lowered,” since it is a question of loss, he will move in a bid to prevent loss. And perhaps it is because of this reason that, although “giving glad tidings” and “warning” are linked together, the Qur’an lays more stress on the element of “warning”:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا ۚ وَإِنْ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ

***Indeed We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news and as a warner; and there is not a nation but a warner has passed in it. (35:24)***

Therefore, at the beginning of invitation, attraction and repulsion are used side by side. There are wisdom and argumentation as well as promise of paradise and warning of hell and fire. Particularly in the traditions [*ahadith*], paradise and hell are sometimes described in a very attractive and stimulating manner while at other times in a very frightening and poignant fashion.

## **2. Preaching must be “Beautiful”**

Now, the other point is that once the term of wisdom is finished and the turn of preaching or admonition comes, it must be “beautiful preaching” or “good advice.” That is, although preaching consists of threats and warnings and its content is not pleasant, the manner of expressing it must be good and pleasant even if the addressee is a corrupt person like the Pharaoh. God said to Musa (Moses) and his brother Harun (Aaron) thus:

اٰذْهَبَا اِلٰى فِرْعَوْنَ اِنَّهُ طَغٰى فَقُوْلَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيْنًا لَعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ اَوْ يَخْشٰى

***Let the two of you go to Pharaoh. Indeed he has rebelled. Speak to him in a soft manner; maybe he will take admonition or fear. (20:43-44)***

That is, Pharaoh has rebelled and the substance of your speech must be such that he would be frightened but your threatening word must be expressed in a soft and mild manner. From the beginning, he should not be treated harshly and ruthlessly. In doing the Islamic call, if you shout and behave aggressively at the beginning, the addressee will close his mind and ears and never listen to what you say. But if you convey in a mild and soft manner the same repulsive message with threatening content, it may have an effect on him.

### 3. Debate and Argumentation

In the same verse, after preaching or admonition, debate has been mentioned:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۚ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

***Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best. (16: 125)***

In order to lead them toward the path of guidance, you debate and discuss with them, but in the debate, argue in the best possible manner. In engaging in disputation also, even if you subdue the other party and defeat him in an academic discussion, it must still not be done beyond the periphery of fairness, proper decorum and courtesy. In defeating him, you should not use any fallacious argument. Try to convince him so that the truth will be made clear to him, and not that you do everything so as to expel him from the scene no matter how.

### The Reason behind Refraining from Repulsion in the Islamic Call

It can be said that in all stages of Islamic call, be it in wisdom, preaching or debate, there is no room for violence and repulsion at all, and although the substance of the message may include hellfire and tribulations therein, the way of imparting the message must be pleasant and in such a manner that the addressee would will to listen and be persuaded to think. Once you talk in such a manner that he wills to listen to you, then he will think about it and say to himself, “If this hellfire or its chastisement is true, I will be subjected to eternal damnation. So, it is better for me to research and find out for myself what the truth of the matter is.”

This is especially true given the fact that on the issue of profit and loss, the amount of probability alone is not the determinant; rather, it is the outcome of probable harm in the contingent that will determine the final result. That is, in certain cases although the probability of profit or gain seen is possibly so little and the contingent is strong, it stimulates us to move.

For example, if a five-year old child says to you, “In the stair where you are, there is a live wire. Be careful, lest you bumped on it.” Here, in terms of probability, its veracity is very weak because how does a five-year old child know about a live wire? Maybe it is just a telephone wire, rope, or something else. How does he know that it is live? Maybe it is just a cutoff wire placed on the middle of the stair. In sum, what this five-year old child is saying is not highly probable in our view. Yet, on the other hand, it is a question of life and death. It is live wire and one cannot take it as a joke. Therefore, although its veracity is probably weak, it is contingently strong. So, upon going up the stair, you are totally careful as to where the wire is located and you pass by cautiously.

In our discussion, it is also contingently very strong. It is beyond the question of life and death. What is at stake is eternal damnation in hellfire as such. If I mention the same hell and fire in a mild language and in a sympathetic and sincere manner, there is a strong probability that the addressee will listen to me and be affected by it.

## **How Islam Deals with Personal and Private Behaviors**

Now, if we go beyond the work of Islamic propagation and talk about the society, government, and behavior of individuals and its impact upon the society, the issue is somewhat different. Here, sometimes it is a clandestine act and its benefit and harm are clearly known and it has no significant impact upon the society. An example is the night supererogatory prayer. At the middle of the night, a person wants to rise up from his bed and without anyone knowing it, he performs the supererogatory prayer.

Or, God forbid, a person finds a bottle of wine and drinks it right there at home. In such cases, to employ attraction is so good. That is, for instance, the rules and effects of night supererogatory prayer are to be mentioned to him so as to motivate him to perform it regularly, or the harms brought by drinking alcoholic beverages are to be explained sympathetically, mildly and friendly to the second person so as to convince him to shun it. Yet, in such cases which are merely personal and totally private, Islam has not given permission to use compulsion, naked force and violent measures.

Even if you incidentally become aware of such an offence, you have no right to tell him, “Yes, I saw and came to know that you committed such an evil act,” let alone informing others of it. This is a secret of a Muslim and it must remain secret, and no one has the right to divulge it. If while alone, a person, God forbid, committed a sin and you saw it, you would say, “I saw you doing something evil,” chances will make him think thus, “Since my sin is now made public and people have become aware of it, it no longer makes any difference if I do the same in private or in public.”

In any case, divulging such a sin and evil deed is not permissible from the viewpoint of Islam, let alone dealing with the offender violently and physically, and punishing him. Yes, if through a certain way you can do something indirectly, while he is not aware that you have witnessed him doing such an abominable act, and admonish him so as for him to abandon it, there is no problem.

## **The Islamic Approach of Dealing with Social Behaviors**

There are also acts whose benefit and harm go beyond the doer and permeate to the society. Of course, this effect is sometimes direct, for instance, when one is harassed and oppressed or his right is trampled upon. At other times, it is indirect. Regarding the manifestations of the indirect impact of an action of individuals upon the society and people around them, there may be disputes and differences (of opinion). Yet, there is no doubt that in certain cases, an action has apparently no effect on other members of the society but through a scrutiny it becomes clear that it is not so.

An example of it is a wicked act done in public and in front of others because doing so is an indirect promotion of the act and gradually its wickedness will become normal in the eyes of people. If father and mother tell a lie in front of their child, it will be indirectly inculcated to him that there is no problem in telling a lie. It is because of this indirect impact upon the society that Islam forbids “feigning debauchery” and in relation to some acts, it does not permit them to be performed publicly and in front of others. That is, if a person does something secretly without anyone knowing about it, he has only committed a sin but legally speaking, he has not done any crime or offence, and the Islamic government will not prosecute him. However, if he wants to do the same in public, it will be regarded as a crime and he will be penalized for it.

Regarding acts that have social repercussions and are considered as violation of the rights of others, in case this repercussion is indirect all the fair-minded people of the world unanimously say that a collective police power called “government” is necessary to check these violations, and this fact is not only confined to Islam and religions of divine origin. In addition to these cases, if an act has spiritual harm for the society, Islam not only permits but in fact obliges the government to intervene and prevent it, and this point is one of the fundamental differences between Islam and liberal-democratic systems. According to the liberal and populist governments, for instance, if someone with indecent dress appears in the public, this is treated as a personal act and no one has the right to complain against him. But Islam forbids this act because of its destructive spiritual and moral effects, and anyone doing so will be treated as an offender.

## **Penal laws as the Factor in Fostering Social Order**

In principle, there is no difference of opinion that actions which are socially destructive and infringing on the rights of others must be prevented, and it is obvious that in undertaking this task the governments are in need of legal backing. The laws existing in society can be divided into two categories, viz. civil and penal laws. The civil laws deal with the rights and liberties of the members of the society such as the laws pertaining to commerce, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and the like. Meanwhile, penal laws deal with the violation of civil laws. That is, after the rights and liberties of individuals are determined in the civil laws, in the penal laws if a person tramples upon these rights and liberties, he must be penalized.

One of the important tasks of every state and government is this implementation of the penal laws. The main factor in fostering social order and maintaining it is these penal laws. If the states merely focus on the civil laws and determining the civil rights of the members of the society and do not take into account the penalties for the violators of these laws, in most cases we will witness violation and disregard for those laws. We will witness that if there are no fines and traffic aides, very few people will pay attention to the red light, ‘no parking’ sign, and ‘one way’ traffic sign. What restrains the thieves and killers is fear of prison and execution. Had it not been so, they would easily have robbed the assets of people and killed them. Therefore, one of the most significant and fundamental functions of the states is the implementation of penal laws and without which, social order, state and government will be rendered

meaningless.

## **Repulsion as the Natural Essence of the Penal Laws**

It is natural that the implementation of penal laws will entail repulsion, because nobody is pleased with imprisonment, fine and lashes and these acts are essentially harsh even if they are done cheerfully and with a smile. If, because of an offence committed, you smilingly say to the offender in utmost respect, “Please remain in this room for 15 years,” or “Please keep your body unclothed in order to receive 100 lashes,” or “Please kneel down so that your head be cut off,” such smile and respect will not change anything and have no effect on the harshness essentially existing in those acts. Who wants to be behind bars for 15 years away from his wife, children, friends, and relatives?

If a traffic officer who is well-mannered, courteously and with utmost humility and respect fines us with only five thousand *tumans* for not stopping at red light, we will be hurt and even if we do not express it verbally, we actually despise him, let alone if a 500,000 *tumans* fine, languishing in prison, or physical torture such as lashes is involved. At any rate, nobody can deny the intrinsic harshness and repulsion existing in the penal laws, and as we said, the existence of government without the existence of these laws is also impossible. Therefore, every government will essentially and intrinsically entail a series of violence and repulsion.

Of course, we can say that technically speaking, violence is applied to the cases that bring about physical trouble such as if a person is beaten or his hands being amputated. However, when fine, imprisonment and similar punishments are involved, even if we do not regard them as manifestations of violence, at least they cultivate a sort of repulsion and usually the people implementing such punishments are not satisfied or pleased with themselves. Thus, in essence, government without penal laws is not possible and penal laws are in one way or another associated with violence or repulsion.

Government cannot afford to have no power of repulsion. The existence of such a government is nonsense because one of the main philosophies of government is that if there are those who are not willing to submit to the law, it will compel them to obey the law. Of course, force and violence have different forms; sometimes it takes the form of a fine; at times, imprisonment; at other times, exile and banishment; yet at other times, lashes; and lastly, killing and execution as well.

## **Assiduousness in Distinguishing between Personal and Social Dimensions of Action**

Repulsion is employed in the different cases of social laws, and as long as an evil act has totally personal and private dimension, and has no social dimension whatsoever, the state has the right to exact any punishment and employ repulsion. Of course, it must be noted that if a person, while in isolation and does not want anyone to know about it, committed an offence, which in the legal parlance

is regarded as a crime and this offence was proven before a judge in the court, the Islamic punishment will be exacted against him. This is so because this offence was done in private and he did not want anyone else to know it, but since others have come to know of it and the case has been made public, it acquires a social dimension and because of the destructive social impacts it may have, it will be subjected to punishment. Even if a person is be informed of his criminal act, it cannot be a manifestation of “divulging of debauchery”, which in the Islamic law is unlawful and forbidden:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

***Indeed those who want indecency to spread among the faithful there is a painful punishment for them in the world and the Hereafter. (24: 19)***

## **Islam’s Attitude toward the Non-Muslim Countries and their Citizens**

The issue of attraction and repulsion with respect to those who are beyond the frontiers of the Islamic country requires a detailed and relatively long discussion, which cannot be covered in the remaining time, but since we want to start discussing a new issue from the next session, in a bid to complete the discussion we shall concisely deal with some relevant subjects here.

Those who are outside the territory of the Islamic government are of two types; they are either those who intend to render a blow and hatch conspiracy against the Islamic government and to undermine and overthrow it, or those who do not have such an intention. In other words, either those who have evil intentions and want to give trouble to the Islamic country and its people, or those who are not like so. If they do not have a plot to create trouble, and undermine and overthrow the Islamic government, Muslims have no right to commit aggression against them, and justice and kindness must be observed in dealing with them:

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 you homes that you deal with them with kindness and justice. (60:8)***

So long as they are not inimical and have no conspiracy, they must be treated with kindness and magnanimity, and sometimes, they must even be dealt with more kindness compared to individuals inside the country so as for them to be attracted to Islam. One of the individuals to whom the *zakat* may

be given are the so-called “those hearts are to be reconciled (*al-mu'allafatu-qulubuhum*)” namely, non-Muslims living in the neighborhood of the Islamic country. In order to foster feelings of friendship and love toward Islam and Muslims in their hearts, they will be offered shares of the *zakat*. So, with respect to this group of non-Muslims, not only should they not be treated harshly and repulsively, but they must also be attracted.

However, if they are inimical and they hatch a plot, they must be confronted decisively:

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَن تَوَلَّوهُمْ ۗ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

***Allah forbids you only in regard to those who made war against you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them. (60:9)***

You should have attraction with respect to the first group, but with regards to this group which is inimical to Islam and Muslims, you should have total repulsion, and suppress and not give them any chance.

We again emphasize that the use of repulsion is only related to those who officially and openly act against Islam and Muslims, and there is no such ruling in relation to other than this group. The Qur'an even says that if it is the scene of battle and the army of infidels and polytheists is on one side while that of Muslims is on the other busy fighting in battle array, if one of the polytheists, for example, raises a white flag or through any other way conveys to you thus, “I have an academic question and the issue has become ambiguous for me is Islam the truth or not? Is my war against your rightful and justified, or wrong and false?”

In this case, Islam says that Muslims are duty-bound to go and bring this person to the camp of Islam while providing him with escorts and guards, and to engage him in a conversation. They must answer his questions and try to convince him through proof and argumentation. And then if he wants to return, while providing him with escorts and guards and without the least annoyance committed against him, again he must be sent to his original station and place away from the danger of being attacked by the army of Islam. Thereafter, if he decides to fight, they have to fight with him, and if not, he must be released so that he can go wherever he wants:

وَإِن أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ حَتَّىٰ يَسْمَعَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أَبْلِغْهُ مَأْمَنَهُ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

***If any of the polytheists seeks asylum from you, grant him asylum until he hears the Word of Allah. Then convey him to his place of safety. (9:6)***

In which legal system you know there is such a thing? Islam says that Muslim student has his own place

even if an inimical infidel, who has a sword in his hand and in a state of war against you, has a question, you have to answer him. We are followers of that school. Who says that the Islamic government and system cannot tolerate a questioner and gives the reply at the point of a sword? Islam which behaves in such a manner to an infidel with a sword in his hand will never be such (as alleged) in dealing with the “insiders” and Muslims. The initial policy of Islam is anchored in proof (wisdom), good advice, and polite argumentation, but if it ends up in animosity and conspiracy and the one who cannot argue in an academic dispute is busy undermining and plotting against the Islamic system, he should not be given mercy and the least chance. Rather, he should be faced with utmost force and decisiveness.

## The View of Islam on Violent Actions and the Power of Repulsion

Hence, Islam has given the order to act violently and to employ the power of repulsion in two instances; one is when a Muslim or a non-Muslim within the Islamic society has violated the rights of others and committed oppression and treachery against them, and the other is when a person outside the jurisdiction of the Islamic government engages in opposition and conspiracy against Islam and the Islamic countries. Of course, in many cases, penalties and types of punishment to be implemented with respect to the violators of law and the infringers of the rights of others cannot be discerned by reason and they have been directly specified by God the Exalted Himself, the Legislator of Law. Yet, after determining the punishment, it must be implemented as decisive as possible against the violators. Regarding those who have spread corruption and committed debauchery, the Holy Qur’an says:

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ ۖ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ  
الْآخِرِ ۖ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

***As for the fornicatress and the fornicator, strike each of them a hundred lashes, and let not pity for them overcome you in Allah’s law, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day, and let their punishment be witnessed by a group of the faithful. (24:2)***

Such a violator must be suppressed as forcefully as possible and no Muslim, if he really believes in God and the Day of Resurrection, should have even an iota of pity and compassion toward him. The severity and hardness of such a punishment is enhanced once we realize that these lashes should be made in the presence of people who witness the punishment to be meted out by the two fornicators. Naturally, in such a condition, apart from enduring the heavy punishment, their reputation will also be tarnished. They must be punished in such a manner that no one would dare to commit the same act.

## Summary of the Discussion on Attraction and Repulsion in Islam

The limitation of attraction and repulsion in Islam means that in case a person in the Islamic society directly or indirectly violates the spiritual and material rights of others or a person outside the jurisdiction

of the Islamic state rises up in opposition to Islam and the Islamic country and hatches conspiracy, in both cases force must be utilized while in other cases, either only attraction is to be employed, or repulsion accompanied by attraction and mild and kind expression which at least reduces the degree of repulsion. In the case where there is force and repulsion, God has explicitly defined its limit and boundary in many cases or stated its general ruling. In whatever situation, we should not go beyond the limit and boundary at the time of resorting to force and violence:

الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ ۚ فَاِمْسَاكٌ بِمَعْرُوفٍ اَوْ تَسْرِيحٌ بِاِحْسَانٍ ۚ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ اَنْ تَاْخُذُوْا مِمَّا آتَيْتُمُوْهُنَّ شَيْئًا اِلَّا اَنْ يَخَافَا اَلَّا ۚ يُقِيْمَا حُدُوْدَ اللّٰهِ ۚ فَاِنْ خِفْتُمْ اَلَّا يُقِيْمَا حُدُوْدَ اللّٰهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهٖ ۚ تِلْكَ حُدُوْدُ اللّٰهِ فَلَا تَعْتَدُوْهَا ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُوْدَ اللّٰهِ فَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُوْنَ

***These are Allah's bounds, so do not transgress them, and whoever transgresses the bounds of Allah it is they who are the wrongdoers. (2:229)***

In conclusion, let us review again the subjects of the previous meeting. If you remember, I said that the topic of attraction and repulsion in Islam can be approached in three dimensions and forms:

- (1) Does the set of Islamic teachings and laws attract some elements for the followers, or does it only repulse some elements, or both the two?
- (2) Is the set of Islamic teachings and laws attractive to all human beings, or is it repulsive to all of them?
- (3) In attracting non-Muslims to Islam as well as in relation to its followers, does Islam employ attractive methods only, or repulsive methods only, or both the two kinds of methods?

On this topic, we focused more on answering the third question and dealing with that aspect, and with respect to the other two questions, a considerable discussion was not made, and since in view of the importance of other topics, we decide to deal with a new subject, we conclude here the topic on attraction and repulsion, and I hope that in the future programs we can complete this discussion.

## Question and Answer

**Question:** Indisputably, in Islam there is both attraction and repulsion, but regarding the word “harshness,” the question is that the use of this concept can be examined from two perspectives. The first perspective is this: Is this concept a religious terminology and has it been mentioned in the Qur’an and traditions? The answer is seemingly negative, because in the Qur’an this word is never used and more or less, we do not have it in the traditions. That is, it has been used very rarely. In sum, it is not the case that in the parlance of the Qur’an and traditions, harshness has been advanced as a virtue. In Persian also, this concept is not positively value-laden, used as the equivalent of ruthlessness and is different from “hardship” and “decisiveness”. And it should not be regarded as synonymous with

decisiveness, which is positively value-laden. A war commander may sometimes be “decisive” and may also be “harsh”, and these two are not identical. Man may also perform harshly even an emotional act (such as kissing).

The other point regarding this word is that assuming that such a terminology exists in the Qur’an, traditions and Islamic lexicography and that we accept that it is equivalent to the concept of decisiveness which has a positive connotation, yet by observing the existing conditions and issues, both in the rational and textual terms with respect to the use of this terminology, there is a hindrance and one must use a different term. But the rational perspective, reason dictates that once it is spoken in a society and place that this word has a negative connotation and it is understood to mean ruthlessness, by using this word, it is not without reason that repulsion is fostered. This is while by using a different word which connotes the same concept, the problem can easily be solved. From the textual perspective, however, the Qur’an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقُولُوا رَاعِنَا وَقُولُوا انظُرْنَا وَاسْمَعُوا ۗ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

***O you who have faith, do not say ra’ina, but say unzurna. (2: 104)***<sup>1</sup>

Since the enemy is misusing the meaning of *ra’ina*, shatter the same implication within the framework of other terms and say, *unzurna* so as to put a stop to this misuse by the enemy.

In other words, it can be said that the discussion on harshness is applied to the goodness or badness of an act while at other times, it is applied to the goodness or badness of the actor or doer. For example, sometimes there is talk about killing. Killing is an action which is essentially harsh. Slaughtering a chicken or a lamb is essentially a harsh action. Meanwhile, there are times when the discussion is related to the actor or doer, viz. the one who wants to slaughter the chicken or lamb. The actor or doer can perform this act harshly and ruthlessly. He can also do the same without such harshness.

The discussion is about the harshness of the actor and not the harshness of the action. That is, in implementing the laws of Islam, we should not associate the harshness to ourselves. It is like the Prophet (S) who is “*the mercy to the worlds*” and has an excellent moral conduct. It is true that in facing the infidels he was hard and decisive, but harshness could not be seen in his action.

In a nutshell, the question is: Why although in all dictionaries the word *khushunat* is synonymous with ruthlessness which has a negative connotation, without any reason we persist in using this word and thus foster repulsion and pave the way to the misuse of the enemy while by changing the term the problem can be easily solved?

Answer: Of course, I have already mentioned some of the subjects which must be raised in reply to this question in a television debate about the topic of *khushunah*, and the colleagues may refer to the subjects published in the *Partu Weekly*.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, what I can explain here is this: Sometimes, the discussion is about the meaning of *khushunah* in our culture and at times, the discussion is about the meaning of the word in the different customs and cultures.

If someone says, “In our culture, the word *harshness* is used to mean *mercilessness*,” we first of all have to clarify the meaning of “mercy” so as to make clear its opposite word which is *mercilessness* or *harshness*. Of course, we have to say that although in our culture the concept of harshness may be associated with mercilessness, it is not so in other customs and cultures. For example, in the legal and political parlance, harshness does not have such a meaning. This word is basically Arabic, and in no Arabic dictionary has this word been defined as *mercilessness*. The adjective of this word; i.e. *hashin*, rather means *rough* or *coarse* and the noun means roughness or coarseness while its antonym is *layyin* which means *soft*, and the noun *linah* means *softness*.

Therefore, according to Arabic lexicography, *khushunah* is not the antonym of *rahmah* [mercy] let alone to mean *mercilessness*; rather, it means roughness and coarseness while its opposite is softness. Of course, it is such that when a concept from the realm of natural and physical sciences is transferred to the realm of social sciences and humanities, it will acquire a new manifestation, but the root of the lexicographic meaning is preserved.

Regarding the point mentioned in the question that this word has never been mentioned in the Qur’an, also mentioned very rarely in traditions and is not treated as a virtue in our current culture, we have to say that this claim is not correct. Of course, in the Qur’an the root-word “*kh-sh-n*” and the word *khushunah* do not appear but its synonym is mentioned. And according to the grammatical and literary rules, we have also the right to put one of two synonymous words in place of the other or vice versa. Hence, if the synonym of the word *khushunah* really appears in the Qur’an, this claim that the concept of *khushunah* is not used in the Qur’an will not be correct. Its synonym which is mentioned in the Qur’an is the word *ghilzah* from the root-word “*gh-l-z*”:

وَلْيَجِدُوا فِيكُمْ غِلْظَةً

**..And let them find severity [ghilzah] in you. ..(9: 123)**

In another place, it says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ وَمَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۗ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

**Wage jihad against the faithless and the hypocrites, and be severe [wa'ghluz] with them. Their**

**refuge shall be hell. (66:9)**

This verse is repeated two times in the Qur'an in *Surah at-Tahrim* and *Surah at-Tawbah* (or, *Bara'ah*). Elsewhere, it also says thus:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ ۚ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۚ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

**It is by Allah's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. (3: 159)**

There is also this verse:

... وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ ...

**Over which are [assigned] angels, severe and mighty. (66:6)**

All in all, the root-word “gh-l-z” has been repeated eleven times in the Qur'an and as I have said, *ghilzah* and *khushunah* are synonymous and have basically identical meanings. Therefore, given the use of the word *ghilzah* in the Qur'an, it cannot be said that the concept of *khushunah* has not been mentioned therein. Similarly, in one instance the concept of *rahmah* “mercy” has also been mentioned in opposition to the concept of “hardness” or “severity” [*shiddah*]:

... مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ

**Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful among themselves. (48:29)**

Talking about the traditions, we have to say that the root-word *kh-sh-n* has appeared in the traditions and in some cases it has been treated as a virtue. For example, the Commander of the Faithful Imam 'Ali ('a) has been reported to have said:

خَشِينُ فِي ذَاتِ اللَّهِ

“He was severe for the sake of Allah.”<sup>3</sup>

All this is according to the lexical examination and that of the Qur'an and traditions through which it became clear that what had been claimed in the question related to this section does not hold war.

Now, concerning the lexical discussion and the uses of the term, does *khushunah* really mean *birahmi*? I am asking you: If, as existing in the penal laws of Islam, because of committing of sin and crime, the right hand and left foot of a person are to be amputated while the community ostracize him and nobody respect him, is it mercy or mercilessness? If, as also existing in the penal laws of Islam, a fire is kindled and a person is to be thrown there, or his hands and feet are tied and he is to be thrown down from the top of a mountain, or because of stealing a golden coin, his four fingers are to be amputated before the people, are these acts a sign of mercy or ruthlessness?

In the question, there had been a correct distinction between harshness of the action and harshness of the actor, and the goodness or badness of the act and the goodness or badness of the actor. Also, decisiveness had been correctly distinguished from harshness. If a person passes by the red light and the traffic officer asks him to stop and after greeting and salutation, tells him cheerfully and politely, “Since you made a violation, you shall have a fine of five thousand *tumans*,” there is decisiveness here while there is no harshness. But the discussion is that *harshness* in Islam we are referring to is not solely decisiveness.

Some acts are essentially harsh and the decisiveness in doing so is always accompanied by a kind of harshness. When the executioner comes, beheads someone with a sword, the nature of this act cannot be done with a smile and cheerfulness. Many people have no endurance to witness such a scene; their faces will get pale; and they will even forget to smile. Even some of them will become unconscious in witnessing it. As such, how can it be said that the agent of such an act performs the beheading only “decisively” but with kindness and a smile?! This act is essentially harsh and, naturally, the one doing so is also harsh and is regarded as a proponent of harshness. To distinguish between harshness of the action and harshness of the actor has no room in such actions.

Furthermore, in essence, those who raise this criticism to us do not refer to the harshness of the actor; rather, their criticism exactly pertains to the harshness of the act. They say, “These things you are doing are harsh and they should not be done.” Even if we do these acts with kindness and a smile, the problem will not be solved. The discussion is not on our decisiveness but non-harshness; rather, all criticisms are related to the punishments themselves.

The origin of this issue can be traced from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of its articles states that all harsh punishments should be absolutely abolished.<sup>4</sup> The very obvious manifestations of such punishments which they highlight are execution and some others like amputation of hands, lashes, and any punishment which is accompanied by physical torture. Today, whenever there is a speech about human rights, and the countries in the world, America at the head of which, condemn us for alleged human rights violations, their criticism is not “Why do you frown and not smile at the time of executing or giving lashes to the criminals?” Instead, the focus is on the very existence of such punishments: “Why such punishments are implemented?”

They say, “These punishments are related to the age when the human race did not have such a level of

culture and civilization, and the people of the different tribes and countries were in constant war, killing and pillaging each other. But now, the human race has become civilized and all become polite, respecting one another, and even if they, for example, want to drop an atomic bomb on a city, they will drop their bomb politely, calmly and silently, and go!! In such a period, the harsh punishments in the form of execution and lashing should no longer exist.” The wave of this propaganda is so strong and effective that unfortunately, even some clerics and turbaned men are influenced by it and are explicitly writing in their newspapers that these punishments are inhuman and cruel and must be abolished.

Of course, this expression of opinions is not new, for I can also remember that during the first years of the Revolution, the lawyers of the National Front issued a declaration that the Islamic law of retaliation is inhuman and cruel and must be removed. At the time, the eminent Imam (may Allah the Exalted be pleased with him) stood firmly in facing them and issued a decree on their apostasy. As they were browbeaten by the Imam, for many years they crawled toward their hiding places, but today they again openly and freely raise their impudent and presumptuous voices in the public gatherings and newspapers.

Thus, it is not a talk about the person and actor as to why he does not smile and is not polite. The criticism is on the actions and punishments themselves, which, they say, are cruel and inhuman. The question is this: Should these acts which they regard as harsh be there or not? They say, “There should be no harshness” and by *harshness* they refer to such punishments like execution, lashes and retaliation. We also want to negate their contention; therefore, we have no option but to use the same word and say, “In our opinion, *harshness* should be there and of course, what we mean by *harshness* is the decree on execution and lashing.”

We do not have any motive to use this word, but since it is mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that we also want to refute the Declaration’s contention and confront it, we have no option but to put forth the word *khushunat*. We say, “These acts that are harsh according to you must be there. The reason for this is that they have been categorically stated in the text of the Qur’an, and we either have to reject the Qur’an God forbid or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and a Muslim will never condemn and discard the Qur’an merely for the sake of the Declaration.

The Qur’an states:

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ ۖ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ  
الْآخِرِ ۖ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

***As for the fornicatress and the fornicator, strike each of them a hundred lashes, and let not pity for them overcome you in Allah’s law, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day, and let their punishment be witnessed by a group of the faithful. (24:2)***

The explicit manifestation of this noble verse, the true faith in God and the Last Day, is that not a speck of pity should be found in the heart of a person for the fornicating man and woman who are receiving lashes. It is natural that once there is no mercy, there will be ruthlessness. The Qur'an says that the faithful is he who shall have no pity in this context. Of course, it should not be an unjust ruthlessness. In any case, a Muslim should either accept the Qur'an and this verse and act upon it, or follow the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and defend it.

Again, the Qur'an states:

وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا جِزَاءً

***As for the thief, man and woman, cut off their hands as a requital for what they have earned.***

**(5:38)**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that this decree is cruel and inhuman. At this juncture, a Muslim should choose either the Qur'an or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the same vein, the view of the Qur'an is this:

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

***There is life for you in retribution, O you who possess intellects! Maybe you will be God-wary!***

**(2:179)**

According to the Qur'an, the life and wellbeing of society will be ensured when the punishment of murder is execution, but the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that execution as a punishment is inhuman and it must be abolished.

This is a cultural conspiracy. Through this hullabaloo and widespread propaganda, they want to put us in a passive position that our religious authorities will not dare to say, "We have such laws." On the contrary, we have to stand firmly and decisively and say, "Yes, there are execution, amputation of hands and burning in fire in Islam, and if you call them harsh, we say: Of course, there is harshness in Islam and we are not afraid of being accused of harshness." We do not show ceremonial courtesies to anyone and we do not like to play with words. If we really follow the Qur'an, then it has permitted these things which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regards as cruel. In fact, the Qur'an has considered them necessary and obligatory. While addressing the Muslims, the Qur'an says that they should be like this with respect to the infidels:

وَلْيَجِدُوا فِيكُمْ غُلْظَةً

***And let them find severity in you. (9: 123)***

It does not say, “And let them find severity in *your action*.” It rather says, “...*in you*.” That is, the violators should feel severity in your beings, and your behavior with them should make them realize that we will not be affected by our feelings and emotions “If I do something wrong, they will not pity me.” But if we really accept the Qur’an and that we are Muslims, we have to say that these things exist in Islam and the Qur’an, and with respect to them, we are not afraid of anybody:

الَّذِينَ يُبَلِّغُونَ رَسُولَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَخْشَوْنَهُ وَلَا يَخْشَوْنَ أَحَدًا إِلَّا اللَّهَ ۖ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ حَسِيبًا

***Such as deliver the messages of Allah and fear Him, and fear no one except Allah. (33:39)***

Even if we are afraid of stating the decree of God and the Qur’an, at least we should not affirm their statements, write articles and deliver speeches here and there in negating it. Of course, not everybody has the courage to engage in this venture. Those who can take a step along this way are the ones who are not afraid of the reproaches and censures of both the friends and foes:

يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ

***They wage jihad in the way of Allah, not fearing the blame of any blamer. (5:54)***

For us to say that there is decisiveness in Islam does not answer in any way the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration says, “The punishments of Islam are harsh and they must be abolished.” In reply, we have to say, “These harsh punishments exist in Islam and they must remain in force.” Just for the sake of pleasing others, we cannot accept some of the laws and decrees of Islam and the Qur’an and reject some others. To have faith in some while denying some others is true unbelief:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلًا ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ حَقًّا ۖ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا

***Those who... say, ‘We believe in some and disbelieve in some’ and seek to take a way in between it is they who are truly faithless. (4: 150–151)***

A true Muslim who believes in the Qur’an must not be heedless of the unambiguous decree of God just because of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and sacrifice his religion before the altar of the Declaration. If an act which people are not pleased with was not supposed to be done, the Holy Prophet (S) would neither abuse Lat and ‘Uzza<sup>5</sup> nor break the idols of people. The order of the Qur’an is for you to categorically declare disavowal of the enemies of God and His religion, and also to be repulsive of

them both in words and deeds. In this regard, the Qur'an says that the action of Prophet Abraham (‘a) should be a pattern of behavior:

قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ

***There is certainly a good exemplar for you in Abraham and those who are with him. (60:4)***

What is the act of Ibrahim (‘a) and his followers because of which we have to cling to them? The reply is mentioned in the continuation of the verse:

إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَاءٌ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ

***When they said to their people, ‘Indeed we repudiate you and whatever you worship besides Allah. We disavow you. (60:4)***

The Qur'an says, “You have to emulate Ibrahim for standing in front of people and saying very explicitly, ‘I repudiate you as well as that which you worship’.” This is the order of the Qur'an, and not for us to say, “We should have tolerance, respect the traditions of people, and go in front of their idol and pay homage to it because it is venerable for them!” The Qur'an does not permit such a thing to anybody. A true Muslim should decisively say, “No way for the idol!” The verse continues to say that you should not suffice yourselves with it; rather, you should enhance your reaction and the severity of your statement and say thus:

وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ

***And between you and us there has appeared enmity and hate forever, unless you come to have faith in Allah alone. (60:4)***

You have to say, “So long as you have such practices and ideas, we are inimical to you and our enmity will never come to an end.” You have to say, “Death to you and your idols!” “*Fie on you and what you worship. (21:67)*” These words and views are not mine; this is the categorical word of the Qur'an which commands, “Tell them, ‘We are inimical to you forever and have rancor and spite in our hearts unless you return to God’.” The issue will become more interesting if we pay attention to the continuation of the verse. It states that you have to follow Ibrahim and emulate his works with one exemption. Ibrahim did something that you are not supposed to emulate:

إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَأَسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ

***Except for Abraham's saying to his [step]father, 'I will surely plead forgiveness for you. (60:4)***

Ibrahim (‘a), with all the decisiveness he had, in his statement to Azar, who was his stepfather, showed a bit of courtesy, saying, “I will plead forgiveness for you.” The Qur’an says, “Do not imitate this act from Ibrahim and do not promise any polytheist to pray to God for his forgiveness.” If we really accept the Qur’an, so be it! This is the order of the Qur’an and a teaching it gives to its followers.

The meaning of the verse is completely explicit and clear, and it has no other interpretation. Its only alternative interpretation is that either we have to distort the Qur’an, or thrust it aside and trample it down for the sake of pleasing the world and the international community. We have to clarify our stance are we followers of the Qur’an or proponents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? We have to accept whatever is stated in the Qur’an, and not only the cases which are consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There are verses in the Qur’an about amputation of the thief’s hand, lashing of the fornicator and execution of the murderer.

Thus, notwithstanding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we have to accept those verses. If there is this verse in the Qur’an,

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ

***“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice, (16: 125)”***

There is also this verse in the Qur’an:

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةً وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ

***“Fight them until faithlessness is no more (8:39)”***

And we have to act upon both these injunctions. If a person recognizes God to be “the Most Merciful of all the merciful,” he should also recognize Him to be “severe in punishment.” We cannot say, “Approve!” where the Qur’an says that God is the Most merciful of all the merciful, while we say, “This is harshness and I do not accept it,” where it says,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

***“He is severe in punishment. (5:2)”***

God is “the Most Merciful in disposition of forgiveness and mercy”<sup>6</sup> and “very exacting at the time of giving exemplary punishment and chastisement.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the points of our weaknesses is that we conceal the truths of Islam and do not have the courage to state them as they are mentioned in the text of the Qur'an. Why are we afraid of expressing these truths? When the late Imam said, "Do not be afraid of being accused of harshness and retrogression," he was referring to these cases. Islam to which we want to invite people is a totality in which everything is knitted together, among which are these punishments which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights negates, and we cannot invite people to ten verses, hundred verses, or six thousand verses minus one verse of the Qur'an.

## Another Question and Answer

We know that the Qur'an and [the precepts of] Islam were not revealed overnight. Instead, they were sent down gradually and consistent with the understanding and progress of the people and society who were the Prophet's addressees. Similarly, there is no dispute that in view of the fact that we live in an Islamic country and that more than ninety or so percent of our people are Muslims, we are obliged to accept the totality of Islam without any omission and not to believe in some and deny some others.

The issue at stake is that we have today staged a revolution and as the impact of our revolution, Islam which was then about to be obliterated, has been revived again and now, we want to present it to the world and invite people toward it. On one hand, we know that through the propaganda campaign they launched, the Western and imperialist media have presented Islam as a cruel and retrogressive religion and Muslims of Iran in particular as terrorists, illogical and harsh people.

Under this condition, if we implement such laws like the amputation of the thief's hand and stoning to death of the adulterer, it will definitely have a very negative impact on the world's public opinion, and by taking a film footage of those scenes and showing the same, the Western media will portray a very hideous and repulsive image of Islam and Muslims. It is obvious that if Islam is presented to the world in such a manner, we will never succeed in conveying the message of Islam and the Qur'an to the people of the world, and nobody will be inclined to Islam.

The question is: Will this issue being expressed not prompt us to bring about a change in some of the laws of Islam for the sake of keeping loftier interests such as the preservation, propagation and spread of Islam? For example, in the case of murder, the initial decree is to give a hundred camels as blood-money, but now we have made an equivalent and we say that seven million *tumans* worth of money should be given. By coining some equivalents, can't we do anything to prevent the hideous image of Islam and let people turn toward Islam?

Of course, the answer to this question requires us to discuss each of the phrases of the question. Anyway, to the extent which is possible here, we shall discuss some issues.

Now, in our own country, we have conveyed (the message of) Islam that more than ninety or so percent of our people have also accepted it, and that there is no deviation and cause for concern, I have to say

that unfortunately, the truth is something else. Today, while nothing has already passed from the Revolution and the speeches of the Imam are broadcast daily over the radio and television, yet we can witness by ourselves that in some writings and speeches, the words of the Imam are distorted and quoted out of context. Today, you can observe in a newspaper whose proprietor is also a cleric that subjects which are against the explicit text of the Qur'an are published. In sum, through different factors, they influence the youth and create doubts and skepticisms in their hearts. Therefore, even in our country, there are serious concerns with respect to the presentation of Islam.

As to what has been said that the West has not yet heard and does not know anything about Islam and we have been trying to introduce Islam to the world, we have to say that this claim is not correct. Today, the Qur'an has been translated into almost all the living and important languages of the world and given the extent of the mass media, radio, television, satellite, and the Internet, actually everything is at the disposal of everyone, and we cannot say that the people of the world are not aware of Islam, especially given the widespread propaganda launched today by the news media particularly by the International Zionism against Islam.

Today, wherever you go around the world, Islam is known as a religion that does not recognize the rights of women and discriminates between the two sexes. I personally have visited many countries of the world and gone as far as the southern part of Chile and the same issues I have mentioned were raised, and I had live radio and television interviews regarding those issues. In short, for us to say that today there are people in the world who do not know anything about Islam and that we are just trying to introduce Islam is not true.

Anyway, even if there are such people, it is obvious that in introducing Islam to them, at the outset we will not come to state the fact that Islam amputates the thief's hand, gives lashes to the fornicator and sometimes stones him to death, and the like. Instead, one has to begin with the fundamentals and principles of the religion of Islam such as monotheism, prophethood and the Day of Resurrection so that the foundation of their faith will little by little be strengthened and gradually the other issues will be explained to them. In the beginning, we should content ourselves in making them ready to recite the testimony of faith [*shahadatayn*] and become Muslims, and of all the laws of Islam, to be willing to perform the daily obligatory prayers.

In sum, at the beginning we have to try to make them closer to Islam only to that extent and thereafter, to gradually inform them of other issues to such an extent that they can act upon. Of course, the policy of gradual conveyance, which is related to every community and country, is definitely not for the people of Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz.

Concisely, given such hypothetical manifestations, the general ruling is that if under a certain condition of time and place to implement a decree has irreparable great blows to Islam and the Islamic society, the Supreme Religious Authority has the right to exercise his guardianship authority [*wilayah*], and in accordance with the secondary authorities, which also exist in the text of Islamic laws, to order for the

temporary suspension of the decree's implementation.

Of course, such a thing is among the prerogatives of the jurist-guardian [*wali al-faqih*] only and nobody else has the right to do so. But the other point which must be noted is that there is difference between temporarily postponement of the implementation of a law in accordance with certain greater interests, and denial of the basis of the law and say that such a law does not exist in Islam or to say that in spite of the existence of this law in Islam, we do hereby declare that from now on, it is no longer part of Islam.

These two are very different from each other. To temporarily postpone the implementation of a decree is not confined to the penal laws of Islam. For instance, we ourselves witnessed that the eminent Imam (r), in accordance with greater interests, postponed the going to *Hajj* pilgrimage, which is one of the important forms of worship in Islam, of the Iranians for some years. To temporarily suspend the implementation of a decree is one thing and to deny the same is another story. In accordance with greater interests, it can be said that this decree is not to be implemented for the meantime, but to say, for example, that Islam has no decree on stoning to death and that the decree was only for the uncivilized and barbaric people at the time in the Arabian Peninsula is denial and abrogation of a definitive decree of Islam, something which nobody, not even the Holy Prophet (S), had the right to do.

In order to better clarify this fact, let us cite a historical example. During the early period of Islam when Muslims lived in extreme hardship, the people of Ta'if<sup>8</sup> came and gave a proposal to the Prophet (S), saying, "We are willing to become Muslims and forge alliance with you, but we have one condition. We are willing to recite the formula of faith [*shahadatayn*], not to worship the idols, and even to pay the *zakat*. Exempt us from only one thing and that is to perform prostration [*sajdah*]. We cannot do what you are doing—to prostrate down on earth. If you exempt us from doing prostration, we are ready to set aside the practice of idol-worship, to abandon other practices which you deemed abominable and to conclude treaty of alliance of siding with you in times of war."

Imagine the circumstances. The Muslims then had a small population and were in need of forces. Their economic power was weak and they were in need of financial assistance while the people of Ta'if were relatively wealthy. In sum, a group of people were willing, out of their own volition, to take not a single step, but a hundred steps closer to Islam, and they did not like to accept only one thing which was apparently simple. In this regard, the Qur'an says that the Prophet (S) of Islam, notwithstanding all excellences he had, was about to have a bit of doubt in declining their proposal; not that he would accept it, rather he wanted to decline it but in the bottom of his heart a very small amount of inclination was about to appear:

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ تَبَتَّنَاكَ لَفَدَّ كِدْتُ تَرَكَّنُ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا قَلِيلًا

***Had We not fortified you, certainly you might have inclined toward them a bit. (17:74)***

Had he inclined toward them, what would have happened? The reply is very severe in tone:

إِذَا لَأَنفَنَّاكَ ضِعْفَ الْحَيَاةِ وَضِعْفَ الْمَمَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا نَصِيرًا

***Then We would have surely made you taste a double [punishment] in this life and a double [punishment] after death, and then you would not have found for yourself any helper against Us. (17:75)***

That is to say, “Had you inclined toward them even a bit, We would have punished you twice that of others in this world and the Hereafter and no one could have helped you.”

You and I have our own respective stations. The issue of denial of religion and not acting faithfully upon its laws is something impossible even for the Prophet (S) himself, and even assuming that it is possible for him to do so, he would definitely be called to account, and God the Exalted is not joking with anyone in this case.

Meanwhile, concerning the issue of paying blood–money mentioned in the question, we have to say that it is not something that we ourselves have to coin. In fact, this issue has been mentioned in the traditions and existed from the very beginning, and even during that time, not only camels (as blood–money) were specified; rather, instead of camels, gold and silver which were monetary units at that time could also be given as blood–money.

- [1.](#) The Jews in ridiculing the Prophet (S) would say ra’ina [meaning, ‘have regard for us’] with a change of accent turning it into another word which made it a term of reproach. The Muslims are told to say unzurna [meaning, ‘give us a little respite] instead while addressing the Prophet (S), as there is no room in this term for such a distortion. [Qara’i]
- [2.](#) The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) is supposed to print and publish soon this debate in the form of a book.
- [3.](#) Bihar al–Anwar, vol. 21, p. 385, section [bab] 36, hadith 10.
- [4.](#) 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 5: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” [Trans.]
- [5.](#) Lat and ‘Uzza: idols mentioned in Sūrah an–Najm 53:19. [Trans.]
- [6.](#) Mafatih al–Jinan, Dī‘a al–Ifitah.
- [7.](#) Ibid.
- [8.](#) Ta’if: a city in the southern part of Hijaz (modern Saudi Arabia), 40 miles east of Mecca. [Trans.]

## **Chapter 10: The Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government (Part 1)**

The topic which has been allotted for this session is the mutual relationship between people and

government. Of course, the technical and exact description of this topic is “the mutual rights and duties of people and government” because “relationship” itself is not something specific which we have to deal academically and discuss all types of relationships ever imaginable, even those which have no legal underpinning and do not create a duty for anyone. Therefore, the topic of discussion is specifically allotted to the mutual relationship between people and government which assumes a legal form.

Before embarking on the main discussion, it is necessary to mention some fundamental points. (Of course, each of these points can be a separate subject for academic discussion and research.)

## **The Interrelatedness of Right and Duty**

Right and duty are two interrelated concepts, and in a sense, two sides of a single coin. When we say, “The people have rights over the government,” it means that “The government is obliged to grant those rights.” Similarly, when it is asked, “Which right or rights the government has over the people?” its other meaning is “What is the duty of people toward the government?” On the contrary, when we say, “What is the duty of the people or the government?” it means that the government (or people) has rights over the people (or government). So, merely to establish the right of one party requires the affirmation of duty of the other party. This is one of the meanings of the interrelation of right and duty.

One of the issues in the philosophy of law and the philosophy of politics is the same interrelatedness of right and duty. What is meant by the interrelatedness of right and duty, as we have stated, is that wherever a right is established for one over the other, the latter is obliged to give that right to its owner. Of course, there are types of correlativeness between right and duty, one of which is the same stated correlativeness.

## **Types of Interrelatedness among Concepts**

This is the further explanation: The interrelatedness of two things means that these two things are related and connected to each other, and it has different types. Sometimes, the interrelatedness is so extensive that the existing connection between them has been embedded in the meaning of these concepts; for example, the interrelatedness of two brothers whose bond of brotherhood is clear because the meaning of brother is that he has a brother or sister. It is not possible for the concept of brotherhood to appear anywhere and opposite to it, there is no brother or sister. The same is the case of the father-child relationship. If the concept of “father” is to be proved, opposite to it, the concept of “child” must also definitely exist. We do not call as “father” anyone who has no child. In any case, this is one type of interrelatedness among concepts which is embedded in the meaning of the words themselves.

Another type of interrelatedness is that which has not been embedded in the meaning of the word. Rather, rationally and logically, the party to which one of the two interrelated ones is credited, gives credit to the other party. In other words, the rational requirement of some terms is that another term opposite to it must exist. One example is the terms “government” and “people.” If there is no “people”

opposite of “government” the dominant apparatus ruling over them the “government” has no meaning at all and the concept of “government” will never be affirmed.

In this type of interrelatedness, the connection existing between concepts is not embedded in the meanings of the terms and the concept of the terms itself does not require it either. Instead, a certain external rational reason dictates that opposite of a concept which is credited, another concept is to be considered as well. For instance, in a dealing in which one type of exchange between goods takes place, the mere transfer of an item to the other party does not necessarily require the payment of money for the receipt of the item, for the other party may give the money and in return, not to receive the item.

Yet, interests require that the goods must be exchanged together, and anyone who produces an item which is more than his need should transfer it to another party in exchange for receiving an item he needs. So, the transfer of goods by itself does not necessarily require the payment of money in return for receiving an item, but the social interests dictate that business transactions and buying and selling must be proportionate. That is, when someone transfers a product to another person, he has to receive something in return which is valuable proportionate to his transferred product.

If a person is defrauded and cheated in a transaction, that transaction is invalid in the sense that the cheated one has the right after becoming aware of being cheated to cancel and revoke it. The reason for this is that here there is no proportion between the exchanged goods. If a glass instead of a pearl or diamond is sold to a person and a huge amount of money is received from him, in this case a transaction has taken place (because after all, glass has a value and is transferred to another party and the payment for it is received) but this transaction is invalid, and the fair-minded ones do not approve it. Why? It is not because the mere exchange or transfer of goods dictates that each of the two parties should definitely receive the proportional goods for the money paid; rather, it is because the social interests dictate so. As such, fraudulent transaction is invalid. The same is true in the case of “delusive” transaction which takes place without the other party being sure of which thing he has to give.

## **Two Types of Relationship between Right and Duty**

With respect to the topic of discussion, when we say, “The ruler has a right over the people,” the concept of the ruler’s having rights demands the observance of those rights by the people. There is sense in saying that one has right over the other, if his right needs not be observed. Similarly, the meaning of saying, “Someone owes me something” is that “That person has to give me that thing.” It cannot be said, “I have a claim upon a person” if that person could either pay it or not depending on his choice! This situation is not consistent with the concept of being a creditor.

The meaning of having a claim is that the debtor has to pay his debt unless the creditor relinquishes his right. Therefore, the concept of right requires that in return for it, there should be a party obligated to respect that right. This relationship of right and duty is a conceptual interrelatedness; that is, two things that are related, and that connection has been embedded in the meaning of the word. One relationship

of right and duty is this one in which wherever a right is regarded for a person, with respect to him the others are duty-bound to observe it.

The other correlation of right and duty is their relationship in terms of “balance.” That is, if we consider a right of person A over person B, in return we also have to determine a right of person B in relation to person A so as to observe balance between right and duty for the two parties. For example, whenever a right is determined for the ruler, a right is also to be considered for the people in relation to the ruler. These two rights are opposite to each other and like the two sides of a scale. Once there is a right for this party, there should also be a right for that party. Naturally, the right that person A has over person B is the duty of person A to observe. The same is true in the case of the right person B has over person A. So, the two rights and two duties are like the two pans of a scale which are balanced.

## **The Relationship between Right and Duty from the View Point of Imam Ali**

An elegant expression (if not to say the most beautiful expression) in this regard has been reported from Imam ‘Ali (‘a) in *Nahj al-Balaghah* when he says:

“It does not accrue to any person unless it accrues against him also, and right does not accrue against a person unless it also accrues in his favor... Then, from His rights, He, the Glorified, created certain rights for certain people against others. He made them so as to equate with one another. Some of these rights produce other rights. Some rights are such that they do not accrue except with others.”<sup>1</sup>

Even when God the Exalted determines a right for Himself over His servants, He determines a corresponding right for His servants.<sup>2</sup> Of course, given the fact that people do not have any right over God, how can it be possible for anyone to acquire any right over God? This requires a profound and extensive discussion which we will embark on at an appropriate time in the future. But here we shall point it out in brief.

## **Right and Duty in Relation to God**

A person acquires right over a thing when he has some kind of ownership of it. For instance, I have the right to speak because I have my own tongue. I have the right to live in my house because I am the owner of it. In view of this, if a person is supposed to have a right over God, does he own anything of God? Does it make any sense for me to say that a person is the owner of something of God?! God forbid, is he the owner of the Essence of God, His Attributes, His dominions, or His creation?

Of which thing is he the owner? He himself and everything else are owned by God. How can he have any right over God? Originally, no creature has any right over God unless God Himself determines that right for him. Yes, if a person does not believe in God, his reckoning is with God. But if a person accepts

God as the One Who has created the universe by His Will and the Owner of everything, there is no sense in imagining that somebody has a right over God. Everything that everybody owns belongs to God:

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

***To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. (2:255)***

Who else can have any right? Out of His grace and favor to His servants, corresponding to His right over them, He has set rights for them upon Himself:

وَجَعَلَ جَزَاءَهُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِثْلَ الثَّوَابِ تَفَضُّلاً مِنْهُ.

*He has laid upon Himself (the obligation of) their reward equal to several times the recompense as a mark of His bounty and the generosity that He is capable of.*<sup>3</sup>

The right that God has over His servants is the right of servitude. The servant should worship Him. If he does not worship, what must he do?

Hence, the right of God over His servants is obedience and worship. But He has not set this right as unilateral, but rather ordained, “I have right over you to ask you to worship Me, but you have also the right that if you worship Me, you shall receive reward from Me.” This is the right ordained by God. Even if you spend your entire life in worshipping God, still you cannot acquire any right over Him because while worshipping Him, what are you really doing? The tongue is owned by God; we move our tongues the way God wants us to do.

The body belongs to God; we move it as God dictates; we kneel down and prostrate. In short, whatever form of worship through whatever member or limb of the body it is, God has endowed and created that limb, and all our actions, movements and pauses are undertaken by the power and might of God. Given this, what right do we have over God? We do not have anything of our own which we can allocate to God, let alone to say, “We did this thing.

So, we have right over you.” The Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali (‘a) says in *Nahj al-Balaghah* to the effect: “If right is supposed to be unilateral, God is most deserving of right over His servants and for His servants to have no right over Him. But God is not pleased even with this. Once the right for Him was established to order His servants to obey Him and to have the right of obedience and servitude over the people, He also set a corresponding right for the people.”<sup>4</sup> They by themselves do not have such right but God has fixed it so as to establish the balance between the two sets of rights. Of course, apart from it, other rights have also been determined. For instance, in the Qur’an He says:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا إِلَى قَوْمِهِمْ فَجَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَاذْتَمَنَّا مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا ﴿٤٧﴾ وَكَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نَصْرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

***And it was a must for Us to help the faithful. (30:47)***

Who has given this right? What right do people themselves have? It is God Who has given this right to the faithful if they remain steadfast in their faith, He shall assist them:

وَلَقَدْ سَبَقَتْ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِنَّهُمْ لَهُمُ الْمَنْصُورُونَ وَإِنَّ جُنَدَنَا لَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ

***Certainly Our Decree has gone beforehand in favor of Our servants, the apostles, that they will indeed receive [Allah's] help, and indeed Our hosts will be the victors. (37:171-173)***

This is another right which God has given to His servants. Yet, another right is for Him to grant their reward in the Hereafter, and another right for Him is to make them victorious in this world. He shall grant succor to those who are treading His path, send hidden assistances and provide causes for them to emerge triumphant. What is given in return for this right? In return, it is to help God and His religion:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَنْصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنْصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

***O you who have faith! If you help Allah, He will help you and make your feet steady. (47:7)***

If they are steadfast in faith, God will also help them:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

***Indeed those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah!' and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, [saying,] 'Do not fear, nor be grieved!' (41:30)***

Anyhow, these two sets of rights are proportional and each of them requires duty. That is, since God has right over His servants, they have to obey Him (right for God and duty for His servants). On one hand, once they worship Him, they will acquire a right over God and that is for Him to give them reward (right for His servants and duty for God). However, God has set this “must” (obligation) for Himself out of His grace and favor for His servants. In simpler terms, we cannot determine a duty for God, but out of His compassion and generosity to His servants, He has fixed a duty for Himself. For example, He says:

كَتَبَ رُكُومًا عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

***Your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself. (6:54)***

In the language of the Qur'an, *kataba* means a very heavy responsibility. Regarding prayer, He says:

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَانكُروا اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ ۚ فَإِذَا اطْمَأْنَنْتُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ ۗ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ  
عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَّوْقُوتًا

***The Prayer is indeed a timed prescription [kitabān mawqutan] for the faithful. (4: 103)***

Whenever He refers to a very heavy duty, He says “*kitab*” [a written one]. Concerning fasting, He also says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

***O you who have faith! Prescribed [kutiba] for you is fasting. (2: 183)***

That is, fasting is a definite duty and it must certainly be observed. Regarding Himself, God also uses the same term and says:

كُتِبَ رُبُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

***Your Lord has made [kataba] mercy incumbent upon Himself. (6:54)***

That is, God has made it incumbent upon Himself to have mercy upon His servants. Of course, this mercy has conditions and it encompasses those who are meritorious and worthy of it. In fact, He has described His conditions elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

In any case, correlation between right and duty sometimes means balance between the coinages of rights. Commensurate to the coinage of rights for one party, rights are to be considered for the other party. Naturally, since by the coinage of each right, duty on the part of the other party also arises, this finally ends up in correlation between right and duty. Here, correlation is no longer conceptual, but it is either a requisite of social interests or of Divine Grace. The social interests demand that once one party has a right, the other party should have also a right. Once the ruler has a right over the people, the people must have a right over the ruler. These two rights should be balanced and proportional to each other. One party cannot have enormous and profound right over another while the other party has no right over him and is only obligated to observe and give his rights.

As we know that right and duty are correlative to each other, wherever a right is established, without need for further reason, we can deduce that a duty for a person or persons will also be established. For

example, if one proved the right of subsistence and living expenditure over his own father, there is no more need for basis to prove that father must provide so because the implication of the first basis stipulating that the child has right over his father is that the father is obliged to do that. By establishing the basis of the right or duty of one of the two parties, the other one is automatically proved. If it is proved through a certain basis that the government has right over the people, through the same basis it will be proved that the people should give it its right, and vice versa. This is another important point which must be noted.

Yet, another point is that determining the duties must be done on the basis of a reasonable foundation. Duty cannot be set for anyone without reason. If it is said that the government is duty-bound to offer a certain service to the people, it must be based on well-defined principles and logical basis. A duty cannot be placed on the shoulder of the government without any reason or just based on whims and caprice. It must be analyzed why the government has such a duty.

The government is founded on the basis of a certain *raison d'être*, and we have to see the reason behind the existence of government so as to understand what duties and responsibilities it has. The same philosophy that proves the necessity of the existence of government will make its duties clear in the process. Once the duties of the government are established, the rights of people will also be established. On the other hand, we should understand what rights the government has over the people; in other words, what the duties of the people toward the government are.

In presenting a logical answer to this problem, it is inaccurate to say that such thinkers as Aristotle, Plato, Kant, Lock, and others have given these views, and we select the midway of these views. Our answer will become logical once we specify what need for government we can see on the basis of our foundations and worldview so that we know accordingly which duties it has and which rights it creates. If we do not pursue the subject while keeping in view of the *raison d'être* of government, we will not arrive at the logical answer; rather, at a subjective answer devoid of any criterion and logical support.

However, if we prove rationally the reason that government came into being, the same proof will automatically state which duties the government has and which jobs it has to do. Once it became clear what functions the government has to perform, it will be proved what rights the people have over the government as well as what duties they have toward it. Therefore, the same reason that establishes the expediency of government also specifies its duties.

## **The *raison d'être* of Government**

Now, the fundamental question is this: For what reason a government comes into being? What is the need for having an institution in the society called “government”? If there is no government, what problems will emerge? This discussion is one of the important issues in political philosophy.

Since the olden times, there has been a tendency that government is not needed. The reasoning for this

is that if the people are morally trained, they will voluntarily act upon the instructions and their duties, and they will not be in need of government. As such, instead of establishing a government, efforts should be made in training individuals. This tendency which is called anarchism has been gradually discussed in the recent ages as a theory in political philosophy. It has been predicted that a time will come when there will be no need for government. One of the views of Marxism is that the society is evolving toward perfection and will finally end up in a classless society in which there will be no capitalist, bourgeois and proletariat. Instead, in that society, all people will be equal and there will be no more need for government.

However, the truth is that such statements are not realistic, and there is no logical proof that one day such a society will come into being. These are only illusions that cannot be reconciled with the reality. As such, most of authorities, both ancient and modern, have a consensus of opinion on the principle of the need for government. Of course, in arguing about this issue, their theories are not completely consistent with one another. The only common element existing among them is the insurance of the society's security and prevention of chaos. One of the important reasons of those who emphasize the exigency of government is that in the absence of government, the society will plunge into anarchy.

Some of those who have been influenced by some Western propaganda and are fascinated by the West think that the Western society has attained such an order and discipline that even in the absence of government, no problem will appear. By observing disorder in our society and lack of adherence to social discipline (such as the lack of observance of traffic and driving rules), these people imagine that the Western society possesses an advanced culture by which even in the absence of government, they will still adhere to social order and discipline and ensure its security.

In order to remove these fancies, it is enough for these people to read national and local newspapers and then they will realize that in the most advanced Western countries, so many crimes are committed daily strange crimes whose example is rare in our country, but are happening there on a daily basis. Some of our friends who had studied in Canada for some time narrated that one night, there was electric power outage of about 15 minutes. (Of course, such an occurrence is rare to happen there.) Within such a short period, all stores in the street were pillaged. The examples of measures that have been conceived in the Western societies for the protection of women bespeak of the state of insecurity of women there.

Sometime ago, some of these cases had been reflected in our newspapers and those who are informed know that such cases are more than these. In Germany, for women who want to drive alone during the first hours of the night, they have conceived a measure in which a male manikin that is made for that specific purpose is seated on the front seat beside the lady driver. The function of this manikin which is so similar to a human being is that people who look outside will think that the woman is not alone in the car.

They rather think that her husband is also in the car. This manikin has been registered as an invention.

This invention bespeaks of the truth that in the West a woman who wants to drive a car in the early hours of the night has no security. That is, not only can she not take a walk, but she is also in danger even inside her car and she cannot take a ride alone. This is the sign of order and discipline which are dominant in the Western world! As such, some foreigners who had recently come to Iran were surprised to see that at the first hours or in the middle of the night some women walked alone in the streets. For them it was unbelievable that at 10 pm a woman can walk alone in the street and yet she was secure.

In any case, a society without government cannot attain its goal. It is a definite principle that one of the reasons behind the existence of government for society is to guarantee security.

## **The Right and Duty of Government in Relation to Providing Security and the Like**

By establishing this *raison d'être* of government, one duty will also be proved for it in that the government is obliged to ensure social security. In return for this duty, the government acquires a right over the people and a duty will be laid on the shoulder of the people. Now, as the government is obliged to provide and maintain security of people, people have to provide the ground for this task so that the government can perform its duty. If the duty of the government is to ensure the security of people, to do this task through the necessary means and prerogatives should be put at its disposal.

For example, it is the duty of people to put the necessary financial means at the disposal of the government for this task. Maintenance of security requires a budget, and the government has to receive this budget from the people through means such as levying taxes to such an extent that it can provide the security of society. It may be said that countries have a public treasury, mineral reserves and natural resources. So, why do people have to pay taxes? The answer is that the government's budget can be provided through various ways including public treasury, taxes, etc. which must all be discussed and examined in their respective places for example, to what extent does the government have the right to utilize each of these income sources? At any rate, so as to be able to provide the security of society, it has the right over the people to provide the necessary means. They have to allow the government to spend from the public treasury, to pay taxes, or provide the means to the government through other means.

Therefore, as we have stated, there is a type of interrelatedness between right and duty. Once a right is established, a duty for that person will also be established. Or, wherever there is a duty, a right will also be proved. Once the government is duty-bound to provide security for the society, it has the right to receive the means from people. This is one of the fundamental obligations of all governments, and it definitely proves the philosophy behind the existence of government.

Of course, it must be borne in mind that this security is not only domestic; rather, its other dimension is the issue of defense vis-à-vis the foreign enemies. People cannot provide their own security against

foreign enemies. Defense against the foreign enemies requires studies, knowledge, experience, various skills, and most important of all, coordination. In war, that which is needed more than anything else is the coordination of combatants.

In doing so, a single overall commander must be specified. That commander, regardless of whatever name and title he has, is a person representing one of the elements of the government his title may be Leader, President, Prime Minister, or Minister of Defense. The one in whose hand is the command to launch an attack is also in-charge of the coordination of the armed forces. In return for this duty, he has also a right over the people. The people who have placed on his shoulder the duty of ensuring the security of their country's frontiers are obliged to provide human resources and equipments needed for this task. Opposite to that duty of the government, the people have this duty.

In principle, one of the fundamental duties of every government is to assume functions which cannot be done by the people alone. The people alone cannot ensure the internal and external security of their country. If this affair is placed on the shoulder of people themselves, for various reasons such as difference of opinions, difference of tastes, etc. this task will always be suspended and postponed. For example, differences of opinions and tastes assume the following forms: Why does the defense expenditure have such an amount and why is it entrusted to such individuals; why should those individuals be dispatched to the warfront; in what way should they defend; etc. As such, there should be a dominant power to give order and be followed by everybody. That dominant power is the government (to be more precise, one of the government's functions).

Different works can never be done by individuals and are beyond their capability; namely, works that are within the realm of the government's functions. For instance, one of these works is to maintain public health. Personal and individual hygiene can be observed by people themselves, but to prevent the outbreak of contagious diseases is beyond the people's capability. If there is the possibility of the spread of a disease from one country to another, people alone cannot prevent it. This work requires a strong and extended power that controls the borders, undertakes quarantine, provides vaccination, dispatches a group of experts, etc. This work also needs equipments that must be at the disposal of the government.

In any case, by considering the *raison d'être* of government, the duties of the government will be established. It creates these legal duties for the people. In return and commensurate to them, certain rights must be taken into account for the government. This is one type of interrelatedness of right and duty which we mentioned at the beginning of the discussion. The consequence of this correlation in such a case appears when we say that the government must assume this function and we have to set this as its duty. In return, it must have also a right because there can be no duty without a right. Once we say that people have such a right over other people, in return they have to accept a duty and responsibility. The rights that will be established for the two opposite groups must be balanced. An important right cannot be considered for one party while the other party does not have such a right. Without the balance

and proportionality of right and duty, work cannot be done.

It has become clear so far that one of the reasons behind the existence of government is the functions which cannot be assumed by the people themselves. On the basis of this philosophy, we said that one of the duties of the government is to undertake these tasks.

## **Another Philosophy Means another Set of Duties**

The second fundamental duty of the government is the functions which can be assumed by people but usually there is insufficient spirit of voluntarism to do so. For example, by building different hospitals, medical laboratories, pharmacies, clinics, and medical centers, people themselves can provide for the needs of society. However, we can see that the number of hospitals that people build or the clinics, pharmacies and laboratories that they establish are not enough to meet the needs of the society. Or, some individuals take advantage of that which is entrusted to the people. For instance, they determine the prices, fees and rates which the masses, especially the deprived and vulnerable classes, cannot afford to pay.

If the cost of a service which some of the specialists offer is supposed to be determined by them, there may be competition initially and the prices are relatively fixed justly, but later on, through different ways such as the founding of cartels, trusts, syndicates, guilds, or cooperatives, in determining the price rate of services and the ways of offering them, they may agree to increase exorbitantly the price rate. In such a situation, again the masses will experience oppressions.

In such cases, there must be an institution above them which in and of itself has no interest whatsoever in the affair so as to observe justice and equity. Of course, at this point schools of political philosophy differ with each other. The liberalist school which is based on individualism regards only the interests of individuals as its duty. The liberalists are of the opinion that the market must be free and in perfect competition, and the state has no right to interfere in such affairs. They also cite proofs to substantiate this claim. For example, they argue that if the market is free and competitive, automatically the supply and demand will be arranged, but if there is interference in this affair, the economy will not grow.

In any way, one approach in economics is that in presenting services and production of goods, the hands of the people must be open, and the state must in no way interfere. People have the right to produce whatever they want in whatever form and to sell the same at whatever price they want. It is the right of people to offer any service they want in whatever manner and to receive the payment they want for it.

On the contrary, those who have a socialist tendency are more inclined toward the society than the individual; they regard the protection of the society's interests as their duty. The socialists are of the opinion that in the conflicts or contradictions of the interests of society and that of individual, the society's interest takes precedence even if it ends up to the detriment of an individual. Of course, such is their

slogan, but in practice, as to what extent they adhere to it is another issue.

On the basis of these two foundations, the duty of the state as well as the rights of the state and people differ. If we turn to the liberalist inclination, we believe that the state has neither duty to determine the prices of goods and services nor the right to determine the duty of others. One of the things that the state can do to create competition is not to fix the price but to be a competitor of the capitalists or the producers. That is, it has to enter the scene as a producer with its own capital and lower the price so that others will be forced to bring down the price. Similarly, the state can control the prices through different methods.

The liberalists say that the state has no right to resort to any of these methods. The people have to be free to such an extent that every person can acquire as much wealth as possible. At most, the individuals pay taxes commensurate to the benefits they enjoy from public services and for the maintenance of security of society, and the state has no right to exact any tax from people. In a nutshell, the state must have the least interference in the affairs of people.<sup>6</sup>

On the contrary, state-centrism upholds that the state has to do whatever it views as consistent with the welfare of society, and to check the abuses of individuals or groups. The motto of these states is the establishment of justice. The liberalists are not after justice. Even if they feign to be so, it is only meant to deceive others, for they do not believe in such a principle. Meanwhile, in most cases the slogan of the socialists is that in addition to security, justice must also be established in the society, and this is another duty of the state.

## **The Impact of the Fundamental Difference in Determining the Rights and Duties of the People and the Government**

The difference of the foundations in political philosophy makes the rights and duties of people and government differ with each other. Without taking into account this foundational difference, it cannot be discussed what right the government has over people and, on the contrary, what duty is placed on its shoulder in such a manner that this answer is correct according to the view of the liberalists and the socialists. The foundational difference leads to the difference of viewpoint on this issue.

One says that with the exception of providing security and eliminating chaos, the government has the right to interfere in the affairs of society. Meanwhile, the other believes that not only the government can, but it is also obliged to interfere in many affairs. Naturally, once the musts and duties change, rights will change. It is at this juncture that we have to specify our view. Are we collectivists, individualists, or something in between? In any case, we have to clarify our foundation, because on the basis of that foundation we can give answers as to how the relationship between the government and the people should be arranged.

More important than these differences is the difference between Islam and the religious schools, and the

secularist schools. In the religious perspective, the government is not only for the maintenance of security and even higher than this, the provision of material welfare of people; rather, it has a more important duty; that is, to provide for the spiritual welfare of the society. This duty is important because of its connection with the truth about a human being which is his very soul. The outcome of providing for the spiritual welfare is everlasting felicity. As such, its value is boundless. However, the value of material welfare is limited because it is related to this transient life in this world.

So, religion says that in addition to providing security, justice and material welfare, spiritual welfare must also be provided, and it is not only a duty alongside other duties. It is in fact the main duty of the government. Providing for the spiritual welfare occupies the highest degree of importance while the rest of duties are of secondary importance. The other duties have a preliminary role. We want security, health, training, and education for the spiritual growth of man. According to this viewpoint, the most important duty of the state is to pave the ground for man's proximity to God because the purpose of creation demands that man should grow and the truth of man is the same humanness, and the growth of humanness depends on nearness to God the Exalted. The realization of this affair is only possible under the auspices of religion. As such, the government is duty-bound to pay necessary attention to this aspect.

However, some people never believe in such a duty for the government. In our society, some uphold this belief and thus express that religion is good but not related to the state. In the end, to provide for this welfare and draw the people's attention to religion is the duty of the clergy, but has nothing to do whatsoever with the government, which must be concerned with providing for the material welfare. If there is conflict and contradiction between material and spiritual welfares, it is none of the government's business. The government should behave in such a manner that the majority of people are satisfied. But it is the government's concern of whether or not their spiritual welfare is endangered.

## **Ensuring the Spiritual Welfare as the most Fundamental Duty of the Government**

We have to bear in mind that religious and Islamic teachings are contrary to the stated viewpoint. From the perspective of religion, the government is duty-bound, nay its most fundamental duty is to ensure the spiritual welfare of man. Along this line, there is also a duty laid on the shoulders of the people and that is, people have to obey the government in obeying God and reviving the religion and religious mottos as well as in campaigning against moral and religious corruptions. The government is obliged to strive to preserve the religious values and spiritual interests while people, in turn, are obliged to observe the pertinent rules and laws of the state so that this goal will be realized.

The best modus operandi that the pristine religion of Islam has presented along this line is the collective and individual duty of people to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong. If only the government is supposed to ensure the spiritual welfare of people, this affair requires the employment of enormous

forces and energy. Just imagine how much resources and facilities the government has to mobilize for every individual so as for him not to commit indecencies, not to become a drug addict, not to engage in trading narcotics, not to indulge in illicit relationships with others, not to commit aggression against the properties and chastity of people, not to corrupt their minds and beliefs... etc.

If we are very optimistic, we have to say that in fulfilling such a duty the government has to employ at least half of the population of the country! Now, the issue is raised that for example, in a country with 60-million population the government is supposed to have 30 million employees, who can guarantee that they faithfully fulfill their duties? So, a government within the government, an intelligence agency within the intelligence agency, and an investigation bureau within the investigation bureau have to be established so as to prevent treachery within those institutions! If they only consist of a small group, they can only control those things to some extent provided that they shun bribery and moral vices, and they themselves are not sellers of narcotics, smugglers... etc. but if the government is supposed to mobilize an enormous force for the prevention of overcharging, drug addiction and drug trafficking, or for the deterrence of indecencies and evils, when will this venture come to an end?!

This is why Islam ordains that in this context, people must participate in and assist the government. One way is that they must shoulder the responsibility of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil; otherwise, the job of the government will always be in abeyance. Yet, unfortunately, as influenced by liberalist thinking, some do not have a positive view on bidding what is good and forbidding what is bad. Recently, with utmost regret, in the Islamic Republic system, the situation reached a point where every day we witness harassments of the agents bidding what is good and forbidding what is wrong though they are unpaid agents of the government, and they do not ask anything from the government.

These faithful souls invest their time, energy, property, and dignity in many cases just to ensure the welfare of the society. Many of the duties which the government has to perform by spending money and using facilities, such as preventing theft, drug addiction, smuggling, and other corruptions, have been done by them. If smuggling and overcharging are to become rampant, which force can put a stop to them? The economic, medical and moral systems will lose their order and discipline. It is here that Islam has set duties for the people vis-à-vis this issue, stating, "Apart from preserving your religion, you have to observe the rules and regulations of the Islamic government in relation to yourselves. Be watchful of others so as for them to observe these rules and regulations." That is, there should be public responsibility and attachment to others. Based on this noble verse, "***The faithful, men and women, are guardians of one another, (9:71)***" a type of guardianship will be established for every faithful over the others the guardianship of enjoining good.

Every faithful is the guardian of another and he has to give order to him, thus: "Don't do this; fulfill your duties." In his lessons as well as treatise on the practical laws, the eminent Imam (r) has said that to enjoin good and forbid evil is not only persuasion; something must be said imperatively; that is, one has to give orders. Unfortunately, in the culture of our country, it has become such that enjoining good is

considered to mean interference in others' affairs. Instead of a logical answer to this command, it is said to the agents who enjoin good and forbid evil, "I want it; it has nothing to do with you."

You ask those agents during hundreds of cases where the conditions of enjoining good and forbidding evil are observed, in how many cases do they encounter logical answers? Usually, they encounter disappointing answers such as follows: "So, what? There is freedom; this is a society of multiple voices; it is a civil society; it's none of your business;" and similar answers. In some other cases, they receive more than this; they are even physically harassed and at times, being killed. These are factors contributing to the degeneration of correct relationship between the government and the people. As the result of imitating the Western culture and passion for the Western tendencies in our society, this state of affairs becomes rampant, and it has rung the bell of danger for us. Unfortunately, even some of the ears that hardly hear could hear these rings lately.

## Questions and answers

**Question:** As you have stated and in consonance with the religious duty, at the times we witness indecency and engage in properly dealing with it, we encounter strong and insulting verbal and at times physical reaction, what should be done?

**Answer:** In reality, these issues are actual manifestations of what I have said and part of the immaturities of the cultural condition of our country. Sometimes, legally speaking there may be a shortcoming, but nowadays the extent that the legislators have set for bidding good and forbidding evil cannot be implemented and put into practice. Meanwhile, those who, while sincerely enduring all hardships, have decided to fulfill their religious obligation are subjected to these acts of callousness on the part of the ignorant individuals. Few of them are possibly enemies but they are mostly ignorant ones who have inappropriate pride, imagining that whenever someone tells them, "Don't do so-and-so," or "Do so-and-so" their personality is belittled. At any rate, these can be traced back to the cultural weaknesses of society.

Before anything else, we have to say that a part of these cultural weaknesses is related to us. Being familiar with religion and proponents of Islamic culture, we have obligations to fulfill and those who are like me have more or less shortcomings in fulfilling their obligations. I initially mentioned this so that you could not say, "The problems are traceable to you." We do confess that the likes of us are blamable in this context. We did not fulfill our obligations in the best possible way. Some acts of circumspectness have hindered the conveyance of the Islamic truths to the people in a lucid and emphatic manner.

What is more important and grievous is related to the other cultural institutions existing in the country and their duty has been to pave the ground for the advancement of the Islamic culture in the society for the past twenty years. Regrettably, the performance of these institutions is becoming poorer day by day, and the cultural authorities of the country have regarded the promotion of national culture (as they claim, but in reality, the culture of disbelief and atheism) as their duty instead of promoting Islamic culture.

If the performance of our cultural establishments is properly examined with supporting statistics and documents, it will be proved that this performance has always been a descending trend. Different modes such as promotion of the Western culture, open encouragement to unrestrained and even anti-revolutionary and anti-Islamic individuals, giving of awards, hidden encouragements which have their own mechanisms, and the like lead to further promotion day by day of the Western culture in the country. You can see that a millions-worth loan is granted for the publication of a periodical to a publisher.

Then, his books with the price which he freely indicates on the cover are also purchased in advance! On one hand, he has been given a loan, and on the other hand, his product is bought at the price he desires and then it is freely distributed as a service to the culture of the country! Nowadays, we witness that the books of the convicted apostate, Ahmad Kosravi are again being published. The current official, the head of this ministry has written an article against the author of those books.

Now, they themselves give money; give award to the same person; render assistance; publish his books; and distribute his books free of charge. And then, they even hold our nation under obligation, saying, "We spent millions of dollars for gratuitous cultural services and sent so many singers and musicians abroad!" When a group travels free of charge abroad to hold an orchestra play, just imagine what a heavy expense is shouldered by the government. At the time when some people are badly in need of their bread at night, from the budget of these people there are those who go to Britain or Thailand for a whole month to hold a so-called cultural program.

They invite such women there, and under the account of the public treasury of the Islamic country, they exchange pleasantries, feasting together, and they call it "service to culture!" Observe which books they permit to be published. The worst novels ever written in Iran are published with the permission of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. Hackneyed tapes are produced with the blessings of the same Ministry. Whenever there is protest against these acts, they say, "These are diffusion of culture, and we have published such-and-such number of periodicals." Mere publication of a periodical is not an art. Your publication of periodicals can also be done in other countries. If you have published a useful periodical, it is an art. It is an art if you are able to encourage people to publish periodicals by their own capitals and not from their public treasury, and worse still, if they are hackneyed and destructive periodicals. This is nothing to be proud of.

This is a shame and ignominy. Unfortunately, those who are supposed to listen are not willing to listen to these words. We are here sitting together and expressing our complaint so that these shouts (of protest) will be voiced, nay to reach some of those who are not willing to listen. Of course, these are not without effect, but we are still lagging behind. This descending trend had also been mentioned in the communiqué of the Assembly of Experts "If this state of affairs persists, till when is it tolerable?" We have to call this ministry the Ministry for the Promotion of Disbelief. They themselves suggested that the label "Islamic Guidance" be omitted. In that case, its "Guidance" becomes "Misguidance" because when

“Islamic Guidance” is no more, is there any outcome other than misguidance?! This is the condition of our country. Of course, it is not only confined to this ministry. In other offices, similar situations can be observed.

One of the duties of the people is to play an effective role in facing the misbehaviors of the government and some officials. One has to stage protest legal protest. There are legal ways to stage a protest. There is no need to create chaos in the streets, but we do not make use of these legal ways either. The fact is that one cannot do it alone. The people have also failings playing their role which is to admonish and guide the public servants in the country. God willing, these conversations make us more sensitive in fulfilling our duties. We have to criticize ourselves first and better perform our duties so that we can offer rational criticism against others.

**Question:** If in the process of the evolution of society, the demands of people happened to be different from the demands of the government, what should the duty of the government be? If the government accepts the people in legal circumstances and restrains them in other circumstances, what shall be the duty of the people?

**Answer:** The question is, if people in their broad scope which has three forms (minority, half, and majority) are not amenable with the policies and programs of the government, what shall be the duty of the government? Our reply is that these demands are of two types: One assumption is that people oppose the government on issues with Islamic dimensions and which, from our viewpoint, are part of the obligations of the Islamic government. That is, they want to suspend Islam; they want not to implement the laws of Islam. In this case, the government has to resist to the utmost because its primary duty is to preserve the Islamic laws and mottos except in a situation God forbid that it has insufficient force for the implementation of the Islamic laws as what happened during the time of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), twenty-five years after the passing away of the Messenger of Allah (S).

May God not bring that day! Yet, if it so happened that the government does not have such supporters to implement the laws of Islam even through the use of naked force, it has no more duty. But so long as it can, it has to resist as far as the implementation of the Islamic laws and realization of the Islamic mottos are concerned, and to put Islam into practice, for in principle it has come into being to achieve this purpose. The democratic and liberal governments, which do not regard as their duty to preserve ideals and have no goal other than meeting the demands of the people, are the proxies of the people, and their sole duty is to concord with the demands of the people; that is, to do whatever people want. But the Islamic government is not like that. In fact, before anything else, it has to perform whatever God desires.

Sometimes, the demands of the people pertain to some issues which have no religious aspect and are related to the modes of implementation. In other words, they are pertaining to the affairs about which everybody accepts that a certain Islamic law has to be implemented the way God mentioned it. There are different ways of implementing it and it can be executed in a certain way at a particular time and in another way at another time. In such cases, the people can express their opinions through legal means;

through the representatives they elected for the legislature as well as through the institutions that exist for the examination of those issues.

Anyway, in such cases the people can have legal, peaceful and logical protests, and to place their ideas and views at the disposal of the government, proving them through logical arguments. But so long as a law or legal order of the Islamic government is not "*bayn al-ghayy*", that is, it is not sure that it is a mistake and detrimental to the Islamic society, the people have to obey; otherwise, no progress can be made.

Thus, the domain of the people's demands belongs to the modes of implementation and not to the essence of an Islamic decree. If anything, whether it is a demand of the people or an ordinance of the Islamic government, is against the Islamic law, it has no legality at all. It is stipulated in the Constitution itself that if the executive bills, legislative bills and even an article of the Constitution are in conflict with the Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions and religious proofs, they have no credibility and they are not laws at all. But if a bill is not contradictory to God's decree and only a difference of opinion on the modes of implementation (like the differences on the economic programs in the country), they are natural, and so long as the government is the legitimate Islamic government, it is obligatory to obey, even though we believe that it has been a mistake.

So long as we do not have incontrovertible proof of the mistake of the legitimate Islamic law, it is obligatory to obey it. For example, let us assume that the commander in the warfront commanded a soldier to move along a certain direction. The plan of attack has been made and the soldiers have to move along a specific direction. The said soldier knows that the decision is a mistake and the commanders have been mistaken. In spite of this, he has no right to oppose. He can express his protest, argue and try to draw their attention, but if his opinion is not accepted, he has to obey the order. Otherwise, no progress can be made.

What kind of an army and system will it be whose soldiers have the right to behave the way they like? So, the government is for what? What for is the commandship? It is because of this that as indicated in the written directive of the Imam (*r*), to obey the ordinances of the Islamic government is obligatory though our opinion is contrary to these. If it is a law of the Islamic government and has no contradiction with the decree of God, to obey it is incumbent upon everybody though there are different ways of implementing it and in our opinion the policy of the government in choosing the way of implementing it is incorrect.

For example, as to whether the foreign exchange rate is fixed or fluctuating, we do not have a religious decree saying that it must definitely be fixed or fluctuating, as the case may be. If the concerned authorities have decided that today the foreign exchange rate should be fixed and that smuggling of foreign currencies is not allowed and that buying and selling of foreign currencies should be based on the set rate, one should comply with them. If the opinion of the concerned authorities changes tomorrow, saying, "We were mistaken and the foreign exchange rate should be fluctuating, the foreign exchange

market should be free, and any one may sell foreign currencies at whatever rate he likes,” this is again permissible. To obey and comply with the ordinances of the government is obligatory, provided that it is not “*bayn al-ghayy*” and repugnant to the degree of God, because the order and welfare of the society lies on this affair. Of course, if a law or decision is contrary to the decree of God, it is no longer obligatory to comply.

[1.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 207.

[2.](#) “Of course, He the Glorified has created His right over creatures that they should worship Him, and has laid upon Himself (the obligation of) their reward equal to several times the recompense as a mark of His bounty and the generosity that He is capable of.” Ibid.

[3.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 207.

[4.](#) “If there is any right which is only in favor of a person with no (corresponding) right accruing against him it is solely for Allah, the Glorified, and not for His creatures by virtue of His might over His creatures and by virtue of the justice permeating all His decrees.” Ibid.

[5.](#) For example, Sūrah al-A‘raf 7: 156–157: “And My mercy embraces all things. Soon I shall appoint it for those who are God-wary and give zakat and those who believe in Our signs—those who follow the Apostle, the uninstructed prophet.”

[6.](#) On the basis of this perspective, since the state has the least duty, it has the least right. Accordingly, the only duty of states is the maintenance of security and the only right of such states over people is to levy taxes as much as necessary for the maintenance of the society’s security.

## Chapter 11: The Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government (Part 2)

### A Review of the Previous Discussion

During the previous meeting in which we discussed the mutual rights and duties of the people and the government, we made a short introduction in this context. It was pointed out that for two reasons right and duty are interdependent and proportional to each other. We said that one type of relationship between right and duty is that whenever a certain right is established for a person, this right is over another person, and in principle the concept of right requires such a thing. For example, if a wife has the right of sustenance over her husband, as she does, its correlative is that the husband is duty-bound to provide sustenance to her.

By proving the right of one party, the duty of another party will also be proved. This is a kind of correlation and reciprocity between right and duty; right for one party and duty for another. The second meaning of right-duty correlation is that if in social relations relationship between two persons, two sensible beings a certain right is established for a person, in return, a duty will be placed on his shoulder. In the first type of correlation, the establishment of right for one party necessary means the

establishment of duty for the opposite party, but here when a right is proved for a person, a duty alongside the right will also be proved for the same person.

That is, once he takes something, he must give something else in return. In a bilateral relationship one cannot enjoy benefit without the other acquiring another benefit. One cannot only have right while the other has duty only. If person A has a right over person B alongside the right he possesses, he has also a duty toward person B that he has to fulfill. Even in the relationship between father and son, if the father has right over the son, he has also a duty toward his son. It is not possible for him to have a right over his son while having no duty toward him. Here, right and duty are correlative in a person.

## **The Relationship between Right and Justice**

With respect to the second meaning, we have mentioned that whenever a right is proved, a duty along with it will also be proved for the claimant of right, once we consider the relationship between the people and the government and set a right for one of them, alongside this right that is acquired, there is also a duty that is to be shouldered. If the government or the ruler has a right over the people as it or he does, along with this right, he also has to accept a certain duty toward the people.

It cannot be accepted that the ruler has right over the people while having no duty at all. Meanwhile, if the people have any right over the ruler as they do, along with this right, they have to accept a certain duty toward the ruler. It is not reasonable that all rights are only for the people while having no duty toward the ruler. If this relationship is balanced that is, a right which is to be proved for a person has a kind of harmony and balance with a duty which is to be proved along with that right in that case, a just relationship will be established. In principle, right [*haqq*] is intertwined with justice [*‘adl*] because the truth behind justice is that the right of every person should be given to him.

If this right is linked with a duty which he has toward another and this right and duty are proportional and balanced, the relationship between them will be just because they are of the same weight. Balance means to be of the same weight; to be equitable. If the duty of one party is supposed to be heavy for example, he has to pay taxes, comply with orders, endure every hardship, and shoulder the expenses of the ruler, his apparatus and government with all their extent but having no right over the ruler, this relationship is not just.

Justice means proportionality of the two parties; balance and equality of the two opposite rights. If this proportionality and balance between right and duty is observed, justice will be established. As shown in the history of philosophy, the discussion on justice has been made from the time of Socrates up to now, covering a period of more than 2,500 years. So far, in this context there has been much discussion and so many books been written that to make a list of them constitute a book itself. Even nowadays, perhaps there has not been a day when no article, treatise, or book which is related to justice in a certain way is even published. This affair, on one hand, shows the degree of importance of the issue while on the other hand it indicates that this issue has so much discussion that after 25 centuries of debate and discourse

about it, it still has ambiguous angles and room for discussion.

One of the discussions in this context is the relationship of justice and right. It seems that what is more confirmable and has also been mentioned by some others is that the relationship between justice and right is an objective one. Justice means to give right. Justice is nothing but that the right of everyone should be given to him. But since right is bilateral, whenever a right is proved, there is also a corresponding duty. If this right and duty which are established for a person are balanced, they will be just and if they are not proportionate that is, the right which is considered for a person is more than the duty which he has to shoulder, or on the contrary, his duty is more than the right which is proved for him this relationship is unbalanced and contrary to justice. According to this viewpoint, the concepts of justice and right are inseparable. In fact, they are not two concepts and two discussions for us to say, "What is the relationship between justice and right?" Therefore, if there is any ambiguity surrounding the concept of right, the same is also applicable to justice and on the contrary, if there is any ambiguity surrounding the concept of justice, the same will also be applicable to right.

## **The Criterion in Determining Right the Viewpoint of the Natural Law and the Positivist Law**

Now, this issue arises: how can the right of everyone be determined? If it is proved that someone has a right, to give that right and along with it, to establish a duty for him is justice. Yet, the ambiguous point here is that how these rights will be proved. That is, from where can we know what the right of a person is? How and who has to determine it? This issue is so complex and as far as I know, in spite of persistent and ceaseless efforts made in the academic centers, universities and academies of the world, the different schools of law have not even arrived at a relative consensus in this context as to what the criterion of right is and from where right arises. Of course, among the different views on this issue, nowadays in the academic circles, institutions and universities, there is one theory which has many votaries, but this does not mean that the discussion is finished and has arrived at the conclusion and the case is solved. In fact, ambiguity still remains.

In general, as to whether what right is and where it emanates, different schools have been formed in the philosophy of law. Among them is the natural law school. On the basis of this school, it is said, "It is the natural right of this person to do these works," or "The vital right is the right of freedom while some other rights are the natural rights of every man." Of course, this term is among the Western imported terms which have become part of our terminology. In the Islamic concepts, there is no talk about the "natural law." Even in one verse, one *hadith* and narration, or in a religious text, you cannot find anything in which there is talk about "natural law." The term "natural law" emanates from one of the specific schools in the philosophy of law, viz. the natural law school. Of course, the concept has been expanded and used in other areas.

Since time immemorial, there have been those who believe that every man has naturally specific rights

and use the same term (natural law). But there is difference of opinions on the interpretation of “He has naturally these rights.” What does “He has naturally this right” means? Sometimes, they used to interpret that nature gives specific rights to man. In the old texts of ancient philosophies, this type of interpretations could be found frequently. For example, it was said, “Nature has given the right to life and the right of food to every living creature. Nature has given right to every creature which is in need of food to eat food. Nature has given right to every creature which is in need of air to breathe air.

The term “natural right” is pleasant as a literary composition, but in reality it is questionable. What is “nature”? What for does nature give right? What does nature possess to give to others? Does one who is given right by nature have right and does he take it from nature, or he has no right and nature gives it to him?! If the expression “Nature bestows right to someone” is examined closely, we can observe its ambiguity. Is nature a sensible being that gives something to a person? Does it have prerogative to give right to a person, or not? In retrospect, assuming that nature is a being that has a prerogative and gives power and right to someone, what is the need for us to obey it?

How and which power persuades us to respect this nature’s bounty? Now, granting that nature gave the right to life to a creature, why are others obliged to respect this right, not to commit suicide and even not kill animals for no reason? We asked this because we said earlier that there is no sense in saying that a right is proved for a person while in return, others are not obligated to observe this right. Once the discussion reaches this point, different views are expressed by distinguished authorities and profound philosophers in answering this question.

Some of these philosophers, believing in the natural rights, say that this right is God-given and when you say “natural right” it means God-given right. Yet, as you know, among the philosophers and the rest of people there are those who do not believe in God. So, what is the sense of talking about natural right which means God-given right? On the other hand, once we claim that a certain natural right is given by God, we have to prove where and when has God said, “I have given this right.” We can even say to ourselves that God has certainly given these rights to certain people. Instead, we should have proof for it.

Some others have said that the natural rights are the rights which the intellect proves. And a number of them have added that in a sense, these are the same rights given by God which the intellect discovers. At any rate, there are many discussions here with which we have no time to deal at the present, and besides, doing so has little practical outcome and I just want to mention them. Anyway, the most fundamental discussion which we should have in the context of rights is the same discussion on where right essentially emanate from.

Because of these problems and ambiguities existing in this context, a view which is diametrically opposed to the natural rights view upholds that right has no fixed root at all. Right has neither root in nature nor rationality, nor is it given by God; rather, all rights are contractual. In order to conduct their social life in a manner that ensures their interests, peace and security reign, and chaos and tumult are

eliminated, men have concluded a series of contracts.

An array of demands is the demand of all. Everyone has these demands and no one can afford to set them aside. This kind of rights has taken the label “natural rights” for itself. Every person wants to be alive. No being can afford to be heedless of its life. As such, they have agreed that this right be recognized as a natural right. Once a creature is alive, it has to take food. So, the right to nourishment is also a natural right which all human beings are in need of. In action, everybody has accepted this kind of rights and no one can deny them. The fact that every person is in need of a house and that he has to dwell in a certain place is undeniable. In reality, there is an implicit and unwritten agreement that since all persons have these needs, it follows that these rights shall be proved for them. The result of this agreement is the same natural rights.

Thus, natural rights, in accordance with their contracts, mean that they have been given neither by nature, God, nor reason. They are rather demands which exist in all people who cannot deny them. In the positivist law school, natural rights are acceptable only in this sense and all rights are contractual. In the philosophy of law, the positivists believe that all rights are contractual. As in the philosophy of values and the philosophy of ethics, they also believe that the values goodness and badness are in accordance with the contracts of the people and society. By accepting this foundation, they are no more in need of explaining why this right exists because the people themselves have accepted it. As such, the acceptance of contract as the foundation of rights leads to the acceptance of democracy.

But this question still remains: If some people somewhere did not accept the said contract, what would happen? In reply, the positivists say, “In the relationship among individuals of a society, if a person does not accept it, he has to follow the majority. When in a society the majority of people have accepted that a certain right is proved, if a number of them would say, “We do not accept it,” there is no alternative but for this number to accept it also, otherwise they oppose democracy. There is no other way. Within a society, whatever the majority say should also be accepted by the minority. Of course, as much as possible, one has to strive so that the rights of the minority are not eliminated. In any case, the principle is that whatever the majority accepts should also be accepted by the rest. The positivists solve this problem in this manner in the domestic law and within a society.

Yet, in the relations among societies and international law, when there is difference between two societies and two states (of course, the state as the representative of a society), who shall determine the rights? It is here that international conventions and agreements are formed. If the representatives of states agree and sign the agreement, that common right shall become binding for them, otherwise no one has any right over another. What are dominant nowadays in international relations and on the basis of which international disputes are solved and cited as the legal basis in international courts are the same conventions such as the law of the seas, law of the space, outer space law, and the like.

Of course, in practice, when the majority of countries or the superpowers, accepted a thing, they also urge the rest to accept the same. Theoretically, international law is based on agreements between two

societies or among many societies. Of course, given this assumption, the problem also exists usually governments are not representatives of their people and are voted for under the influence of different factors. In this case, what is the need for the people of those countries to comply with those conventions? For the meantime, we are not engaged in criticizing these theories, and the main point is that once it is related to two persons, they have to agree upon and accept a matter together.

But within a society since there is the possibility of opposition to arise and general consensus cannot be achieved, the majority vote is the criterion. In international relations also, the law among nations is established through the agreement of their representatives, viz. the governments. Of course, as to the case where certain people have the right to set rights for all societies and impose the same to others as the international rights, there are different theories. In this context, some were extremists and others exaggerated. Among the legal experts there are those who believe that a number of people may promulgate laws and impose them on others especially in the case of the existence of violation of the human rights.

Regarding human rights, there is no need for the approval of all states. If a state opposes and does not sign a convention, or for example, does not sign the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, others have the right to impose the articles of those conventions or the Declaration on the said country. This theory has been recently mentioned in international law.<sup>1</sup> The ramifications of all these can be traced to the philosophical theory which states that rights are conventional affairs and in accordance with contracts. On the contrary, some believe that rights are real affairs which are discovered by the intellect, endowed by nature, or given by God (with the different views mentioned in the context of natural rights, rational rights and divine rights).

## **The Viewpoint of Islam on the Criterion of Determining Right**

The question raised here is: What is the view of Islam in this regard? That is, if we want to attribute a theory to Islam in this connection, shall we say that Islam is advocating the positivist law school, the natural law school, or the rational law school? To answer this question within the given time is not an easy task, but we have to do so anyway.

One of the most fundamental differences between the Islamic perspective and the perspective dominant over the Western culture is regarding the realness or otherwise of values. According to the Islamic perspective, we have a set of real values which are not according to convention and contract. They are rather anchored in real interests and above personal tastes, contracts and conventions and even international treaties. Just as for example in medical issues, once a person is sick, in discovering the medicine for a disease, physicians make an agreement among themselves, forging a contract that from then on the said ailment shall be treated in a certain specific way. Are physicians like that? Or, are they looking for its real medicine? That is, whether we know it or not, there is a material which is very effective in eliminating the sickness. And the task of the medical researchers is to discover the

relationship and not merely to arrive at a consensus among themselves. They do not create relationship between medicine and treatment, between observance of the principles of hygiene and health nor do they sign a contract. Instead, by conducting different tests, they try to discover those relationships.

In the realm of values also, according to the Islamic perspective, there is a set of general, fixed and absolute values which are based on real affairs and are not according to contracts. We have to discover these general, fixed and absolute values through reason or another way (revelation). The pristine moral values are like so and they do not acquire value through a contract.

The same is true in the case of rights. In reality, rights discover the existing real relationships in the lives of people. The formulas, which can organize these relationships in such a way that the felicitous life of man is ensured, are real formulas that must be discovered. Of course, one of these formulas may, for example, consist of ten elements, nine of which we have to identify and one is unknown to us, and then to see where there is exception. It is because some of these relations and their organizing formulas are so complex and thus, to discover them is equally problematic.

Consider a person who has taken the trouble to plant a seed or seedling on land which does not belong to others. Then, through his efforts he has succeeded in making a fountain there from which he used to water the seed or seedling until it has finally turned into a fruit-bearing tree. This person has taken trouble during the different stages of planting, maintenance and watering until his efforts have borne fruit. At this point, an issue called "ownership" is raised. As this person has made an effort and produced a fruit or a fruit-bearing tree, the welfare of his life is that he has to benefit from it. Now, if another person takes this tree from him and does not allow him to benefit from it, there is no doubt that his right is trampled upon. From where has this right been acquired?

From the troubles he has taken in the process. In a relationship of this person with another person who wants to benefit from the product of his labor, if this relationship is organized in a correct manner such that both equally benefit from the product of labor of each other, in that case it will be a just relationship. It is because a right is established for each of them and alongside the right which each of them has, a duty is also established to respect the right of the other. This is a simple formula which can be expressed in this manner: Anyone who produces a thing has the right of ownership of it.

But the issue is not always as simple as such and in intricate social relationships one cannot easily make judgment. In the same example, if we add other factors, determining the rights will not be as simple as before. If we plant a tree in a neighboring house and this tree arbitrarily affects the house structure, deprives the house of the sun rays, or its branches and twigs penetrate into the house and occupy a space of the house, in this case to what extent do we have the right to benefit from this tree?

Here, a new relationship is raised which affects the determination of rights. It is true that with respect to this tree, we have taken trouble, but through which we disturb another person because under the existing situation, taking benefit from this tree gives injuries to another person, and these things must be

taken into account in a bilateral dealing. The element of the first formula since I took trouble, it follows that I have the right to benefit from it alone is not enough. For, here a new issue is also raised and that is the complex links among those elements embedded in the right.

Sometimes, social relations are so intertwined and produce reciprocal relations that to organize which necessitates an intricate formula and to solve them is not easy. In cases where the relations are fixed and simple, by making use of our reason and taking advantage of the experience of a person or the experience of others and sometimes scientific formulas, we can easily arrive at an answer which can easily be accepted if we mention it in any academic gathering or explain it to any reasonable person. In these cases which are simple and basic legal issues, our intellect is capable of discovering the relationship between right and duty and through rational proof we can argue in establishing a right or duty. But once the relationship becomes complex, even the expert and well-experienced legalists will be stunned.

In some legal cases, we can see that for many years and centuries, the lawyers have discussed them and notwithstanding it, they have failed to arrive at a decisive conclusion. In any case, there are some cases in which to find the final solution and a clear answer which is explainable to everybody is very problematic, nay something which is nearly impossible. It is in these cases that we, in the parlance of our Islamic culture, say that the intellect here can not understand. But it does not mean that they cannot be understood. It rather means that through our usual and common reasoning and the conventional skills at our disposal, we cannot easily discover the relationship and identify the exact formula that completely specifies the effect of each of the factors.

In these cases, because of the complexity of the relationships as well as the multiplicity of the factors and the uncertainty of the coefficient effect of each of those factors, through their common intellect human beings cannot have a correct, certain and identical judgment. According to our Islamic culture, we believe that in such cases divine revelation should assist humanity. Seeking the assistance of divine revelation does not mean that it will say something which is contrary to our intellect. It rather means that the divine revelation will compensate the shortcoming of our rational understanding. If we have information about all things and can discover all factors and determine the extent of their effects, in these cases, we can understand by ourselves. However, owing to the deficiency of the conventional skills we have, we cannot exactly discover these factors and the magnitude of their effects, and specify the exact formula for them. At this juncture, we say that our intellect cannot grasp them, and God (through the revelation) should determine them.

## **The Fundamental Difference between Islam and the West on the Criterion of Determining Rights**

The result is that rights are actually founded upon real bases and substructures. In other words, there are laws which are consistent with real welfare and corruption. That is, in the real world there are real

interests and corruptions on the basis of which we have to determine the rights. Yet, in all cases we cannot discover those real interests and corruptions because an important part of the interests and corruptions in the life of man is related to his soul, spiritualities, human nobility, and eternal and otherworldly life with respect to which we do not have information and knowledge.

This issue that is, not considering spiritualities and heedlessness to the interests and corruptions of the otherworldly life is the second point of the difference existing between us and the Western culture. Nowadays, in all modern Western countries in the world, we cannot find a legal expert who takes into account the spiritual and otherworldly affairs and the eternal life in enacting laws, rules and regulations.

Whether these legal experts do not believe in the otherworldly life, or even if they believe in it, they regard this belief as devoid of any influence in the realm of legislation, because, in their opinion, the otherworldly life has nothing to do with the material worldly life. At most, we have two stages of life which are independent from each other. There is one material worldly life whose laws we have to enact.

The other is the otherworldly life which, if it ever exists, is related to the world after death and at most, the thing we should do for it is for us to go to the house of worship and engage in worship. The only impact of the belief in the life hereafter is that people should go to mosques to pray, to gather in the *husayniyyah*<sup>2</sup> to engage in chest-beating so that these acts become useful for the Hereafter. Yet, this belief has nothing to do with man's socio-political relations! The separation of religion from the world, the confinement of the jurisdiction of religion to the personal relations of man with God, and the non-interference of religion in organizing the socio-political relations is the same secularist outlook which is dominant today in the Western world.

Unfortunately, our new intellectuals also want to drive us toward this outlook, change our Revolution into something else, and separate us from Islam. This subject is the fundamental difference between the Islamic viewpoint and the Western culture. Our belief is that our worldly life has a causal link with the Hereafter. In our belief, whatever voluntary act we do in this world, including even breathing, winking of eyes or uttering a word, can have repercussion on our otherworldly life because each of these acts is either lawful or unlawful. If it is lawful, it can have a positive effect while if it is not, it can have a negative effect. This is true even in the case of a mere glance.

There is so much difference between this outlook and the secularist outlook which argues that if ever there is the Hereafter, none of the economic, legal, political, and social issues is related to it in any way. The Hereafter is only an emotional relationship of man with God. The person who believes in the Hereafter goes to a house of worship and performs some devotional rituals. That is all. This is the very essence of religion.

The other issues are either among the secondary parts of religion or have no link to it. This kind of view toward religion is very different from the religion which states that the winking of eyes has effect on your Hereafter, let alone speaking about family, marital, parents-children, and social relations and the

relations between the government and people. We believe that all of these have effect on our otherworldly life.

Of course, all of us accept the essence of this case because we are Muslims, though we do not know the extent and quality of their effects. We know that our winking of the eyes can also have an effect on our otherworldly fate, but we have no way of discovering as to how it affects and which glance has a positive effect and which one has a negative effect. One side of this relationship which is the Hereafter is beyond the reach of our experience. Through experience we can discover the medicine and treatment of a physical sickness and say that this medicine has relation with such an ailment. Why? It is because in this regard, we have many tests and have witnessed the relationship between two factors. As such, we pass a judgment that there is a relationship between this medicine and that sickness. But how can we test the impact of our behaviors in this world upon the fate of our life in the Hereafter? We have not yet gone to the Hereafter and those who have gone there did not bring any news to us.

Now, if our social affairs which are the cradle of individual, familial, political, and international rights can play a positive or negative role in the otherworldly life and in the felicity and wretchedness in the Hereafter, this question is asked: Who should discover this relationship and those rights? As far as we are concerned, we have no experience in this regard; therefore, in order to prove and measure it, we have no option but to seek assistance from divine revelation.

He who is acquainted with this world and the Hereafter, and all things are equal to Him, knows what the relation of each of our actions with our life in the Hereafter is and what the extent of its effect on the felicity or wretchedness there is. We thus say that the religious law should determine the legal relationship. This does not mean that the religious law's determination is idle, baseless and subjective. The religious law's verdict assists in compensating for the deficiency of rational perceptions. In relation to the realm which is beyond the grasp of our common intellect, God the Exalted, through the knowledge, wisdom and grade He has for the universe, enlightens and guides our intellects.

## **The Religious Law's Remarks on Dealing with the Relationship of Actions with Welfare and Corruption**

The issue which must be noted is the manner of the religious law's guidance and expression. Expression can show the formula to us and states the extent of effect of a certain action in our otherworldly life if it is like this, it will have this extent; if it is like that, it will have that extent. Explaining and understanding are so difficult in this method. Since it needs scientific terminologies and similar to elucidation of formulas and precepts in physics or mathematical equations to common people, it will be a difficult task. However, in expressing the said relations, if symbols and symbolic expressions are made, the problem will be solved. Then, for each of these symbols appropriate names such as obligatory [*wajib*], forbidden [*haram*], recommended [*mustahabb*]... etc will be selected depending on the magnitude of the positive or negative effects of those actions on the otherworldly life.

Thus, the religious decrees such as *wajib* and *haram* are a set of symbolic concepts, but not senseless and baseless symbols. They are rather symbols to express a set of real and fixed beliefs just like mathematical symbols (numbers, letters and signs).

These decrees are a set of conventional and symbolic affairs. Yet, since they are not idle and mere conventions but based on real welfare and corruption, each of them bespeaks of real affairs and true relations, actions and their effect in the Hereafter, which they have to discover with much effort. Since we ourselves do not have the capability to discover these relationships, the religious law, while unraveling them for us, has engaged in stating right and duty by means of these simple symbols, stipulating that this is obligatory and that is unlawful, or this is a right and that is a duty, and the like.

Hence, we believe that right is based on a set of real substructures; that is, welfares and corruptions really exist in our life and are realized as the effect of some actions. As such, neither the view of those who say that nature gives right to man is correct nor is the view of the Ash'arites who say that it is a divine right and since God has said that it is good and right, it has thus become good and right.<sup>3</sup> Nature is an ambiguous concept, unscientific and interpretable diversely. For this reason, the natural law theory has no clear explanation. Nevertheless, the view that it is a divine right in the sense that without any basis and out of domineering God has commanded it so is equally not correct. God has given orders but His commands are symbolic terms for a set of real and essential welfares and corruptions. God the Exalted has unraveled those welfares and corruptions and placed them at our disposal.

## The Exigency of Facilitation

Among the factors that must be considered in determining the limits and expression of right and duty is the issue of facilitation of implementation. There are so many cases in which theoretically one can identify the welfares and ensure them by enacting a law, but in practice the same law creates much trouble and the activities and lives of people are put in abeyance. It is here that God the Exalted adds another factor called "*yusr*" to the influential factors in the legislation, saying:

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ

***Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you. (2: 185)***

There may be many things which if a person can abstain from, it will give him a better health condition, but if all people want to observe them, they will be subjected to trouble and their lives will be in abeyance. For, from morning till night, they have to think only of health issues and have no more time for work and occupation. In such cases, He does not issue decree on the necessity of abstaining from them; rather, He says that it is necessary to abstain from them if they are harmful to all under common circumstances. As such, some things may be harmful, since people will be put into difficulty, there will be no strict ordinance concerning those things. This is technically called the exigency of facilitation

[*maslahat-e tashil*].

In addition to the factor of proper understanding of the welfares and corruptions, other factors such as easiness in practice must also be considered, and then, through adaptation and modification that will be undertaken, a law is enacted. This is beyond our analysis and elucidation. He who created man knows better than anyone else to what extent under the different conditions of life, this man can endure and tolerate, and if something is obliged to him, to what extent it will arbitrarily affect other things pertaining to his welfare.

In sum, it is true that legal concepts are conventional and have no equivalent terms, but they are based on a set of real welfares and corruptions which will be realized in the human life. Many a time, the enactment of a law led to the emergence of chaos or paved the way for the emergence of some spiritual and emotional, or physical diseases. Many a time, a law led to improper training or cold-heartedness of children, or made people devoid of feelings, or provided for the rearing of criminals. All of them are real factors which will be realized in the world outside the mind. The overall trend of the effects among these factors and elements embedded in this formula will be considered, and the symbolic concept called “right” [*haqq*] or “law” [*qanun*] (the legal or political concept in different cases) will be enacted for it.

## **God as the sole original bidder and forbiddor**

The important and logical question is this: Who has the right to bid and forbid? Is he other than the One Who has endowed life to man? What is the right of others to say to me, “You have to do this”? Are they the owners of me to say, “Do it”? No person has the spontaneous right to command another person. Only God has such a right because He is the Owner of the entire universe. In accordance with the ownership that God has in relation to man, the legislative guardianship, right of legislation, and to bid and forbid also belong to Him.

God the Exalted Who is our ontological Lord has also legislative Lordship over us. Since our existence depends on Him, it is He Who can say, “You have to do this” or “You must not do that.” Other than Him, who else has the right to do it? This bidding and forbidding, and any kind of determination of duty, require one’s ownership. Here, there is no more room for this question: Who has given this right to God? This is the right of God’s Divinity or Godhood. Has anyone given Divinity to God?! Divinity is an Essential Attribute of God. This right of Lordship and legislative guardianship are also requisite of His Divinity, and there is no need for someone to give this right to God.

Of course, God does not give order in vain and without wisdom. In fact, whenever He gives order, there is definitely something good in it. According to this viewpoint, the legal concepts and decrees in religion are two sides of the same coin; one side of it encompasses bidding and forbidding, credibility, commander and agent, servant and master, while the other side covers the real goodness or evilness associated with those affairs. Thus, the bidding and forbidding of God unravel the real good and evil the good and evil that constitute the edifice of rights.

In the act of proving, it is this bidding and forbidding of God which confirms the rights, and the determiner and bidder for us. No other creature can command us. The expression “divine rights” is correct, but not in the sense that may create misunderstandings; that is, to be construed as idle commands and domineering orders. God does not need to compel anyone. The commandment and prohibition of God are meant for our welfare and out of His grace and love. God the Exalted, out of kindness to His servants, wants us to attain perfection, thus making those ordinances and prohibitions. So, it is a divine command, but it is neither a domineering command, nor is it baseless and senseless. It is rather based on real goodness and evilness.

## Questions and answers

**Question:** Is the rule of right–duty correlation related to the human society or related to the relationship between God and man? How are the divine right and duty toward mankind? Does the right of God over people create a duty for God?

**Answer:** To answer this question requires a detailed discussion which must be done in its proper time, but here we shall suffice ourselves to a concise answer: In relation with God the Exalted, we have no right whatsoever over Him and He the Exalted has no duty toward us. Out of His grace and benevolence, God the Exalted has set duties for Himself toward His creatures on certain cases; that is, He has set rights for His servants over Himself. For example, God’s saying, “***He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself, (6:12)***” does not mean that we have to set the duties of God or acquire a right. However, out of His grace, God the Exalted has made it incumbent upon Himself to be merciful to His servants.

As He says, “***And it was a must for Us to help the faithful, (30:47)***” in essence, the faithful believers have no right for God to assist them. The point is that for any good deed done by a person, God shall reward him, but for God to definitely assist him is something which neither the faithful believers have such a right over God nor is it a duty of God toward them. However, out of His grace and benevolence, He has made it a right of the faithful to be assisted. As a result, it is incumbent upon Him to observe that right. Therefore, originally, neither we have any right over God nor does God have any duty toward us, but His grace demands that He has to set a right for His servants and to make it incumbent upon Himself to respect it.

**Question:** In relation to the foundations of law, it seems that even with the acceptance of the basis of “real goodness and evilness” in law, some laws such as traffic and driving regulations will be enacted on the basis of social contract. Now, the question is: What is the limitation and boundary of real and contractual laws?

**Answer:** A part of laws and legal rules is based on social contract. Yet, our emphasis is that the substructures of law are real goodness and evilness. As to what extent these substructures unravel those real goodness and evilness once they turn into superstructures and are crystallized into current

laws, there are different stages. In reality, what represents the substructure of law that is the same welfares can be realized in certain cases through many ways. That welfare is a real affair but to identify the way of realizing it into the current laws is a contractual affair.

For example, the traffic and driving rules are meant to prevent accidents and disorder in driving. This welfare is a real affair which can be obtained through various means. One way is, for example, for the drivers to drive along the left side of the road as in Britain and Japan. The other way is for all drivers to drive along the right side in most countries such as ours. To drive along the right or left side of the road has no goodness or evilness in itself and it depends on the consensus in a society, for it makes no difference whether everybody will move along the right or left side of the road. In any case, accidents will be avoided. But if one moves along the right while another one moves along the left side of the road, accidents and collision will happen and there will be heavy traffic jams.

In summary, there are cases in which the realization of the welfares and corruptions is possible through different ways. However, the social order demands that one of them must be chosen so that everybody will observe it. In that case, it is the legitimate ruler who is the determiner of that way and it is also obligatory to obey him.

- [1.](#) It is mentioned as the general principles of law. Technically, “general principles of law” is said to refer to a set of principles which no country, including the non-signatories to pertinent conventions, is ever permitted to oppose and make a contrary step.
- [2.](#) Husayniyyah is a place for the remembrance of the third infallible Imam, the grandson of the Prophet (S), Imam al-Husayn (‘a). [Trans.]
- [3.](#) Ash‘arites [‘asha‘irah]: the followers of Ash‘arism, a school in Islamic scholastic theology [kalam] founded by Abū‘l-Hasan al-‘Ash‘ari (d. circa 330 AH/941–42 CE), which are aimed at defending the basic principles of the Ahl as-Sunnah, or attempting at a rational justification of their beliefs. One of its main doctrines is that acts are not intrinsically good or evil, i.e. the goodness [husn] or evilness [qubh] of deeds are not intrinsic, but determined by the shari‘ah. [Trans.]

## **Chapter 12: The Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government (Part 3)**

### **The Different Approaches in Discussing the Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government**

The subject under discussion, i.e. the mutual relationship between the people and the government, can be studied and examined from different angles. One is from historical perspective; that is, for us to examine the governments existing in human societies throughout history and how they established relations with the people. This approach requires extensive work which is in need of historical

information.

Another angle is to examine the present condition in the world and the relationships between the people and the present-day governments and it shall be in the form of a descriptive discussion. Under this approach, the relationships existing between the governments and the peoples under their respective jurisdictions in the different societies shall be stated from the perspective of the different schools and ideologies. Of course, this description shall be the groundwork for the succeeding assessment of the scale of desirability of the various elements of those relationships. At any rate, the nature of the discussion is a descriptive one.

Another angle is related to the viewpoint of Islam about the government and its relationship with the people. This issue can be examined from two perspectives: One is in the form of an imperative and theoretical discussion, while the second is in the form of a thematic and objective discussion. In the context of the actual observations of the Islamic government, the government's relationship with the people from the time of the Islamic government established in Medina by the Holy Prophet (S) can be examined as the evidence and basis for finding out and understanding the viewpoint of Islam on social issues.

In the same context, similar to this kind of relations can also be examined in other periods where governments were founded in the name of Islam. What is more worthy to note for us is the examination of the relationship of the government during the period of the Islamic Revolution whose example was the Imam's relationship with the people. The mode of this discussion is an examination of actual and external cases. In this method, the society serves as a laboratory to be studied in order to arrive at a theory and to examine and evaluate it.

The other mode of the discussion is in the form of an analytical discussion keeping in view of the foundations of Islam, how should the government's relationship with the people be. In this method, while disregarding what relations have been established throughout the history of Muslim societies, the point is to know which of them is consistent with the standards and foundations of the Islamic thought and which of them is not. Reciprocally, in a comparative discussion, one can examine the type of relations of the governments with the people in the other schools and societies, especially in the West in the present time. In this method, one can study the said relations actually and externally (descriptive discussion) as well as on the basis of intellectual foundations they adopt in political philosophy (analytical discussion).

The fact is that many of these subjects can be expressed in theory, discussion, speech, or writing, but cannot be put into practice perfectly. Instead, a very wide gap (sometimes even to the extent of 180 degrees) between what is said and what is materialized in actuality can be witnessed. In the Muslim world, the same manifestations also exist. We have the theory of Islamic government but in different ages of the Muslim history, in some parts of the Muslim countries, some people obtained power to govern, adopted different methods of governance, and organized their relations with the people in such a manner that has not been far from that of the government of infidels. The governments of the likes of

Hajjaj ibn Yusuf<sup>1</sup> or some other Marwanites (descendants of Marwan ibn al-Hakam and their followers) under the name of Islam and even under the name of the caliph (successor) of the Holy Prophet (S) have been many throughout the history of Islam while they used to act diametrically in opposition to the objectives of the Islamic government and contrary to the theory of Islamic government.

Some people, especially those who are more inclined toward sociological discussions, say, “We do not have much concern with theoretical and hypothetical discussions. We rather observe the actual behaviors.” In their opinion, Islam is that which the Muslims have while Christianity is that which the Christians have. For us to say that Islam is such-and-such, or Islam says that such a thing must be done, but in practice we observe that the actual reality among Muslims is something else, is a useless discussion. If we really intend to describe and explain the Islamic government, we have to see how the government of Muslims has been and what the condition of the present governments reigning in the name of Islam is.

The above outlook is a sociological one which does not give much value to theoretical and value-laden discussions. In this outlook, they examine the actual happenings and pass judgment on the basis of the events. Perhaps, throughout these two decades after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, you might have observed such an approach in some writings or speeches. Prior to the Revolution, there were those who used to discuss and speak in the name of Islam and Islamology, saying, “Islam is that which can be witnessed in the practice of the Muslims. For us to imagine that Islam is something different from what we can observe in the practice of the Muslims is nothing but sheer illusion, dream and imagination.” However, the fact is that we, the Muslims, believe that Islam is that which has been ordained by God the Exalted or that which is required through the statements of the Holy Prophet (S) and the pure Imams (‘a). Islam is that which is introduced by the Qur’an. Therefore, the truth of Islam is not exactly consistent with what the Muslims have done or are doing.

You can take this point as the theory of Islamic government after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. If they say, “The theory of the Islamic government and the Islamic revolution must be presented through the actual happenings and performance of the Islamic Republic,” such an outlook is wrong and such a method is incorrect because in many cases there may be deviations and that which was desirable might have not been realized. There is a difference between theory and practice.

Of course, those who want that whatever they have accepted in theory is also realized in practice will always try to see to it that their behaviors are gearing toward the ideal point and their movement’s trend as ascending, and if they suddenly and unexpectedly do not achieve their ultimate goal, at least the direction is something which is always near the ideal target. But if the direction of the movement is not like that, we have not promised that throughout its path, this government is totally and definitely the ideal Islamic government and that we have to defend it thoroughly. We will defend the present government so long as it is consistent with the principles and foundations of Islam as well as the principles and theory of the Islamic government. As to whether there is deviation or not throughout its lifespan, we do not

guarantee that since they are ruling in the name of Islam, certainly everything is proper and we defend all its particularities.

Is there any considerable period throughout human history wherein a religion government (prior to Islam) or an Islamic government (after the advent of Islam) has been perfectly established according to what God wanted and the requirement of the doctrine? My answer is, "I do not know." If there is really such a thing, it was only a short period during the time of the Holy Prophet (S) and an equally short period during the time of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a). But in other times, whatever has transpired to the followers of other religions and Muslims, or done in the name of religious or Islamic government, we do not know them as completely religious or Islamic, and we defend only that extent which is consistent with the religious or Islamic foundations and principles. We also criticize wherever there is deviation.

Yet, those who have sociological inclination do not pass judgment in this manner. They say, "The Islamic government is the same thing which exists and is practiced in Iran." As such, if lack of success and deficiencies are observed, it is clear that the Islamic government has these deficiencies. The outcome of such a statement will be this one: If this government fails to realize its objectives, it will become clear that Islam cannot actualize whatever it says and promises. Therefore, in their opinion, that defect will be from Islam. We pointed out earlier that in our opinion, such a judgment is not accurate, because Islam may have given admonitions and orders, but for whatever reason we have failed or did not desire to act upon those admonitions and orders, we might have still failed to reach the ideal point.

## **Descriptive Study of the Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government in Islam**

Concerning the relationship between the government and the people in Islam, one method is to utilize actual studies, observations and examination of external evidences. That is, we have to see what has happened in the Muslim governments and which relations have existed among the governments and the people. It must be noted that the outcome of these studies does not bespeak of the relationship between the government and the people in Islam. In reality, it expresses the relationship between the government and the people in the government of Muslims.

The fact is that in many cases, actions have been done in the name of Islam, which apart from not being a source of pride for the school of Islam, are in fact a source of ignominy for Islam. There are many examples in this context. One of the examples is the same affairs for which we sit in lamentation during the days of the month of Muharram. Under which name were they governing those who ruled in Sham, martyred the children of the Messenger of Allah (S) and took as captives his daughters? They used to regard themselves as the caliphs of the Messenger of Allah (S) while they used to drink forbidden drinks in their parties, engage in vain talks, recite profane poetry, listened to notorious songs, and watched dancers, while they ruled under the name of Islam.

These issues are not new and are not related to today and yesterday. There were also musicians and singers who used to sing national songs. They used to praise the tribes and families, the nobles and the ancients of these people, taking pride in their fathers. During those days, these issues existed and they are not confined to the present that in the name of national culture and Islam, many works contrary to the religious law are done. The fact is that these cannot and must not be attributed to Islam.

In any case, the issue of the relationship of the governments, which were in power in the name of Islam, with the people throughout the history of Muslims can be examined. As we have stated, they have no identical actions. In fact, they have been very different from one another. Sometimes, they have been near to Islam to some extent while at other times a hundred percent anti-Islamic. Be that as it may, this historical discussion is not so much useful for the point we are presently driving at.

In this historical method, what may be useful for us is an examination of some examples of governments which we regard as Islamic and can be cited as an appropriate reference for understanding the theory of Islam. A vivid example of them is the government of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a). It is so good that this year is the Year of 'Ali ('a) and 'Ali's Conduct, and there are those who identify and examine the characteristics of the government of 'Ali ('a) and present to the society the result of those examinations in the form of articles, or discussions and research works.

Of course, innovation in research and avoidance of repeating and rewriting of the earlier writings as well as attention to our needs, especially the issues which we demand today, should be observed. We should strive to answer the questions of the society today from the life conduct of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) How to govern? How should one behave with the people? How should the people organize their relationship with the government? When the Imam (r) was in Paris, foreign journalists frequented his place of sojourn to ask him, "What is the nature of the government that you want to establish?" The Imam used to reply, "The model of our government is the Islamic government."

They used to ask, "What does the Islamic government mean? How should it be? What is your model?" The Imam used to reply, "The model of our government is the government of the Commander of the Faithful ('a)." By means of it that the personality of 'Ali ('a) has become known to all societies and peoples of the world irrespective of religious affiliations and nationalities, and everybody has learnt of something from the life and conduct of 'Ali ('a) as well as his justice. The Imam used to say, "The model of our government is the government of 'Ali ('a)." As to what extent that the Imam succeeded in putting into practice this model in our revolutionary society can be examined. But what is fair is that the Imam did not indulge in negligence as far as it was related to him.

The eminent Imam followed his master [*mawla*] as far as that which was related to him was concerned. His simple living, nightly acts of worship, benevolences to the deprived classes of the society, wailings and lamentations, seeking of divine assistance, attachment to the truth, overcoming the pressure of the nearest ones, and not preferring his and his family and relatives' interests are all indicative of his imitation of 'Ali ('a). During last year's Year of Imam Khomeini, they were supposed to familiarize us

better with the Imam, but unfortunately, they made us instead more alien to him. Subjects under the rubric of the Imam's viewpoints were discussed and published and most of them were contrary to the viewpoints of the late Imam. What can be done?! It was the same during the time of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Commander of the Faithful ('a). The late Imam spoke on a certain day and then the following day they would distort his sayings notwithstanding the fact that no leader in the world was as simple as him in his language. Sometimes, he used to say, "I do not know how to speak so as to prevent them from distorting my speech!"

In any case, the life of Imam was so similar to that of his grandfather (Imam 'Ali). Yet through a single man, a government cannot be set aright, as the saying goes, "One flower cannot bring about the spring season." As far as he could, he used to be watchful of those who were around him and directly under his authority. Sometimes, he would admonish them while at another time, reprimand and criticize them. As far as I remember, I heard from high-ranking officials of the country saying, "It never happened that we came to the Imam without him expressing criticism.

Whenever we visited him, he had a criticism." Even his nearest kin whom he loved so much, whenever they had a point of weakness, the Imam would remind them. Of course, a reminder does not mean that it must be done completely. The point is that he used to play his role. If we would like to show two examples of government as exemplar Islamic governments throughout the history of Islam, one is the government of 'Ali ('a) and the other is the government of Imam Khomeini (r).

Of course, this does not mean that all the rest were or are at fault; rather, the Imam had certain peculiarities both in his own personality and the social conditions which appeared to him by the will of God. These conditions will not be provided for everybody exactly. On the other hand, the rest could not play the role which he used to play because they do not have all the social bases and conditions. Therefore, I mean to say that the rest are blameworthy though there are also those whose certain behaviors could be criticized and have defects which they can afford not to have. Anyway, human beings are not stereotypical machines. Instead, everyone has his own certain peculiarities just as people's knowledge, faith, piety, willpower, and management skills are diverse. Apart from innate characteristics of individuals and their personality differences, skills are different among them. Of course, we have to thank God that after the Imam, today we have his substitute, and by His will, God will prolong his sublime presence with us.

Whatever the case may be, historical examination is also a method of examining the relationship between the government and the people. One can find the ideal behavior of rulers toward the people in the life of 'Ali ('a) and that of the Imam (may Allah be pleased with him). In this regard, all of us have heard or read certain things, and we can narrate them to others. There are so many outstanding points in the life of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) that if someone intends to express, after a whole year of sitting together and conversation, there will still be many things to be said.

One day, while 'Ali ('a) was standing on the prayer niche and preparing to utter the *takbirat al-ihram*<sup>2</sup>

after reciting the *iqamah*,<sup>3</sup> a woman entered the mosque and shouted, “O ‘Ali! Wait.” He did not commence the prayer. Instead, he turned toward the woman and asked, “What are you saying?” She answered, “The governor whom you sent to our place is an oppressor; he is ill-mannered... etc.” The Imam of the congregation and Islamic ruler was standing in the mosque, recited the *iqamah* and wanted to utter the *takbir*, and a woman came to lodge a complaint against the governor of her city. While tears flowed in his eyes, ‘Ali (‘a) said, “O God! You know that I am not pleased with his oppression.” He then said, “Bring me a pen and a paper.” After reciting the *takbirat al-Ihram* of his prayer, he wrote the order of dismissal of the said governor and gave it to the woman. Thereafter, he uttered, “*Allahu akbar!*”

Where in the world have you ever heard that the relationship between the government and the people is similar to that government? These examples are so many that if they are inscribed and painted in golden tableaux and displaced in the museums of the world, every fair-minded person who takes a look at them will be shocked out of astonishment and amazement. Can a person be as free as such?! Which school is this?!

There were also similar instances in the life of the Imam (r). Of course, there is a very wide gap between ‘Ali (‘a) and the late Imam, but examples similar to the life conduct of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) can be observed in his behavior. In this age and in this world, according to the testimony of all his friends and foes, he is the most beloved person ever seen in this century throughout the world. The enemies also confessed that during the last century, there has not been any person in the world as beloved as the Imam. Although not in words, his enemies secretly loved him and were enamored by his personality, justice and sincerity. His inner and outer being, word and action were one. He would do whatever he would say, and say whatever he would do. His heart was indeed burning for all people—young and old, child and adult, man and woman. Whenever he saw that someone was deprived, he would really be upset.

Prophet Moses (‘a) heard in the Mount of Sinai that a number of his people had become idol-worshippers, but there was no change in his state of emotion. When he returned from the Mount and saw people worship in idol, it was at this moment that he threw the heavenly tablets, his color changed and took hold of the beard of his brother Harun (‘a) in front of people and said, “*Did you disobey my command?*” Prophet Moses (‘a) knew it beforehand, but knowing is different from seeing. The Imam also knew that there were many deprived people in the society, but whenever he would see an orphan or a deprived person, he would be so touched and he felt a sense of responsibility.

This is one method of discussion through which we examined the Commander of the Faithful’s conduct with people so as to know how the government’s relationship with people in Islam is.

By disregarding the actual cases taking place, in the analytical discussion we have to note what the intellectual and theoretical foundations of Islam require in the realm of governance. How should the government’s relationship with people be? We shall tackle this subject in the next meeting, and in the remaining time of this session I shall deal with a subject in the field of historical and actual discussion of

the mutual relationship between people and government.

## **Descriptive study of the Mutual Relationship between People and Government in the Democratic system**

Just as we can have an actual examination of the government's relationship with people in the Muslim world, we can also perform the same actual studies about the government's relationship with people in other schools. We all know that the political developments in the world and the people's intellectual and rational advancement, especially in the West, finally ended at the point where the best form to govern is for us to set aside religion. The best model of government is the democratic government and it represents the sovereignty of the will and demand of people in all spheres. Of course, as to how this government be established both in theory and practice, certain events took place until it reached the present stage in the contemporary world whose common and ideal mode, particularly in the advanced countries, is the democratic model; that is the government by which every person describes everything through his own thinking and will.

Now, in an actual study, one can examine how democratic government is run in the world. In other words, we shall examine in practice what is said that democracy is the government or sovereignty based on the will of the people, and see how the governments that rule in the name of the people actually govern, what their duties and role are, and how their relationship with the people is.

By dispensing with every sort of fanaticism, we want to examine one example of government in one of the most advanced countries which claims to be the champion of democracy and defender of human rights, viz. the United States of America. In this actual examination, we want to see how government takes form in America, what form the power structure there is, and how the government's relationship with the people is.

By considering what the Western and American scholars themselves have reflected through examinations, statistics and actual instances they have written in the pertinent books and articles, with utmost neutrality and in plain language we declare that the government whether that of the Republican Party or that of the Democrat Party, is a medium between the capitalists and the masses. What plays the pivotal role in the policymaking of these countries is the interests of the capitalists.

Of course, the capitalists consist of different groups ranging from the landowners to the industrial giants such as manufacturers of airplanes, spacecrafts and war armaments and producers of electronics, computers and Internet-related software and hardware, and other technologies at the disposal of mankind today. This number is only a small population which does not exceed ten percent of the American population or even less. The rest of people have no share of the national capital except meager food for survival. Of course, there is competition among these capitalists, and in order to win the competition, a certain group works more with the Republican Party just as some others support the

Democrat Party. The common aim of both groups is the triumph of capital. In the words of the eminent Imam (‘a), their conflict is a mock war and they are not very inimical to each other. In fact, their objective is to ensure the interests of the capitalists.

But how is the ruling parties’ relationship with the capitalists? They take money from them to fund their electoral campaign so that as a result their party would win the city, federal and presidential elections and take the government and power in their hands. If there is no money paid by the capitalists, one of them will not come to power. Many of these financial assistances are official, registered in the offices, legal, and nothing is wrong about them. Yet, in accordance with their principles and laws, much other assistance are bribery and embezzlement. In one of the European countries (which is known everywhere and thus, there is no need of explicitly mentioning it) a party ruled in the country for many years and made successes for the country in different areas such as economic progresses. Then, it became clear how much bribe money it took and presently the issue on the legal trial against their heads and leaders is raised.

The fact is that in America, the government’s relationship with the capitalists is a master–slave relationship. They collect money from the capitalists so as to win in the elections and later on provide for their demands. These demands will be provided for by the statesmen both in the legislative the Congress and the Senate and the executive branch. Since the pulse of work is in the hands of the executives, they have to ensure the interests of the capitalists. We hear every day that through a thousand tricks and ruses, the US Secretary of Defense departs and goes to different countries in order to sell a certain amount of war ammunitions and earn money.

For what? So that the life of the owners of war industries is ensured. If he does not do it, tomorrow they will not vote for his party. What does it mean for them not to vote? It means that they will not give money to the party for its election campaign. Winning in the election depends on campaign while campaign depends on money while money, in turn, is in the hands of the capitalists. The capitalists have to give money so that the parties can launch an election campaign in order to win and to form the government as a result of their election victory. In this manner, the aim of forming the government is to ensure the interests of the capitalists.

In this way, the connection between the government and the minority group of capitalists will be established. So, how shall be their relationship with the masses? It will be a relationship of a deceitful fox for deceiving its preys in which it has to carry out diverse propaganda so as to satisfy the people and control the society in whatever way. Of course, this work requires a highly advanced psychology because the people consist of different groups including religious groups, religious minorities, young and old, retirees, and men and women. As to how each of these groups and guilds are pleased so that the propaganda is effective on them requires a particular psychology.

In the countries where the people imitate the Americans, they do the same things. In the extremely underdeveloped or developed countries which take America as a model, they try, for example, to identify

the religious minorities and to contact them and promise them thus, “If we succeed in controlling the government, we will appoint governors and mayors who are natives from among you,” so as to win their votes. They also take into account a special propaganda campaign for women. They say, for example, “Once we assume the helm of government, we will give you these liberties.” Among these, the most important and diverse election campaigns are focused on the youth. They are always the greatest preys of the politicians.

These works are not confined to only one or two countries. In fact, in all democratic countries these approaches are observed. The ethnic minorities, religious minorities, women, and youth are the main targets of propaganda campaigns of the politicians in the world. In these neighboring countries, in India for example, whenever we want to hold election campaigns there are many parties which bribe the Muslims.

During the election campaign period, they try to give promises and pledge to the Indian Muslims, who are a considerable religious minority (with a population of about two times that of our country), thus saying, “Once we obtain power, we will do this and that for the Muslims,” in order to win their votes. They promise the ethnic minorities who live along the countryside to officially recognize their language and culture, and respect their customs and traditions, and similar other things. For what these promises and propaganda campaigns in this manner are? They are meant to deceive the masses.

## **To be a Mercenary of the Capitalists as the Real Role of the Governments in the Western Democracy**

As such, the basic and important role of the governments in the democratic countries is to serve as mercenaries of the capitalists and to deceive the masses. Which act are they doing which cannot be included in these two things? What and where is this promised heaven that they make to you and me, saying, “You set Islam aside and you will achieve this progress and development and human rights will be observed in your countries”? Alongside some of these industrial advancements and developments, only God knows what oppressions, crimes and corruptions are made.

They are willing to relegate the whole humankind to quagmire just to protect the interests of a few. Don't you believe?! For instance, just observe what Hollywood is doing in America. Hollywood is a filmmaking company which is not concerned about anything except the protection of its interests. In a study and survey they conducted, it became clear that most of their viewers are adolescents who like violent scenes. As such, more than eighty percent of films that Hollywood is producing have violent scenes. What are the repercussions of watching these films? Its smoke will first irritate the eyes of the people. Today, the worst and most corrupt country in the world in terms of crimes committed by youngsters is America. A day during which a crime is not committed by this class in America is very rare. More than two hundred million firearms are in the hands of people and have become the toys of their children.

This is because their lives are in danger and they have to arm themselves and their children to defend themselves and not let anyone harm them in the street. In going and coming from school, the children of those who are affluent are escorted by employed policemen. The children are not safe from the metro to school. Why are these (film producers) allowed to be free to show these violent scenes, moral corruptions and sexual promiscuities to the youth and adolescents and corrupt their morality? Why are they trying to sell these films to the other countries? What is the reason for the persistence in selling them? The answer is: In order to get money in return.

Canada is one of the close trading partners of the United States and its neighbor as well, and as it was frequently said before, it is the “private yard” of America. This country which is considered the main partner of America in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)<sup>4</sup> is not permitting the Hollywood films to be freely sold there and the people of Canada to watch those scenes. Of course, you have to bear in mind that the scenes existing in Canada itself are hellish scenes for us and we cannot tolerate them. In spite of the corrupt life they themselves have, they are not willing to watch American films! Why does America insist on selling these films without being censored and is this part of their trading agreements?

The only reason is for the film producing companies to get money and profit and also give a share to the ruling party so as to be able to launch an election campaign and by obtaining votes it can remain in power and meet the demands of the companies. This form of government is the same promised heaven they promise, saying, “If our government becomes democratic, it will become like America. That is, a puppet government at the service of the capitalists and a deceitful fox for the masses.

## Question and Answer

**Question:** Is there no practical experience that can be used as the perfect model for the Islamic government? If the answer is negative, can it be accepted that the Islamic republican government starts in the form of trial and error, and has to continue in this form?

**Answer:** When we said that we could hardly show a perfect model of the Islamic government, it does not mean that there are defects in theory and the rules of Islamic administration. Instead, it is due to the nature of man. Man is not a being that can be stereotyped and confined to a specific space and path and not stray from it. This is because man is an autonomous being. As such, consciously or unconsciously in practice, people in general will commit violation including those who hold administrative positions. These individuals (public servants) do not come from the Divine Throne or heaven.

They are also people. This is regardless of whether the creams of the crop are elected according to the Islamic standards or garner votes according to the same democratic standards and through election campaigns. Even we who are engaged in theory and theorizing in the Islamic government, whenever we are so strict with respect to the necessary qualifications of the position-holders and believe that the government should be close and similar to the government of the Infallibles (‘a) as much as possible, we

refer to the intelligence and not to the method, for all positions to be held by infallibles is not possible.

Even during the time of presence of an infallible Imam, infallibility [*'ismah*] pertains only to the intelligence. During the time of the Commander of the Faithful ('a), were there no individuals sent by the Imam ('a) as governors who committed violations and treacheries, embezzle the public treasury, left and joined Mu'awiyah? He was in the government of 'Ali ('a) and had a decree of appointment from 'Ali ('a) but he used to misappropriate the public treasury, leave and go to another person because he knew that if he went to 'Ali ('a), everything he embezzled would be taken from him.

The reason for this is not the existence of defect in the theory of the Islamic government. The nature of man is such that it tends to choose, and based on the choices that people make, not everybody can be angel. Finally, there are defects; violations will be made; and at least, mistakes will be committed. Therefore, the ideal will never be perfectly realized. Of course, during the time of the advent of Wali al-'Asr ('a) as to what extent it will be close to the ideal state, I do not know. We hope that we will experience that time and benefit from its blessings. Nevertheless, during the time of the advent, will all violations be stopped? Will no one be oppressed anymore? In each of the works to be done by the different administrative workers of the Imam ('a), will the laws of Islam be accurately implemented? These questions are worthy of reflection. God willing, we have to experience and see that time. What is certain is that the violators will be punished but we have supporting basis and guarantee that there will be no violation at all.

Now, in these circumstances, should we discard the ideal form of government and no longer take such a government as our goal? The answer is negative. The nature of man is such that he should take into account the ideal point, move toward it and try to get closer to it as much as possible. So long as we see that our government is such that Islamic standards are observed more and has a rising trend, we have to be pleased to have good people, not that Islam is good because Islam by itself is good. If we succeed in bringing ourselves closer to Islam and better observe the Islamic values, we have to thank God that our society succeeded in making itself closer to the ideal scheme of Islam.

Therefore, to expect that a government is formed in which no violation is ever made and the Islamic standards are observed is an improper expectation. But to expect that day by day we can get closer to it and put into practice more the ordinances of Islam is not an inopportune expectation; of course, provided that we also strive harder.

1. Hajjaj ibn Yusuf ath-Thaqafi (d. 714 CE) was a lieutenant appointed by the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705 C.E.). In order to suppress dissent in Mecca, he ordered the bombardment of the Sacred Mosque. He is famous for his bloody persecution of the Shi'ah, particularly for having killed Sa'id ibn Jubayr (d. 713 C.E.), who was one of the early exegetes of the Qur'an. It is reported that Hajjaj was tormented by the image of this martyr in his dying moments. [Trans.]

2. Takbirat al-Ihram: the recital of Allahu akbar [God is the greatest] which is the formal beginning of prayer. [Trans.]

3. Iqamah: a shortened form of adhan, heralding the commencement of prayer [salah]. [Trans.]

4. Members of NAFTA are the United States of America, Canada and Mexico.

# Chapter 13: The Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government (Part 4)

## A Review of the Discussion in the Previous Session

The subject discussed in the previous session and about which there was a discourse as far as the time permitted was the relationship between the people and the government from the viewpoint of Islam. The summary of the previous discussion was that this issue can be examined in two methods: one in the form of a historical approach and another in an analytical method.

In the historical method, this issue is examined—in the Muslim world, how the relationship of those who have governed in the name of Islam with the people has been; similarly, in the Western world, how the relationship of those who have governed with non-Islamic ideologies has been.

We have stated that unfortunately, in both the Muslim world and the Western world, there are abundant criticisms and problems. We all know that only a few decades had passed after the demise of the Holy Prophet (S) when there were those who used to govern under the name of succession [*khilafah*] to the Prophet (S) and even in the name of vicegerency of God and did things which were rare even in a non-religious government. The works the Umayyads and after them the 'Abbasids did only show the absence of the Islamic government, but they were rulers in the name of Islam anyway.

Therefore, if anyone wants to examine the government's relationship with the people from the perspective of the history of Muslims, he will naturally not arrive at good results. This is because the government's relationship with the people in almost all cases has been that of a master-servant relationship. Of course, sometimes at the margin there had been some movements and to some extent the laws and values of Islam had been raised, but generally the government's relationship with the people, like all monarchial systems, was a master-servant relationship.

One could hardly find the distinct difference between the government of the Umayyads, Marwanites and 'Abbasids and that of the Persian kings and Roman emperors. Even the outward forms of the acts had reached a point wherein those who governed as the successors of the Prophet (S) had an assembly of impolite singing, drinking of forbidden drinks and carousal, and the same practices had been used to be done in courts of other kings.

In relation to the people, they did not refrain from committing oppression whether against Muslims or non-Muslims. Under the name of Islam, they started to pursue expansionism and conquering countries. Instead of behaving with the people on the basis of the ordinances of Islam and invite and guide them to the divine religion, they fought with them under the pretext of being infidels; they thus killed them and

took as captives their wives and daughters and became a source of ignominy for Muslims.

The bitter memories of these military expeditions still remain in the minds of many and have become the source of abnormalities in the relations between Muslims and Christians. Nowadays, one can witness an example of such frictions in the events in the Balkans. In any case, historically we are not satisfied with the relationship between the governments that used to govern under the name of Islam and their people, and we have no proof to acquit them either. We have no proof or motive to present them as the original and real examples of the Islamic government. Similarly, there were those in the West who used to govern under the name of Christianity and were not behind these and perhaps worse than these. Those who launched the Wars of Crusades or those who formed the Inquisition were no better than the other kings.

Therefore, the examination of the government–people relationship from the ideological viewpoint of Islam or the Western ideological viewpoint through the study and examination of the actual and empirical examples of the governments that claim to be Islamic or democratic is not a proper method and the discussion will arrive at no conclusion. What can be concluded from these examinations is what has happened in the government of those who have ruled under the name of Islam and what relationship has existed between them and the people, or what has transpired in the government of those who have ruled under the name of Christianity in the West and what relationship has existed between them and their people as well as what happened during that time until it ended to the period of Renaissance and then to the period of modernity and the contemporary time in which the liberalist thought is dominant.

## **A Comparison of the Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government in Islam and the West a Descriptive Approach**

Meanwhile, the other method in examining the government–people relationship is the analytical one; that is, to examine what the intellectual and theoretical foundations of Islam or the intellectual and theoretical foundations of the West require. Of course, we have to bear in mind that in the West there have been no fixed intellectual foundations for the past fourteen centuries. Many developments have happened in the history of the Western thought, while we regard the Islamic thought as fixed. Differences of opinion on some secondary matters have come up but the principles and foundations have not changed. Today, the Islamic thought about politics and government is the same that existed during the time of the Holy Prophet (S), and what we know as Islam is that which comes from the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* and the life conduct [*sirah*] of the Prophet (S).

If we want to compare the theory of Islam with that of the West, it must be specified with which part of the Western thought we want to compare. Do we want to compare with Christianity which has been expelled for centuries from the page of social life in the West, from the political scene in particular?

Should we compare the ideas during the Renaissance and after it, i.e. the period of modernity and postmodernism with Islam? What is most asked is the latter part; that is, if we want to compare Islam with the West, we have to do so with the present West and not with the West thousands of years or many centuries ago. That discussion does not have much use for us. Today, the dominant idea in the Western political and social circles is the liberalist thought. Therefore, it is better for us to compare these two thoughts, viz. Islam and liberalism.

The liberalist thought is dealt with in the form of democracy in the political and administrative scene. The origin of liberalist thought is an extensive one that covers the different economic, political, moral, legal, and other domains, but in the political domain, it is portrayed more in the form of democracy. The intellectual foundations of democracy are not identical with that of liberalism, but nowadays these two have practically become synonyms? Wherever the government is democratic, it is based on the liberalist ideas, and vice versa. For this reason, in our comparative discussion, we will tackle this issue what relationship between the government and the people the Islamic thought chooses and reciprocally, what relationship between the government and the people the liberalist–democratic thought prefers.

## **The Government People Relationship in Western Thought**

First, we will take a look at Western thought. In the Western thought, “God” is absolutely not discussed. It does not mean that it is negated. (For, sometimes they criticize the statement that Western thought is atheistic for there are also many faithful people there. We do not deny this fact.) What is meant is that in this totality of ideas, from the foundations to its superstructures, nowhere is it said that one should believe in God and divine revelation, observe the religious law, and make the laws of God prevail in politics, society, ethics, and other domains. In liberalist thought, belief in God is not a great deal.

Even if a person believes in God, it is mentioned merely as a personal communion with God for, in the realms of politics, society, law, and social rights and relations there is no room for God, religious law and religion. This is the meaning of secularism. Of course, among the seculars there may be believers in God and they go to church, but their religiosity is only their personal and emotional relationship with their Lord, and has no relation to their sociopolitical affairs.

That we say, “The dominant thinking in the West at the present (that is the same liberalist thought) is an atheistic thought,” means the absence of religion. In such an outlook, politics, man and all values mentioned for him have emanated from man himself, and the originator of values is man. Therefore, in this outlook a place for God and the Hereafter has not been taken into consideration. If ever there are those who have liberalist thought believe in God and the Resurrection, this belief of theirs has no influence on the organization of their social relations and it is regarded as a totally personal affair.

The humanist thought had been advanced centuries ago (more than 25 centuries ago) by the Sophists in ancient Greece. They used to regard man as the barometer of everything including ideological, political, legal, moral, and other issues. Its simple formula is that whatever the people accept and vote for is

credible; and nothing has credibility unless it is accepted by people, be it in the spheres of law, ethics, or social matters. If ever we say, “So–and–so is credible,” it is because the people say so. If we also say, “It is not credible,” it is because the people say so.

For this reason, it is possible that a certain thing is credible in one society but not in another society, because the people of the former society accept it while the people of the latter do not accept it. So, the only criterion is the vote, wish, acceptance, and will of the people. And since acceptance differs among people, it naturally follows that values will become relative. The first outcome of the West’s humanist thought is that we can never talk about a universal and fixed value because we know that the tastes of people differ from one another. Based on this perspective, to talk about all–encompassing universal values has no logical underpinning unless someone says that some values are common in all societies and have been accepted by all peoples.

Of course, the existence or nonexistence of such values is questionable and worthy of reflection. A simple example which is usually cited is that everybody accepts that truthfulness or honesty is good, but this claim is not true and this case is not acceptable to some others, such as the Marxists who explicitly declare that truthfulness or honesty is actually not always good.

The Marxists used to say that stealing is not always bad; rather, it may be good sometimes. If there is a time when stealing has effect on the establishment of the communist system and the dominance of the proletariat over the bourgeoisies, in this case it is good, because the end justifies the means. The objective is to make supreme the “modern level” system in the world and all people equal in terms of class distinction. Whatever assists in the realization of this objective is valuable. If one day the means of realization of this objective is to steal, there is nothing wrong with it.

Of course, nowadays, nobody explicitly says so, but there are those who believe in it in practice. In the name of freedom, in the name of peace and in the name of human rights, they do things that the natural human disposition abhors. They commit the most grievous crimes against humanity, yet they name it human rights advocacy. One of its most vivid manifestations can be witnessed in the Occupied Palestine. Although the most horrendous and grievous crimes have been committed there against humanity for many years, we can see that the powerful states in the world who are alleged defenders of human rights and are at loggers with the entire world over this issue are totally supporting Israel. Outwardly, they say that peace is good and human rights are preeminent and respectable, but they say so while they in practice do not believe in it.

## **First Criticism to this Theory**

Our first criticism to them is that based on this notion that all “musts and must–nots” as well as values whether in the domain of law (including civil law, penal law, international law, commercial law, and all other branches) or in the domain of ethics depend on the will, acceptance and approval of the people, we cannot have fixed values in the whole world and expect all people to accept a certain value from us.

The first outcome is that we should strike a red line over the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

So, to say that everybody must acknowledge human rights because the Declaration deals on universal values is idle talk. Based on their notion, have they not said that values are based on the will of the people? Therefore, if some people do not approve this declaration, rejecting it, and their taste is something else, what is the reason that this declaration acquires universal value and must be imposed upon everybody? If one day certain people accepted and approved this declaration but the next day changed their mind, why should they be compelled to follow it? Have they not claimed that values are in accordance with the will of the people? Thus, if one day (the people of) a state decided to approve the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but after sometime, they changed their decision, saying, "We are in regret and from now on, we do not accept it," what is your right to condemn them and take into consideration punishments for them?

## **Second Criticism**

Secondly, based on this outlook, you have to grant right to the people to regard their choice as respectable whenever they change their mind, while this issue has repercussions to which no country or government is bound, and none of those who have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights could abide by it. Among these repercussions is that if a group of people in a country living in a province, a city, or even a village say, "We want to live independently and to have independence on sociopolitical issues," no country can have any right to hinder them because it is the will of the people.

Yet, is this observed in practice? Many wars in the Balkans and other parts of the world have occurred because the people of those regions said, "We want to be independent." So, why do the claimants of sovereignty on the basis of the will of people not pay heed to these people?! No state, as much as it can, will permit a section of its people to gather and form a separate state. This is while the intellectual foundation of the West does not permit so, and in fact, they have to submit to the will of the people.

They had been saying, "We want to have a single state." But now, they want to have two separate states. In consonance with the foundation of liberal democracy, one should yield to the will of the people. In practice, however, wherever this music is played, under the pretext of insurrection and that a number of troublemakers are planning to disintegrate the country and endanger the national independence and territorial integrity, the central government suppresses them. Based on the intellectual foundation of the liberal democrats, this should not be done. Yet, according to another foundation, we may grant such a right to the states and governments, but based on the thought acceptable to the West, they have no right to hinder the realization of the will of the people whatever it is.

## **Third Criticism**

The third criticism to this way of thinking is that if one day the people changed their choice, saying, "Yesterday, we voted for so-and-so. Today, we realized that we were wrong," or "Yesterday, we wanted

that thing, and today we want another thing and to change our vote,” they are supposed to be able to do so. Yet, nowhere in the world are such people given that permission. It is said to them, “You were supposed to be aware from the very beginning.”

To claim that “They deceived us,” or “We were mistaken,” or “We wanted it yesterday but now we do not like it” is not acceptable. The question is: What hinders the people if yesterday they wanted something and cast their votes on the basis of it but now they want to retrieve it? They say, “It is the law.” But the crux of the matter is exactly here. The law is anchored in the will of the people and the same people say that they do not like it. Does this thought not claim that if a people approve a law, the following day they have the right to amend it?! Everywhere in the world, it is said that even the constitution is amendable.

What does it mean by amendable? It means that yesterday the people ratified this constitution and tomorrow they will say, “We do not accept it.” If the people have such a right, why if one day they voted for a president but tomorrow they have no right to say, “We do not like him?” In reply to this question, it may be said that during the presidential election it is said that to whomever you will vote for shall be the president for two, four or seven years, and on the basis of that they have cast their votes. The reply is that such was their will on that day and today they like another thing, and based on the liberalist thought the criterion is the will of the people.

## **Fourth Criticism**

The fourth criticism is this: Where can you find in the world a place in which the will of the people is a hundred percent identical and one?! In all countries there are always minorities. Perhaps it is unprecedented in the world the formation of a government like the Islamic Republic of Iran in which ninety-eight percent of the people voted for it, but this high percentage still means that a small percent of the people did not accept it. If the criterion is the vote of the people, what shall be done in this case with respect to them who do not accept the law or the government? When two percent is faced with the ninety-eight percent, in practice they are forced to yield and can do nothing. Yet, this is something which your theory is not conforming with. If the criterion is the will of the people, it follows that these minorities have a right to form a government of its own.

In reply to this criticism, the liberal democrats argue, “We do observe the rights of the minorities under the aegis of democracy.” It is however clear that this answer is wrong because these people labeled as “minority” do not want the essence of this government. Ten percent of the people say, “We do not like this government at all,” and yet you say to them, “We will observe your rights under the aegis of this government!” Those people do not like the basis of this government. Does the credibility of this government not depend on the votes of the people?! Is this group not part of the people?! This minority constitutes ten percent of these people and they say, “We do not like you,” and still you make this promise: “We respect the minority,” but the government runs on the basis of the will of the majority.

Therefore, in the democratic government the will of the minority remains unanswered, and for the minority to submit to the majority while keeping view of the basis that the criterion is the will of the people has no logical justification. If the minority says, “We do not like this government” and assuming that the credibility of this government depends on the vote of the people, what right do you have to oppose it?

These and similar criticisms have no logical answers and are true with respect to this theory. The last answer they will give is this: “We do not know a better way and in the evolution of theory on the government and its form, we have reached the point that liberal democracy is the best form of government.”

## **A Summary of the Criticisms to this Theory**

In any case, there is a series of logical criticisms and objections which have still remained unanswered. Regarding the criticism of the intellectual foundation of liberal democracy, hundreds of books have been written by the Westerns themselves. If a government based on such an idea is formed, these contradictions exist there, among which is that the minority must be oppressed! It is their right not to approve this government but it is imposed on them. This basis requires that if tomorrow the vote of the people for their elected officials changes, it shall have credibility. If today they vote for a president and tomorrow they say, “We do not like him,” this must be given importance because the vote is the vote of the people and their will. Yet, is such a thing possible? Naturally, no one will do such a thing because in this case the government will experience many instabilities and regarding everything, it should always be through a referendum as to whether the people want it or not.

It may be said that the representatives of the people come, cast their votes and enact laws. The problem with this is that the representatives themselves may change their votes. Today the representatives confirm something, and it happens frequently that they change their votes afterward. The law changes as easy as such. In addition, the main problem is this: If tomorrow the people reject these representatives and their enacted laws, what should be done?

These fundamental problems exist in this way of thinking and it has no logical answer. Here, the relationship between the people and the government changes into a relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor in numerous cases. Even according to this very outlook, in many cases the right of the people is not given to them while their votes and views have no bearing at all. In some cases, very horrible crimes are even committed. [1](#)

## **The Government–People Relationship in the Islamic Thought**

Meanwhile, according to the Islamic thought, the basis of the rights, laws and values is the real interests of human beings and the one who is aware of all those interests is God the Exalted. As such, God acquires the right to sovereignty over man. On the other hand, He is the Creator of all human beings. The entire universe belongs to Him and all human beings are owned by Him. He thus has the right to

enact laws for His creatures. What right can I whose eyes, hands, life, existence, intellect, and common sense belong to Him have over Him except that which He grants to me?!

According to such an outlook, all those criticisms and objections will find logical answers and justifications. Concerning personal ownership, does anyone have no right to do whatever he likes to his property? You may fold a sheet of paper which belongs to you and put it in your pocket, or write something on it with a pencil or ball pen, or give it to someone, or draw on it, or solve a mathematical problem on it. You may do whatever you like to do with it because it is yours. None can complain to you, saying, “Why did you write on it with a pencil?” or “Why did you write on it with a ball pen?” or “Why did you draw on it?” or any other “why” because it is yours and you wanted to do what you did to it. Does ownership mean other than this?!

Once we accept that everything belongs to God, there is no more point in asking this question: “Why has God enacted such laws?” God is not in need of such laws. Whatever law He enacts is for your and my interests.

So, on one hand, we believe that the criterion of credibility and backing for the value of law is a real affair, and they are the good and bad things existing in a subject. On the other hand, the one who has the right to bid and forbid human beings must be their Owner and such a being is no other than God the Exalted. Therefore, God Who knows what is good and bad better than all, and He is the Absolute Owner of man and the world, has the right to do whatever He likes to them. Of course, all these utilizations and expropriations are meant for the interests of man and God does not acquire any benefit.

In some cases, the people themselves need to enact rules and regulations under certain circumstances. In such cases, God has given the authority of legislation in a certain way and to specified individuals. They are those who know the divine values better than the rest. Similarly, they possess the necessary God-wariness [*taqwa*] so as not to sacrifice these values before the altar of personal interests, and have the needed talents in ratifying and implementing the laws in the realms of individual and social affairs.

These individuals are no other than the jurists [*fuqaha*']. The jurist-guardian [*wali al-faqih*] is the person to whom God the Exalted grants the right to enact unfixed laws and decrees and bestow religious and legal credibility to them, and it is incumbent upon others to act upon those laws. Who has the right to order that obedience to those laws and the jurist-guardian is obligatory? It is God Who has created man, this jurist-guardian and the entire earth and heavens. This theory has no logical loophole.

God the Exalted can enact numerous general and universal values because there may be good things which are identical for the whole mankind. Are all humans not identical in terms of humanness? So, they may have common interests. One set of these interests is related to the humanity of man, and as such, so long as man is human, these interests are fixed and permanent.

Hence, the existence of absolute and fixed values in the human society is possible. Also, the global culture can exist only on the basis of such an outlook. In a sense, we are followers of a universal culture,

but this universal culture which shall be established on the basis of the real human values through the hands of Mahdi (‘a) is different from the values which should be imposed on others on the basis of the whims and caprice of some great powers.

The result is that these fixed and absolute values can exist under two conditions: (1) They must be related to the humanity of man, and (2) they must be conveyed by God. With these two conditions, we can have fixed and absolute values, and the culture, which should be established on the basis of these values, can become the universal culture. For example, the universal culture means that all people worship the One and Only God. Our ultimate dream is that such a day will pass:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظَاهِرَهُ عَلَىٰ الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

***It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse. (9:33)***

The value–system of this universal culture is not subservient to the will of the people: “...*though the polytheists should be averse.*” That is, it is not subservient to the pleasure and displeasure of others. Even in the presence of aversion of the polytheists, this religion will reign supreme and spread its values. This is the promise given by God and it will certainly be fulfilled. Based on the Western outlook, there is no sense that a value is against the will of the people. Based on the divine outlook, values which are actually meant for the real interests of the human beings are determined by God. Of course, some cultural elements and particles are not necessarily universal. We do not expect them to be so, nor does Islam want so.

It may be asked, “What does it mean to say that Islam brings about the universal culture? Does it mean that all should speak in a certain manner, have one script and language, and have uniform customs and ways of living?” Generally, the answer is negative. The universal culture we mean pertains to the moral principles of the culture and is expressed in its beliefs and values, but not on the customs and traditions. Most of customs and traditions are conventional. The manner of speaking is conventional. You speak Persian here but once you go to an Arab country, you have to talk in Arabic. Yet, will your identity change? When you go to an English–speaking country, you have to talk in English. Does your identity change in this situation? No, because they have no role in the true identity of man.

The said universal culture is based on beliefs and values that make the true identity of man. This cultural unity is preserved through the conventional elements of culture. The cultural unity of society depends on its unity of beliefs and values. The diversity of conventional affairs under discussion includes the customs and traditions, and the different life conditions which are consistent with geographical, environmental, genetic, and so many other factors. There is nothing wrong at all in this diversity on conventional affairs. Islam does not want to eliminate this diversity. What is seriously given importance by Islam is to focus on the real beliefs and values which are actually the edifice of culture.

According to the Islamic outlook, the people's relationship with the government is that of the implementer of the laws of God with the rest of His servants. All people, including the ruler and the subject, are equal in servitude and none is different from the rest except in the level of God-wariness. All of them observe the same law and in the eyes of the law, the president is no different than the lowest of people.

Actual examples of this equality can be observed during the time of the Holy Prophet (S) and the Commander of the Faithful ('a) cases even one example of which cannot be found in all the cultures of the world and all human societies. 'Ali ('a) who was the ruler of a magnificent Islamic empire encompassing Egypt, Sham,<sup>2</sup> Iraq, Hijaz,<sup>3</sup> and Iran as far as Marv and some parts of the Central Asian countries, came and presented himself before a judge whom he himself appointed. He had a legal dispute with a person belonging to a religious minority on matters of law and they agreed to go to the judge.

The ruler of a country or let us say, the president of a federal country with such a magnificence had a dispute with a subject belonging to the Jewish minority of his own government and both of them referred to the court for judgment. The judge said, "O Abu'l-Hasan [Father of Hasan]! What can you say?" 'Ali ('a) said, "Why did you say 'Abu'l-Hasan,' while you addressed this Jew by his name? You should not have addressed me by my epithet (which shows respect and appreciation). This is discriminating!" Once you addressed him by his name and said, for example, 'Ya'qub,' you have to address me also as 'Ali. You have no right to say Abu'l-Hasan. Even that amount of respect (by addressing a person by his epithet) from the viewpoint of 'Ali will lead to differentiation and discrimination. This is while that place is the presence of judgment and locus of the implementation of justice, and the two parties must be equal and treated equally.

We are very interested in the fact that someone can show us an example of this justice in a certain part of the world. This is the Islamic government's relationship with the people.

Of course, it is necessary to point out that here it deals with the theory and its consistency with its actual manifestations. And we have no claim whatsoever with respect to the so-called "Islamic" governments, for many of them have become directionless and deviants. We are talking about the theory in Islam. Just as we talked about the Western theory, we have no business with their activities. In this theory, all individuals, even the ruler himself and one of the Infallibles ('a), are equal before the law. The station and greatness of an infallible Imam ('a) and a personage like 'Ali ('a) can never be discernible for individuals like us. In spite of it, when he had a dispute with a minority living under the protection of Islam, he would not talk in a position of strength and authority. He rather referred to a judge whom he himself had appointed. There in the court, when the judge showed the least respect to him (by calling him by his epithet), he complained to the judge and said, "You have no right to call me by my epithet while calling my adversary by his name. You either call us by our names or call us by our respective epithets!" This the government-people relationship based on the Islamic outlook.

## Questions and Answers

**Question:** Please, explain about the statements of the eminent Imam (r) when he said that the vote of the people is the basis or ‘The criterion is the vote of the people’ and when he said that we overthrew the monarchial government based on the vote of the people.

**Answer:** The famous statement of the eminent Imam (r), ‘The criterion is the vote of the nation’ has a continuation which is usually not quoted. The Imam said, “The criterion is the vote of the nation and the nation wants Islam.” Therefore, the emphasis of the eminent Imam is on the populism of this government which has been established in the name of Islam. In other words, in countering the propaganda of the Global Arrogance against our government that it is a government of force, a government of coup d’état and not accompanied by the will of the people, the eminent Imam emphasized that the Islamic Republic is a government with the will of the people and a majority of ninety–eight percent has voted for it. The eminent Imam wanted to prove to the world that we did not impose the government on the people; rather, it was based on their will.

In any case, if an incorrect conclusion is deduced from this statement of the Imam (r), this is because of negligence of a very important point; namely, it is different to say, “The criterion of credibility, legality and legitimacy of this government is the vote of the people” from saying, “This government is consistent with the vote of the people; the criterion is the vote of the people.” The meaning of the latter statement is that since the people have cast their vote for it and approved and demanded for this government, it is because of it that we are here governing them.

These two issues are different from each other. This is the same issue discussed in the philosophy of politics is the criterion of legitimacy the same acceptability of the people, or is the criterion of legitimacy something other than the acceptability? Detailed discussions in this regard have already been made and the correct viewpoint is that the criterion is the legislative will of God the Exalted. Of course, the activity of this government, which acquires its legitimacy from God the Exalted, is realized under the aegis of obedience and will of the people. Its vivid example is in the case of the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali (‘a) and his statement:

...لَوْلَا حُضْرُ الْحَاضِرِ وَ قِيَامُ الْحُجَّةِ النَّاصِرِ

*If people had not come to me (and paid allegiance to me), and supporters had not exhausted the argument [hujjah], I would not have ruled...*

لَأَلْقَيْتُ حَبْلَهَا عَلَى غَارِبِهَا

*I would have cast the (camel’s) rope of caliphate on its own shoulders.*[4](#)

This is a literary expression. Once the camel is set free and its rope is placed on its shoulders, it is no more a concern of the owner and it can now go wherever it wants. The Imam (‘a) said: Had it not been for the will and allegiance of the people, I would have cast the camel’s rope of caliphate on its own shoulders and set it free.

In our belief, the Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali (‘a) had been designated by God.<sup>5</sup> Thus, once he ruled, his government had legitimacy from God. But when was the argument exhausted for him and it became obligatory for him to rise up for the realization and setting up of the Islamic government? It was the moment when the people supported him. At the time when the people had not yet supported him, the argument was not yet exhausted. To say that prior to the support of the people, the argument for him was not yet exhausted means that he had the right to form the government but had no obligation to do so.

Based on the right granted to him by God, it was his right to rule and the legitimacy of his government originated from God but so long as the people did not pay allegiance to him, it was not obligatory for him to establish the government. When the people came and paid allegiance to him, promising to support him, the argument was then exhausted for him and it became incumbent upon him to take steps in setting up the Islamic government. His right to rule and its legitimacy have not emanated from the people; rather, based on firm and numerous proofs we have, God has given this right. Among these proofs is this statement of the Holy Prophet (S):

مَنْ كُنْتُ مَوْلَاهُ فَهَذَا عَلِيٌّ مَوْلَاهُ.

*Of whosoever I am Master [mawla], then ‘Ali is also his Master.*<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, when the eminent Imam (r) says, “The criterion is the vote of the people” and since the people wanted us to rule means that since the people wanted it, the argument was exhausted for me and thus, I have to come forward and endanger my life, be exiled for sometime, imprisoned, and even die, but move in order to establish the Islamic government. There was no distance between him and martyrdom. It was God’s will that they changed their decision and banished him. They were afraid that with the martyrdom of the Imam, a revolt throughout the country would occur which they would not be able to control. In fact, the decision of the regime was to martyr him on that very day of Khordad 15.<sup>7</sup>

Their fear and apprehension started when they saw that as the Imam began to deliver a speech, the people expressed their support. If it were like other reform movements which experienced the sluggishness or heedlessness of the people, the arguments would not have been exhausted for him. (It was like what happened to the late Ayatullah al-‘Uzma Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim in Iraq. He also initiated a movement but the Iraqis did not support him and as a result, Hasan al-Bakr and Saddam Husayn became dominant while he was deeply afflicted, suffered from the failure and passed away. The argument was not exhausted for him because the people did not support him.) But the noble people of

this country gave a positive reply to the call of the Imam. Thus, the argument was established for him.

The other point which can be put in connection with the statement of the eminent Imam is as follows: In the science of logic, there are two types of reasoning; one is called “proof” [*burhan*] while the other is “disputation” [*jadal*]. Both types of reasoning are correct, but depending on the discussion and situation, at a certain time we use one type while at another time, another. In the noble verse:

دُعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۗ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۗ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

***“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best, (16:125)”***

it is stated that apart from wisdom [*hikmah*] and good advice [*maw'izah*], one has to dispute [*jadal*] also. But it must be “in a manner that is best.” That is, to dispute is one of the ways of inviting (others) to the way of the Lord, but it must be in the best manner. In the Qur'an, the two types of reasoning have been used. In proving religious instructions and conveying the truth, God the Exalted has reasoned out through proofs as well as disputation. In some verses, God the Exalted has resorted to disputation in refuting the belief of the polytheists and infidels. For example, He says:

أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الْأُنثَىٰ تِلْكَ إِذًا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَىٰ

***Are you to have males and He females? That, then, will be an unfair division! (53:21-22)***

The explanation is as follows: As you know, the Arabs hated their daughters while loving their sons very much. On the other hand, they believed that the angels are God's daughters. God thus reasons out and says to them: Why do you allot for yourselves the things you like and love, but you associate the things you do not like to God? What logic is this? This is an unjust division: *That, then, will be an unfair division!* That is, this division is illogical and baseless.

Now, if they said that the angels are God's sons, was their statement correct and did they have right to say so?! It is obvious that the answer is negative. If this word of God the Exalted is a proof, they had a right to say so. Since the proof holds, “You associate to God that which you like,” they say, “We like sons, so also do we believe the same for God.” In this case, none could raise an objection.

Regarding the belief of the Christians that God has a son, the Qur'an says:

تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْهُ وَتَنْشَقُّ الْأَرْضُ وَتَخِرُّ الْجِبَالُ هَدًّا، أَنْ دَعَوْا لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدًا

***The heavens are about to be rent apart at it, the earth to split open, and the mountains to collapse into bits that they should ascribe a son to the All-beneficent! (19:90-91)***

That is, the heavens are about to be rent apart and the earth to split open. Why? It is because the Christians believe that God has a son. Why does the Qur'an say that it is bad to say that God has a son? There it is the issue of disputation but here it is that of proof. Disputation means to talk with someone according to his basis.

When addressing the world and wishing to defend the legitimacy and rightfulness of the Islamic Republic, the Imam (r) also says, "Are you not saying that once the people cast their vote for it, the government has credibility? This government is legitimate based on the same foundation you accept because the people have voted for it." This is a question of disputation; that is, to prove a point based on the basis acceptable to the adversary though the same basis is not acceptable to the party. God said in the Qur'an that if a daughter is bad, why do you say that God has daughters?

This does not mean that once they say that God has sons, what they believe is right and what they say is correct because this is a question of disputation. Also, when the Imam spoke to you and me, he expressed himself in this manner: "By virtue of the guardianship vested in me by God, I do hereby appoint the Prime Minister." In all decrees issued by the Imam to the Presidents, he has either pointed out or stipulated that "I designate the President." If the criterion of credibility of the President is the vote of the people, what right has the Imam "to designate" him?

The Constitution stipulates that the jurist-guardian confirms the vote of the people, and does not say "designates the President." Yet, in all his decrees issued to every President, he has written: "I do hereby designate you," or "You are hereby designated." What does this mean? It means that what gives you legitimacy is my designation which is indirectly from God because I am designated by God. Therefore, in reply to this question, two points should be noted: One is the difference between acceptability and legitimacy while the other is the difference between reasoning by proof and reasoning by disputation.

**Question:** If one day the Islamic Republic, which is in accordance with the Islamic principles and has been materialized on the basis of them, is no more approved by the people and making a move against it they want to topple down this government, do we have to yield to it? What is our duty in this regard?

**Answer:** This question has been raised time and again and in different gatherings, and we have given reply to it, and it is also mentioned in the book on questions and answers. At any rate, in reply to this question, one of the ways is to refer to the life conduct of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a). We all know that after the demise of the Holy Prophet (S), the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) was supposed to assume the reign of government. Our belief is that he had the right but failed to get it because the people did not permit. We again know that after about twenty-three years he accepted to rule. Why? He himself said:

*If people had not come to me, and supporters had not exhausted the argument... I would have cast the*

*rope of caliphate on its own shoulders, and would have given the last one the same treatment as to the first one.* [8](#)

That is, if until now I have no supporters, I will abandon the government, but as they gather around and paid allegiance to me, the argument has already been exhausted for me. Once I have supporters and I can establish the Islamic government, the argument is exhausted for me. [9](#)

Yet, sometime after the establishment of the Islamic government, some of the Companions and a cousin of 'Ali ('a) and those who had paid allegiance to him earlier than others initiated the Battle of the Camel. Talhah and Zubayr came to the Imam ('a), asking for their appointment as governors of Basrah and Kufah respectively. The Imam ('a) did not deem it appropriate to give them governorship. Following that event, they went to 'A'ishah, widow of the Prophet (S), brought her to Basrah and initiated the Battle of the Camel, the first battle against the government of 'Ali ('a). Mu'awiyah who was in Sham did not acknowledge the government of 'Ali ('a) either and prepared for war against him.

But how did the Commander of the Faithful ('a) behave with them? Did he say, "As this is what you want, come and let us share in the government. Iraq belongs to you. Hijaz belongs to me and Sham shall be in the hands of Mu'awiyah"? Under such circumstances, did 'Ali ('a) yield to these people? No, it was not so. Why? It is because the Islamic government had been established. The government of truth existed the government which was backed by the people. These people who had gone out of the Islamic state were dissidents and insurgents and 'Ali ('a) brandished his sword against them. During his rule, the Imam ('a) engaged in three battles against "those who broke their allegiance," "the deviants" and "those who missed the truth of the religion." He never said, "Come and let us sit together. Let us talk and make peace. Let us pacifically divide among ourselves the government and laugh together!"

The Imam ('a) drew his sword and as he said, "*Verily, I have put out the eye of revolt, and did something which none could do except me* (referring to the war with the Kharijites). [10](#) Imam 'Ali ('a) did not make peace with the Kharijites and conclude a peace treaty with them. Why? It is because the government of justice existed then and there were those who supported and followed the government of justice. Under such circumstances, one cannot submit to the enemies.

If one day history repeats itself and some people and groups want to rise up against the Islamic government and dismember the Islamic state (who in this case are outside the pale of Islam and treated as insurgents), the Islamic ruler has no right to deal with them pacifically; rather, he has to defend the Islamic sovereignty in the entire territory of Islam and whole jurisdiction of the Islamic government. Yes, if the people are not on the scene and withdraw their support for the Islamic government, there is no point to insist on the preservation of the Islamic government because it is no more applicable and the government has no more supporters. If such circumstance occurs, as in the twenty-three year period of 'Ali's solitude, we have to be in solitude and suffer for failure. Of course, by solitude it does not mean being heedless of the government and for us to sit in a corner and shut the door.

In sum, in case of insurrection against the Islamic government and struggle to overthrow it, there are two situations: One is the existence of the Islamic government while the people voluntarily defend this government of truth. In this situation, it is incumbent upon everybody to struggle against the insurgents or secessionists. But if the people turn their backs or there is the leader of truth but he has no or not enough supporters to fight for the government of truth and its sovereignty, there is no obligation to maintain the government and keep the sovereignty through force and compulsion. Thus, the people have a pivotal role in the establishment of the government and so long as they support the government and leader of truth, the leader has to defend the jurisdiction of Islam, not yield to the secessionist movements and insurrections and not submit to the opponents. But if one becomes like Muslim, the envoy of the Doyen of the Martyrs, Imam Husayn (‘a) in Kufah, without having any supporter and helper, what could be done?!

Therefore, the reply to the question is that if through the auspices of the support of the people the Islamic government was established (for, without the help and will of the people, the Islamic government will not be established), none has the right to engage in insurrection, sedition–mongering and secession after the establishment of the Islamic government. One has to wage war against those who will engage in those activities, and to fight them is one part of *jihad*. But if the people withdraw and reject the Islamic government except a few of them, there is no more argument for the leader and he has to withdraw.

**Question:** In reply to the previous question, you have said that after the establishment of the Islamic government, our duty is to preserve it, even though the people do not accept it. Now, the question is: What percent of the people shall be the criterion? If more than half of the people opposes, will the situation be the same, or will there be another one?

**Answer:** Quantity is not the criterion. The criterion is that the population who support the Imam or the legitimate jurist–guardian is such that they are able to preserve the government. Sometimes, the government can stand with only ninety percent of the people. At other times, it is possible with only eighty percent, or even fifty or forty. He is commissioned to preserve the government. If the individuals are so few that given that number they can no more preserve the government, the case will be like the time when the people had not yet paid allegiance to him and the argument had not yet been exhausted for him. There should be the existence of a helper and there should be someone who assists him in preserving the government. If it was like the people of Kufah who dispersed from around Muslim ibn ‘Aqil and deserted him, the Imam of the community could do nothing. So long as there are those who assist in preserving the central government of Islam, the duty of the Islamic ruler is to preserve the government and in this connection, the criterion is not quantity.

[1.](#) Sometime ago, it was reported in the news that a religious sect in America committed suicide in accordance with their faith and burned themselves. However, it was revealed later that it was committed by the government and they had been burned in arson.

[2.](#) Sham included today’s Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. [Trans.]

[3.](#) Hijaz: the region in Western Arabia bordering the Red Sea that includes Ta’if, Mecca and Medina. [Trans.]

[4.](#) Nahj al–Balaghah, Sermon 3 (Shiqshiqayah). [Trans.]

5. Among the proofs substantiating the designation of Imam `Ali ibn Abi-Talib (‘a) to leadership of the Muslim community after the Holy Prophet (S) is the Verse of Conveyance [ayat at-tabligh] revealed during the event at Ghadir Khumm and addressed to the Holy Prophet (S):

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۚ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَّغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ

“O Apostle! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, you will not have communicated His message, and Allah will protect you from the people.” (5:67)

6. Both Sunni and Shi’ah transmitters of hadith, through various chains of narration, have uninterruptedly reported that the Holy Prophet (S) took the hand of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), raised it and then said: “Of whosoever I am Master, then ‘Ali is also his Master.”

7. On June 3, 1963 (Khordad 13, 1342 AHS), Imam Khomeini delivered a historic speech in Qum, repeating former denunciations of the Shah’s regime and warning the Shah not to behave in such a way that the people would rejoice when he should ultimately be forced to leave the country. Two days later, he was arrested at his residence and taken to confinement in Tehran. His arrest prompted a major uprising in many Iranian cities, which resulted in the deaths of no less than 15,000 people in the span of a few days when the Shah’s troops opened fire on unarmed demonstrators. The date on which this uprising began was the 5th of June, or the 15th of Khordad according to the solar calendar used in Iran, and became known as the uprising or movement of 15th of Khordad. [Trans.]

8. Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 3.

9. Literally, “The argument arises with the existence of the supporter.” [Trans.]

10. Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 92.

## Chapter 14: The Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government (Part 5)

### The People Government Relationship Subjection and Domination or what?

The subject of our discussion is the relationship between the people and the government in Islam. In this session, we shall examine the issue from a different angle and then spend the remaining time by entertaining questions.

In principle, the relationship between the people and the government can be conceived in different forms. Of course, these various forms are not mere mental conceptions; rather, something which existed in the annals of history and does exist more or less. One type of relationship is that the government is the master while the people are the subjects.

Throughout history, most of the governments we know became dominant by force and have forced themselves on the people. Their expectation from the people was to obey them unconditionally and unreservedly. If in some cases they used to act contrary to this expectation, it was because they wanted

to win the people's hearts and stabilize the condition of their respective countries so as to rule easily.

Otherwise, their expectation has been for them to give order and the people to act upon them, and the relationship between them and the people is that of sovereign and subject. The expression *sovereign*, which, in our Persian literature, is used for the government, is not inappropriate for this way of thinking. Of course, I was not able to obtain a statistical record and examine the different governments in the various parts of the world, and to see what percent of them are like that. At any rate, what we know in history is that almost all governments have been like so.

Contrary to that type of government, other inclinations can be found at the margin of history in which the case has been the opposite; that is, the people have defined their own duties, dictating their wills to the government. In other words, instead of the government imposing its orders upon the people, in this type of government it is the people that dictate the rules and regulations to the government and the government is the implementer and agent of their demands. Of course, I am not a historian and in studying historical documents I do not know to what extent the authenticity of a certain subject is. Nevertheless, it is narrated that it has been like that during the ancient periods in China, India, and more or less, Greece. In Greece, the people's inclination toward government existed centuries before the birth of Christ ('a) and for some decades that the government existed in Athens it had been like that. It is said that democracy originated and came into being there.

So, these are two opposite tendencies; one is that the state<sup>1</sup> is the master while the people are the subjects, and the other one is the opposite.

The third type of relationship that can be assumed is the people-government relationship that is beyond master-subject relationship. For example, it can be assumed that a kind of mutual contract between the people and the government is in force and in reality a sort of division of labor in which a set of tasks is performed by the government while another set is shouldered by the people. As to which specific form for this model of government can be imagined which performs this division of labor between the people and the government and in which none is the master can be imagined in different forms.

In any case, there is no phase in history which shows that this third type of government-people relationship has even existed. The first two types have different sub-classifications. There have been despotic and dictatorial rulers who do not abide by any rules and the law is that which is according to monarchical approval. There have also been organized systems in which a set of moral and social principles were observed and finally, the order was with the ruler and the people were the subjects.

The salient feature of this type of government is that if it is supposed that the ruler is the master and the people's only role is to obey, in this case if the ruler gives an order or enacts decrees, rules and laws which are inconsistent with the will of the people, they are forced to obey them even if all people oppose them because they are just "people" after all and not government, and to order is the prerogative of the government. Here, the government gives order and the people have to obey. Whether the people agree

or not, whether those who oppose are in majority or minority, in any case the position of the people is to obey while that of the government is to order.

Meanwhile, in the second type in which the people are supposed to be the masters and enact the laws, and in summary, the will of the people is supposed to reign supreme in society, in this case the government has no right to enact laws and rules contrary to the will of the people. On the contrary, the people have the right to abolish the government anytime they want. In this administrative model, the government is the people's agent, and in other words, their proxy. So long as the people like, it can serve as their proxy and whenever they do not like anymore, it shall be removed. In such a system, the will of the people, whatever it is, is what is credible even if it is against moral and divine values. The government has no right to say that since your will or vote is contrary to such-and-such moral principle or divine law, I shall not abide by it. The government has to act in accordance with the will of the people and if it would not like to do so, it has to resign.

Of course, the first principle is that the will of all people is the criterion of credibility, yet since it is impossible to arrive at an identical will of all people, they set the basis of the majority will instead of general will of the people. In other words, since particularly in the extended and complex societies of today, direct democracy in which the people directly get involved in their destiny and express their opinions is either impossible or difficult, they resort to the idea of indirect democracy. In the indirect democracy, the elected representatives of the people make decisions in lieu of them.

In the democratic system, the government is actually the implementer of the wills and orders of the people who pay its salary as their employee. Here, the people enact the law, determine the agent and administrative institutions, and provide the government's budget so that it can serve them. It is like an employer hiring an employee with the only difference that instead of a person, an institution is hired.

The general notion is that the administrative model must be one of the two types; either the people are the rulers while the government is the worker, servant and, in a simpler term, the slave, or on the contrary, the government is the master, sovereign and commander, and the people are the slaves. The heart of the discussions made in the philosophy of politics as well as in the different schools of thought and academic forums can be traced to the same two types of government, but they have weaknesses and strengths, flaws and strong points.

It should not remain unsaid that the model of mastership and commandership of the government has had many diverse forms. Among its forms has been the theocratic government in which the popes used to regard themselves as the masters of the people while the people are their servants in a sense. Of course, they claim that they had this right from God and it is God Who has given to them the right to rule over the people and these servants of God are their servants by the will of God.

## The Status of the People and the Ruler in Islamic Political Thought

In interpreting the Islamic government, many people who imagine that the government is confined to one of the two mentioned types are questioning which model this government is. Does the Islamic government belong to the category of democratic governments in which the people are the masters of their own destiny and have the right to enact any law they like? In other words, are the Prophet (S) and the Infallible Imam (‘a) or the jurist-guardian who in our opinion is the deputy of the Imam of the Time (‘a) the agents, proxies and servants of the people in such a manner that the people have the prerogative to enact the law by themselves and determine its implementer? If that is not the case, it follows that it has another form; that is, if the Islamic government is not democratic, it follows that the people are servants of the government and the government has the authority over the people who have to obey it unconditionally.

Some people argue that the government has only two types, and the Islamic government as acknowledged by its designers and theoreticians is not democratic. So, it must be a dictatorial government! Since the adopters of the jurist’s guardianship say that the jurist-guardian is authorized by God to rule and the people do not designate him to that position, it follows then that in the government based on the theory of *wilayah al-faqih*, democracy does not exist. Once it is not democratic, it must be dictatorial, and it will imply that like a dictator, the jurist-guardian has the right to enact laws and give orders, while the people are his servants and they are under his command. For the sake of respect to them or considering some expediencies, he may not explicitly say to them, “I am your master while you are my servants,” but that is really the truth of the matter.

Yet, is it true that there are only two types of relationship between the people and the government, and the truth of every type of government is mastership and servitude and the only difference is who the master or servant is?! The fact is that the government is not confined to these types and our claim is that the Islamic government is none of these two mentioned types. According to the theory of Islamic government, the people and the government are not two classes, meaning one is high and the other low, or one is the master while the other the servant; rather, all including the ruler and the subject are one and equal before the law.

At the time of birth, the title “ruler”, “jurist-guardian”, “king”, or “president” is not written on anyone’s forehead, and the officials of the government are from the same people and are not different from others. In the Islamic government, the government-people relationship is not that the government is the master while the people are the servants nor the contrary. Instead, all are equal. Here, what is actually done is a sort of division of labor and the one who gives order is higher than all of us. As such, neither the state and government nor the people are the sovereigns. Instead, the real commander is God, the Lord of the people.

In our opinion, the divine government is a third type of government. It is neither the democratic model nor the dictatorial or monarchical; it is rather designed by God. Here, the sovereignty belongs to the Creator–God Who has authority over all people. Before His decree, all people are equal, whether the Prophet, Imam and jurist–guardian, or the masses. Even if a slave has a dispute over a legal matter with the Prophet, Imam or jurist–guardian as the leader of Muslims, once they refer to a judge, they have to sit together and the judge has to speak to them equally. The judge has no right to practice discrimination in issuing a judgment and, for example, to address the former with the title “His Holiness the Prophet” and the latter with “O wretched servant.” In fact, he has to look at them equally.<sup>2</sup> If he wants to address them with a title of honor, he has to address both of them with their respective titles, and if it is with epithet, he has to address them with their respective epithets and to listen to them impartially. The fact that this one is the Prophet and that one is a slave does not make any difference in this case.

The Prophet (S) has no right to dictate whatever he likes to the people such that one day it would be said that since the people have not elected him and the government is inconsistent with the will of the people, it follows that the government is a dictatorship while the ruler is a dictator! Neither the Prophet nor anybody else has any right at all to issue a single word of decree against the decree of God. He and all Muslim rulers are the implementers of the law, yet not the law of the people, but of God. He is a subject but of God. He has no will of his own:

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ، لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ

***Had he faked any sayings in Our name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta. (69:44–46)***

That is, “If the Prophet attributes a lie to Us regarding a law which We have not enacted, saying, ‘It is the law of God,’ We shall deal with him severely: “*We would have surely seized him by the right hand.*” The right hand denotes power and the meaning of the above verse is that “We shall deal with him with utmost severity. “*And then cut off his aorta.*” That is, “We shall cut off the aorta of his life.” He who is a prophet of God has no right to speak of himself, let alone the Imam or jurist–guardian. If he wants to enact in some cases of specific administrative rules (administrative decrees), he has to do so with the approval of God the Exalted.

Thus, in relation to God, all are His servants, obedient to and equal before Him. Responsibility and mission are given to the Islamic ruler to implement the divine laws on earth. Even this is because of the fact that in view of the necessity of the existence of government in the society, the existence of a set of rules and regulations is indispensable and in implementing the laws and solving disputes to happen in understanding and acting upon the law, every society is in need of an implementer who can say the final word in practice and the law that solves disputes.

If every person is supposed to say, “In my opinion, the law is what I say and this is my interpretation of

the law,” disputes will not be solved. The one whose word is the law and has the final say does not speak out of his own will and carnal desire; rather, his word is either a direct revelation of God (if he is a prophet), or a divine inspiration (if he is an infallible Imam), or an authoritative and credible understanding of the content of the revelation and word of the Infallible (when there is no access to the Prophet or an infallible Imam). Anyway, it is because of this that all are equal before the law and there is distinction among them.

## Islamic Political Thought: The people and the Ruler as Responsible before God

Now, given this explanation, is the Islamic ruler a dictator? The answer is negative. He cannot dictate something out of his own desire. Is the Islamic ruler the servant and slave of the people and their agent? Again, the answer is negative. The people have dominance over him in saying, “We do not like you and thus remove you from this position,” because God has made him ruler over the rest of people. Is he a servant and mercenary of the people? No.

God has determined the salary of the ruler from the public treasury. God the Exalted has made it incumbent upon the people to place a portion of their wealth at the disposal of the Islamic ruler. In addition, He has placed at the discretion of the Islamic ruler the spoils, assets and incomes belonging to the society in general. In any case, the determiner and endower is God, and the Islamic ruler does not stoop to the people’s favor nor live under their expense.

Such a person can implement the laws promulgated by God the Exalted even if it is not pleasing to the people. If the ruler is only a servant or proxy of the people, he has no right to impose on them what they do not like, nor order things which all people or the majority of them do not accept. Meanwhile, does the Islamic ruler have the right to give such an order? Yes, because it is the order and ordinance of God.

Therefore, in the Islamic government the divine law must be implemented. Even if one day most of the people do not like it, the Islamic government has the right to and must implement the law of Islam including the *hudud*<sup>3</sup> which is not acceptable to the world today. The people may desire to make some things permissible and free which God the Exalted has not sanctioned. In this case, the Islamic ruler has to forbid it and put restraint on its practice and not allow the people to practice it even if most of them want to do so. The reason behind this is that the Islamic ruler is not the people’s agent; rather, he is a functionary from God to implement the divine laws.

Of course, all people are obliged to implement the ordinances of God but the ruler is particularly commissioned to make the law of God incumbent upon them and to punish the violators. To punish the violators is a divine decree. Thus, the Islamic ruler is not a dictator who decides by himself and orders whatever he wishes and makes it incumbent upon the people to implement. He is not a servant and proxy of the people to abide by whatever they dictate to him.

In the Islamic government, all are equal before the law, and as such, the governors and the governed are not different from each other, and we have no higher and lower classes.<sup>4</sup> Here, there is no room for “first-class” and “second-class” citizens. The “first-class” and “second-class” citizens are meant to compare the original citizens of the Islamic state with those who live under its protection whose life, property and honor are basically protected. Examples of such citizens are the People of the Book [*ahl al-kitab*] and the non-Muslims who live under the protection of the Islamic government.

Since these people are not Muslims, the main decrees of Islam shall not be implemented to them and the main taxes of Islam (*khums* and *zakat*) shall not be levied to them. They pay *jizyah* instead. In return for this insignificant amount of taxes, their life, property and honor are legally protected under the auspices of the Islamic government. Because of some legal distinctions that Islam has set for them, these people can be called as “second-class citizens” but beside these distinctions, in most of the rights, the ruler and this non-Muslim citizen do not have the least difference with each other.

For this reason, both of them can be regarded as “first-class citizens.” The ruler has no right to say that he is higher in rank compared to the common citizen on the ground that he is the president, prime minister, or jurist-guardian, as the case may be. He is a servant just like the other servants of God. At most, he has a special responsibility.<sup>5</sup> This is a characteristic of every system which the head or administrator has, and finally owing to his superiority, skill and merit, one person has to administer that group and organization while the rest have to pay attention to his orders. Yet, this does not mean that here we have “first and second-class citizens.”

## [A Summary of the Discussion](#)

In Islam, neither the ruler is the master and the people subjects, nor the people are the masters and the ruler a subject, servant and worker, or in a more polite expression, proxy or any other appellation.

The rights and duties of both parties are determined by God, Who has set two proportional rights for the people and the government—a right for the people over the government and another for the government over the people. The determiner of right is He Who has created both parties. The people have no right to set rights for themselves, because they are not the owners of their selves and their existence does not belong to them. For the same reason, they have no right to decide a set of rights for others. Similarly, the government has no right to set a right for itself or others. The ruler is one of the servants of God, and his existence, like that of everybody and everything else, is from God and belongs to Him. However, since God the Exalted is All-wise, He has set balanced rights for both the government and the people. Due to the service it renders to the people, the government has rights over them while they have rights over it.

This is another model of government and mutual relationship of the people and the government which is not so known and comprehensible to the minds accustomed with the Western culture. As such, whenever the term, “divine government,” “Islamic government” or “religious government” is mentioned,

many people imagine that it is the same democracy of the popes which is a type of dictatorship whereas it has no connection with it.

Let us forget that as far as we know, an example of democratic government does not exist in the world at all. There has been either the government of the bullies, tyrants, swordsmen, feudal lords, and the like, or as today's government of the capitalists. When they outwardly say, "So-and-so is elect" or "He is not elected," behind its curtain is the disputes between two groups of capitalists; for example, between the owners of firearms manufacturing companies and that of oil and petrochemical industries. They are ostentatiously parties. At times, one party comes to power while at another time, the other party does.

In reality, money and assets of the capitalists is the actual determinant and ruler. Those who decide behind curtains and give campaign funds so as for a party to win are the owners of capital. The natural and usual trend is that whoever campaigns more will win in the election. Yet, the masses are in difficulty providing for their daily life expenditure, let alone spending for election campaign huge expenses with spiraling figures which are spent in the European and American countries for election campaigns. Perhaps, you might have heard or read that, for example, the deposed Shah of Iran was among those who assisted in the Republican Party in the elections of America. The helpers who are more known in the world and whose assistance is the determinant are the Zionists and their capitalists. The actual determinants of the American governments and similar to them in some other countries are the same Zionist capitalists.

The common people are not very familiar with a leading candidate in an election. They only witness the profound magnitude and wide scope of his propaganda. Usually, their participation in the elections is very weak such that in most cases, below fifty percent of the eligible voters participate in the elections and even that is through the force of propaganda generated with the money of the capitalists. This shows that the government in reality belongs to the capitalists. Also, this subject is not a claim which is advanced by me only. In fact, Western writers and researchers have acknowledged it and written numerous books and articles in this regard.

Theoretically speaking, what is customary in the world is that either the people are subdued by and are subjects of the governments, or the government and the ruler are under the domination of the will and demand of the people. We explained that in Islam, the government is something else. The third alternative is that both the people and the ruler have the same Master; namely, God. Both are servants before God, but before each other, both are masters and each has rights over the other.

## **Examples of the Mutual Rights Between the People and the Government in the words of the Commander of the Faithful**

Considering that this year is the Year of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) and His Conduct, for this occasion I shall read to you a part of *Nahj al-Balaghah*. It is a lengthy sermon of the Commander of the

Faithful (‘a) in which he says:

*So now, Allah the Glorified, by placing me over your affairs, has created my right over you, and you too have a right over me like mine over you.* [6](#)

Examine closely the expression of the Imam (‘a). He does not say, “You have granted a right to me.” He rather says, “God has granted it. He has right to me as well as to you.” It is not the case that the right has been given exclusively to the ruler while the people are subjects and condemned before him, nor is it the opposite. Thus, the determinant of right and duty is God the Exalted, for, as we explained at the beginning of this series of discussions, once a right is set for a person over another person, automatically a duty for the second person will come into being. Once the ruler has right to give order, the people are duty-bound to behave in accordance with the order. In cases where the people have rights, the government is obliged to observe their right because right and duty are proportional and correlative.

The continuation of the sermon is a very interesting and detailed passage. I wish we can divide the sermon into different parts, and in every meeting, I can deal with each part of this blessed speech. This radiant speech contains very lofty and instructive subjects. It also consists of knowledge that is considered the solution to many issues on the philosophy of ethics, law, politics, and all practical philosophies. At this moment we shall deal with some other lines of this sermon:

*Then, from His rights, He, the Glorified, created certain rights for certain people against others.*

As He has rights over His servants, God the Exalted has set rights for some people over others based on His right, which essentially belongs to Him and no one is supposed to grant it to Him; namely, right of Lordship. Since He is God and the Creator and Master of all things and people, and the existence of the entire universe emanates from him, He has such rights over His servants. Based on that Essential right God has over His servants, He has set rights for some of His servants over others.

*He made them so as to equate with one another.*

The rights He has set for some people over others are balanced. Balance and proportionality mean that once He sets a right for party A, He also sets a right for party B so as for these rights to become proportional to each other. It is not the case that this side is heavy while that side is light. The Arabic word *tatakafa'* means equal and alike, and these rights are also equals.

*Some of these rights produce other rights. Some rights are such that they do not accrue except with others.*

The existence of some of these rights requires a right for others. This right cannot be obliged unless a right is proved for others. These rights are balanced and of the same weight. So, right should be determined by God and this emanates from the rights of Lordship and Godhood He has.

*The greatest of these rights that Allah the Glorified has made obligatory is the right of the ruler over the ruled and the right of the ruled over the ruler.*

Yet, the highest and greatest right that God has set for a servant over another is the right that the government has over the people and that of the people over the government. There are also other rights such as the right of parents over their child and the right of the child over his/her parents, the right of the spouses over each other, as well as other rights which God has fixed for the people. However, among the greatest rights that God has set for organizing the relationship among people is the right of the ruler over the people and that of the people over the ruler.

*He has made it the basis of their (mutual) affection, and an honor for their religion.*

These rights that God has divided among people and made balanced have secrets. It is not the case that He has just given these rights without any reason, justification and philosophy behind them. There is a secret behind His granting specific rights to the ruler and certain other rights to the people. One wisdom behind the creation of these proportional rights between the people and the government is to make firm and steadfast the unity and solidarity between the two. Once this party has right over that party and that party over this party, a kind of mutual attachment between them is established and each becomes dependent on the other. If this right were only unilateral and one-sided, one's detachment from the other would become easily possible. But the bilateralness of the rights fortifies the intimacy, unanimity, affection, sincerity, and unity among the members of society.

The higher philosophy and wisdom behind the creation of these rights is "*honor for their religion.*" That is to say, "These rights are set and divided between the people and the government so that their religion earns honor."

It is not only meant to make their worldly life prosperous and well-organized as the effect of this solidarity; rather, the more important effect of this affair is for their religion to earn honor, and under the auspices of religion, the earned honor will lead them to eternal bliss.

In the rights set for the ruler and the subjects, their merits are not only the provision of life comfort, security and prevention of chaos and anarchy. This is one side of the story. Their more important aspect and higher secret is under the aegis of these rights set by God for the people and the government, the religion acquires honor. In other words, in this explanation and division of the rights and duties, two points are mentioned; one is the worldly and material welfare, while the other is the otherworldly and spiritual welfare.

Yet, this is contrary to what is considered in all political philosophies in the world. The ultimate thing they observe is security, peace, health, life comfort, and the like, but no political philosophy has ever treated the issue of spiritual advancement and proximity to God as the main goal. This point has been mentioned only in the philosophical views of the earlier thinkers. In the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, this subject has been touched on the ultimate felicity of man must be sought in his spiritual

perfection; all his power, both spiritual and material, must attain perfection; the orientation of the government must be such that all these powers and talents would grow.

Of course, it must be noted that spirituality in the culture of Aristotle and Plato and their followers has its own meaning. As stated in history, they were not like us, monotheists and believing in the One and Only God and the heavenly religions. They rather believed in different deities and were afflicted with a kind of polytheism. Of course, in this regard I do not have a decisive claim. There is still room for more research.

In continuation of the sermon, Imam 'Ali ('a) says:

*Consequently, the ruled cannot prosper unless the rulers are sound, while the rulers cannot be sound unless the ruled are steadfast.*<sup>7</sup>

If the ruler is the commander and he is responsible for the welfare of the society while the rest are subjects, it follows that the responsibility for the society's welfare lies on the shoulder of the ruler. Wherever there is corruption, it can be seen from the eyes of the ruler because it is the orders of the ruler and the government which are implemented while the wills of the people have no role in the administrative laws and orders.

Wherever there is corruption, this is because the ruler fails to enact good rules and regulations, or fails to implement them well. In democracy, wherever there is corruption, it originates from the people themselves and the ruler has no fault at all because in this type of government whatever the people say and like shall prevail. So, wherever there is corruption, it is related to the people themselves. In the theory of Islamic government in which the responsibilities are shared, the ruler shoulders only a part of the responsibilities, and the people who have will, common sense and awareness have responsibility and duty as well.

If both the people and the government faithfully fulfill their duties, welfares will be ensured and the society will prosper. But if one fulfills its duty while the other does not, there is no guarantee for the prosperity of that society because the one responsible for the whole affairs of society is neither the people minus the government nor the government minus the people; rather, both are responsible. So, the prosperity of one depends on the prosperity of the other. They are like two bricks that lean against each other. Once we remove one of them, the other will fall. These two (government and people) should reform the society by leaning on and helping each other. If one of them is destroyed, weakens and breaks, the other one will also fall. "The ruled cannot prosper unless the rulers are sound." Its opposite is also correct: "The rulers cannot be sound unless the ruled are steadfast." The government apparatus will not remain good unless the people remain good and are steadfast in their responsibilities and duties.

In these two expressions of Imam 'Ali ('a), there is a subtle difference which is worthy to note. In the first case, he said, "The ruled cannot prosper unless the rulers are *sound*." That is, the society will not be reformed unless the rulers and the government apparatus are righteous. In contrast to it, he says, "The

rulers cannot be sound unless the ruled are *steadfast*.” In this case, he does not say that the goodness of the rulers depends on the goodness of the ruled; rather, he says that it depends on their steadfastness.

The expression “steadfastness” is used here to denote that in addition to the initial reform, there must be continuity. As such, the issue of steadfastness is more difficult than the initial reform. Perhaps, the secret behind the difficultness of steadfastness is that for the people to be merely righteous in the beginning and act upon their duty toward the government is not enough. Instead, this righteousness and virtuousness should be continuous.

The people are more exposed to transformation than the ruler. In the Islamic government, the person to be chosen as the ruler usually takes trouble for thirty or forty years, is well nurtured and has cultivated the spirit of piety and justice in himself. And naturally anyone who has nurtured his self for forty years and is God-wary will not change suddenly overnight. How probable is it that people like the Imam (*r*) will one day stray away from the path of piety?

The possibility for a person who lives for seventy years in asceticism, piety, devotion, and self-sacrifice and has purified his soul during his youthful years to become a worldly and sensual person is very insignificant. But this issue is different with respect to the people. The people have different classes and diverse levels of faith, piety and attachment to values. And the possibility of transformation in the people is high compared to the ruler. Therefore, regarding the people more than the initial probity has a role, and the perpetuity of this probity and its steadfastness acquires importance. But anyway these two virtues (probity of the government and the people) support each other. The society will prosper and be reformed provided that the government is righteous while the people are steadfast and persistent along the right path.

Now, if the people and the government perform their respective duties and observe each other's rights, what will be the outcome?

*If the ruled fulfill the rights of the ruler and the ruler fulfils their rights, then right attains the position of honor among them, the ways of religion become established, signs of justice become fixed and the sunnah gains currency. In this way time will improve.*

If the people perform their duties, there are benefits: Its first benefit is that truth will be held in high esteem in the society and in turn, falsehood will be weakened. The people and the government's fulfillment of the rights and duties will strengthen this spirit among individuals and gradually it will become a general culture of the society.

The other benefit is that in such a society, if a person wants to move along the path of falsehood, the society will not permit him to make such a move because it is against the current and accepted culture of the society.

Its third benefit is the implementation of justice: “signs of justice become fixed.” That is, the signs of justice will appear throughout the society because justice and right are linked together, and in reality, justice is to give right to its owner.

Another benefit of it is: “the *sunnah* gains currency.” That is, in light of fulfilling the duties, the divine traditions will prevail in the different segments of society.

And its final outcome is:

*In this way time will improve, the continuance of government will be expected, and the aims of the enemies will be frustrated.*

Thus, in order to set up the government, the rights of the people and the ruler must be observed proportionately and according to the principles laid down by God the Exalted. If both cooperate with each other and fulfill the divine duties with each other’s help and support, the society will be reformed and the enemies will no longer be interested in it. The opposite is also true. As the Imam (‘a) says in the continuation of this sermon, if each of them does not discharge its own duties, this society will be humiliated; the enemies will cast an evil eye on it; the honor of religion will be destroyed; and finally, it will lead to the society’s adversity.

We hope that God the Exalted will grant opportunity to all our statesmen and people to discharge properly their divine duties and observe each other’s rights so that, God willing, our society will be reformed more and more every day and the enemies be hopeless [in their evil plots].

[1.](#) What we mean by state [dawlah], government [hukūmah], or ruler [hakim] is the ruling body or apparatus existing in a country and in charge of managing the affairs of society regardless of whether it is a despotic king and figure, establishment, or court, or a group in different other forms.

[2.](#) Based on reported traditions and teachings of the Infallible and pure Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), the judge has to observe justice even in his outward glance. For example, in the letter of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) to Muhammad ibn Abi-Bakr the governor of Egypt, it is thus stated: “And be impartial in staring and glancing at them.” Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Letter 27.

[3.](#) Hudūd (literally means boundaries or limits) in the Islamic law is generally applied to penal law for punishments prescribed for particular crimes whose extent is determined by law. [Trans.]

[4.](#) In this regard, see Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i, Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur’an, 4th edition (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 1362 AH), vol. 4, pp. 129–132 (chap. 12, under Sūrah al ‘Imran 3:200).

[5.](#) This is a well-known expression in the letters of the Master of the Monotheists and Commander of the Faithful; namely, Imam ‘Ali (‘a), addressed to the people under his rule, governors, officials and workers of the State, military commanders, and even the heads of his sworn enemies (Mu’awiyah). His expression is as follows: “To a servant of Allah, ‘Ali the Commander of the Faithful to...” See Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Letters 1, 50–51, 53, 60, 63, and 75.

[6.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 207.

[7.](#) That is, the people under a government will not become good and their works will not be set right except through the prosperity and goodness of the government while the government will not attain goodness and prosperity except through the steadfastness of the people (in action and supporting the truth).

# Chapter 15: The Mutual Relationship between the People and the Government (Part 6)

## A Review of the Discussion in the Previous Session

The subject of discussion during these many sessions was the relationship between the people and the government in the Islamic system. The discussion reached the point where we said that all the human systems can be divided into two groups: (1) statist (government-oriented) and (2) populist (people-oriented).

The group of systems which regards the government as the sovereign and master of the people holds that the government has the right to reign over the people while the people are duty-bound to unconditionally accept the orders of the government. In arguing for this theory, some reason out that since the human nature is a fox-like nature (the same famous statement of Hobbes that “Man is the fox of another man”), there must be a strong and powerful body to prevent rebellion and these foxes’ cutting one another’s throat. The argument of some others is that the order and security of the society cannot be established without such a power. So, the government has to impose order upon the people through naked force and other means. The people, in turn, have to obey such a power. Other arguments to prove this theory have also been advanced.

Others (whose theory is the same currently well-known one), contrary to the view of the first group, believe that the people are the sovereigns while the government is the servant. In their opinion, the government must be totally at the disposal of the people and obey whatever their order; the government has to implement every law they approve; and whomever the people elect to implement the law has the right to implement the law. This is the same system which is called “populism” or “democracy.”

As in the past, some try to say that there is no other way than these two: either statism or populism. They add that statism is a reactionary affair related to the period of slavery, and as we live in the modern period, we cannot accept such a thing. Therefore, there is no other way but to accept populism. Populism means that people choose whatever law they like without any condition or inhibition. If there is any necessary condition in enacting the law, people have to enact it. As such, all the state power must be ascribed in a sense to the people and be chosen by them.

## The View of Islam on the People and the Government

During the previous session, we stated that it is not correct to confine government into these two types and that in this regard there is another way on the basis of which the Islamic theory lies. The third theory is that neither the people have inherent dominance over the government nor the government has

inherent dominance over the people. No dominance of any individual over another individual or a group over another group is correct and credible except with the permission of God. From the Islamic viewpoint, in essence the officials of the government are a group of the same people.

So, there is no distinction between the people and the government. It is not the case that the people have the right to enact the law while the government has no corresponding role, or vice versa. It is God the Exalted Who enacts the law because He is the Master of all people and He knows best what is good for them. God the Exalted knows best, compared to others including the people themselves, their welfare in this world and the Hereafter, material and spiritual prosperity, and individual and social interests.

Thus, since God the Exalted is the Lord of mankind, the Master and Authority over them, and His knowledge is boundless and there is no error along its way, only He has the right of legislation, and the people, both the government officials and the rest of people, are all equal before His law.

Now, the point is that this law requires an agent and in some cases, it needs an interpreter. Similarly, in some cases, the law needs to determine the branches and organize the executive rules. Naturally, these affairs must be delegated to certain individuals. As such, these affairs need a government to enact law and exercise mastership and dominance over others. There must be someone who is at the service of the decree of God, justice, the welfare human beings, and human values.

Along this line, there must be some people who take charge of this function and they must be the most deserving, compared to others, to assume it. Within a group of people under a commercial, economic or educational establishment, or any other name, the responsibilities of individuals are divided among themselves according to their respective talents and merits. This is the way of the wise. In a factory, the one to be the manager is the most expert in management. In an educational institution, the one to be the director is the most expert in that work.

In a class session wherein a teacher conducts a lecture, it implies that his merit to teach is more than that of the students. So, the teacher has to give lessons while the students have to listen. Here, there is no dispute that the teacher is the master of the students, or the students are the masters of the teacher, as the case may be. Once the realization of an objective lies in the struggle and coordination of the members of a group, it is natural that the tasks must be divided among individuals. In this division of labor, in every section those who are supposed to be assigned are the most deserving of the work. The expression “meritocracy” which is sometimes used in discussions is a very elegant expression for our subject.

Given this viewpoint, we can consider, alongside the two forms, the third form of relationship between the people and the government. In this viewpoint, the issue of merit is not a deal in principle. Here, the issue is that those who are designated by God the Exalted to implement the decrees He has promulgated have the permission to offer this service for the society. Of course, it is natural that this task

requires that an order given should be followed by others; otherwise, no progress can be made and the existence of government will be rendered useless.

Similarly, if the principal of a school gives an order, the teachers have to comply with it; otherwise, no progress can be made and in this case the existence of the principal is senseless. Does the teachers' mandatory compliance with the orders of the principal mean that the principal is the master and they are servants and slaves?! In materializing administrative objectives, the most deserving individuals have to assume the posts, too. In the Islamic government, these individuals are those who are authorized by God the Exalted. The permission of God the Exalted is necessary because He is our Master. As such, the affairs of people should be managed according to His approval.

Therefore, in the Islamic government, God gives authority to rule to the deserving individuals and on the basis of this permission they manage the society and implement the divine decrees. This is the spirit of the theory of *wilayah al-faqih* [guardianship of the jurist].

Based on this, the authority of the jurist-guardian over the Islamic society is grounded on the fact that he is the most meritorious person who can apply the law of God to the society. According to the conditions taken into account for the jurist-guardian, he has the greater and better understanding of the divine law. In addition, he must have the highest level of piety, moral excellences, management skills and qualification to administer the society. It is by means of the aggregate of these three qualifications that the jurist-guardian is identified.

The person whose knowledge of the law of Islam, whose piety in practicing Islam and implementing the divine laws, and whose acumen in managing the affairs of society are more than the rest has the guardianship and right to rule in the Islamic society. By taking into consideration these three elements, the person who should take charge of the government and management of the society and has the permission from God to implement the divine laws in the society can be identified.

For that reason, in the Islamic government and the theory of *wilayah al-faqih*, the relationship between the people and the government is at least like the relations of individuals belonging to an office, or that of an academic staff with the head of that staff. The jurist-guardian is designated to manage the society only because his merit in understanding and discerning the divine laws and the manner of implementing them is greater than that of others. Neither he enacts rules by himself nor do the people do the same by themselves. Instead, the laws and rules have been enacted by the Supreme Authority Who has conveyed them to the ruler and the people for implementation.

## **Ensuring the Spiritual Welfare as the Duty of Government and the Right of People in the Islamic Government**

Concerning the people-government relationship, its spirit is traceable to the implementation of the Islamic laws, and this affair guarantees the material and spiritual welfare of the society. In this

connection, attention to the spiritual welfare and providing for it constitute a significant part of the duties of the Islamic ruler, and one of the important functions of the government is to ensure the spiritual welfare of human beings. According to the Islamic perspective (which has provable solid proofs), the humanness of man does not mean merely engagement in mundane affairs. In fact, its main part is related to the spiritual values and affairs. On this basis, the government has to supervise the spiritual affairs which are related to the society so that the activities are done properly and the society's spiritual interests are ensured.

## The Duties of the Ruler and the People from the Viewpoint of the Commander of the Faithful

In a letter, the Commander of the Faithful ('a) wrote to Malik al-Ashtar, he has mentioned the responsibilities at the very beginning of the epistle. In the said charter, he describes the duties of the Islamic ruler in this manner: "...to collect zakat there, to combat the enemies of Islam and Egypt, to work for the welfare of its people, and to look after its prosperity." That is, as the governor of Egypt, you have four responsibilities.

Firstly, you have to properly collect the *kharaj* and taxes and closely attend to the public wealth so that it can properly be spent. Secondly, if an enemy attacks and puts to danger the country of Egypt, you are obliged to fight him and maintain the society's security. Your third responsibility is this: You are obliged to strive for the people's welfare. This is a responsibility, which is mentioned in the Islamic government but not so in other political systems. In the rest of the political systems, what is the duty of the government and to which it has to utilize all facilities and talents for its realization is only order and security,<sup>1</sup> but as to whether the people are meritorious or not, it is their own responsibility, and it has nothing to do with the government, while in the Islamic government one of the very significant issues is that the Islamic government has to strive and mobilize the facilities of the Islamic country to reform the people. That is, it has to engage seriously in proper training and education in society according to the Islamic values.

Fourth: "to look after its prosperity." Another duty of the workers of the Islamic government is to develop the cities. While addressing Malik al-Ashtar the governor of Egypt, Imam 'Ali ('a) says: "*I sent you to Egypt so as to develop that place.*"

Things similar to these subjects are mentioned elsewhere in *Nahj al-Balaghah*. These are rights the people have toward the ruler and can claim from him. In sum, the government is responsible to strive hard in ensuring the material and spiritual welfare of the people. Meanwhile, the right of the ruler over the people is that the people have to assist him in implementing the laws. There are two types of assistance: One is where the ruler issues definite orders based on his discretions. Here the duty of the people is to obey. In correctly implementing the divine laws and decrees and providing for the material and spiritual welfare of the people, they have to render assistance to the government; otherwise, a

person or a small group cannot duly do this function.[2](#)

The other type of the people's assistance to the government is an intellectual one. If, for example, the governmental official commits an error, the people must remind or criticize them, or present their suggestion if they have any. This is the meaning of "the mild admonition of the Muslims" mentioned in the traditions.

Elsewhere in *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Imam 'Ali ('a) expresses the reciprocal duties and rights of the people and the leader in this manner:

*O people! I have a right over you and you have a right over me. As for your right over me, it is to counsel you, to pay you your dues fully, to teach you that you may not remain ignorant, and to instruct you in behaviorism that you may act upon. As for my right over you, it is fulfillment of (the obligation of) allegiance, well-wishing in presence or in absence, response when I call you, and obedience when I order you.*[3](#)

So, all the rights of the ruler over the subjects and the rights of the subjects over the ruler can be traced back to the provision of the material and spiritual welfare of man and whatever is really needed by the society. The materialization of this objective depends on cooperation between the people and the government, and thus, some of the burdens can be shouldered by the ruler while some others by the people. As we believe, providing for the material and spiritual welfare of man is not possible except under the blessings of the Islamic laws. Hence, there should be cooperation between the people and the government in the implementation of the Islamic laws.

## Questions and Answers

**Question:** Can the Islamic ruler act against the executive laws of the country? In essence, what is the station of the law?

**Answer:** What is meant here by "ruler" is sometimes a person while an executive body at another time. What is meant by "executive body" in turn is sometimes only the executive branch while at another time, all the three branches of the government. So, what is meant by "ruler" must be clarified. Probably, the questioner refers to the *wilayah al-faqih* here, because on top of the hierarchy of power in the Islamic system is the jurist-guardian who is the supreme ruler. Then, it will be asked: Can he act against the current laws of the country or not?

In reply, it must be asked: Which law is referred to as current laws of the country? If it means that Islamic laws mentioned in the Islamic text or the laws which have been enacted with the confirmation of the jurist-guardian, for the Islamic ruler to oppose them has no meaning. Opposition to the Islamic laws negates the credibility of the Guardianship [*wilayah*] and tarnishes the legitimacy of his rule because in this case, he deviates from justice, for opposition to the Islamic laws means opposition to Islam itself,

which perversion is graver than this?

But if the current law of the country is against the law of Islam and what is stated in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* or against an order given by the jurist-guardian in accordance with his discretions, such a law has no credibility. It is stipulated in Article 4 of the Constitution that any bill enacted in whatever stage of legislation has no credibility at all if it is contrary to the Islamic laws.

So, if what is meant by the current laws are laws that are ratified, for example, by the former regime in the country or some individuals without the approval, or even against or with the disapproval, of the jurist-guardian, and are treated as laws, the Constitution stipulated that such things have no credibility as they are against the law of Islam. As such, the ruler's opposition to them is not an opposition to the credible law, but an opposition to a thing which is branded as *law*, for the legitimate, credible and authentic law is harmonious with Islam. This condition and qualification is stipulated in our Constitution, and if ever it is not stipulated, the Constitution has no credibility in principle. If it is not stated in our Constitution that whatever is contrary to the law of Islam is not credible, in that case we do not regard this constitution as credible. The credibility of the Constitution owes to its Article 4 which states that whatever is against Islam is not credible.

In sum, if the law of the country is credible, which means that it is consistent with the laws of Islam, neither the ruler nor anybody else has the right to oppose it, and if he does so, on the ground of perversion [*fisq*], he deviates from justice and his Guardianship has no credibility and legitimacy. However, if the law in question is against Islam, that *law* is not credible for the jurist-guardian to act in accordance with it.

**Question:** The discussion on the theory of the Islamic government is correct, but in action the question of efficiency of the Islamic government, which is certainly based on evaluation and decisions is raised. How can this question (of efficiency) be solved so as for the government to be responsive to the Islamic society?

**Answer:** Perhaps, what is meant by this question is that we have a general theory that in the Islamic government the Islamic laws should be observed and at the head of which is the jurist-guardian, and we accept it. But the question is: Keeping in view the methods of execution which require different times and places, how are these laws put into practice?

During the past twenty years, the manner of putting into practice the Islamic laws in the Islamic government has been clear. At the suggestion of the late Imam (may Allah be pleased with him), the Assembly of Experts [*majlis-e khobregan*] and by ratifying and implementing rules and regulations, the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran was established and reflected in the Constitution. The way of realizing the Islamic government and implementing the Islamic laws is what has been stated in our Constitution. All things stated in the Constitution are not in the text of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, but their credibility is with the credibility of the jurist-guardian's signature. Since the eminent Imam (*r*) and

then the Supreme Leader have a favorable opinion about his law, it follows that this law is credible for us and the law has defined the manner of its implementation. Here, there is a need for more specific rules. The manner of implementation of these general laws is determined by the law; that is, the laws that the Islamic Consultative Assembly enacts and must naturally pass through the channel of the Council of Experts so as to ensure their conformity with the Islamic ordinances.

In a nutshell, the ways of implementation are changeable according to the demands of time and space, but these ways must (directly or indirectly) be approved by the jurist-guardian so as to be credible and for the people to be religiously obliged to regard these ratified laws as credible and act upon them. In one of the discussions earlier, we have mentioned that such a guarantee does not exist anywhere else in the world that the people (at least on the basis of their own belief) are bound to implement the administrative laws. Yet, the laws of the Islamic state are religiously obligatory.

As a result, once it is ratified in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, for example, that a certain group or class has to pay a certain amount of taxes inheritance tax, income tax, or any other payment of such taxes, as in the case of *khums* and *zakat*, is incumbent upon them. This is the use of the approval of the jurist-guardian because any law approved by him is a decree of God.

The Imam (*r*) says many times that to abide with the rules of the Islamic Republic, as in the case of other religious laws, is religiously obligatory. Such a guarantee exists only in an Islamic system and this is a great service that the Islamic Revolution has offered to our society. Of course, culturally speaking, this issue has not yet settled well and many people do not pay attention to it since, for many years, the people had been living in a despotic system and they had always tried to circumvent the public laws because they regarded them as a kind of compulsion and tyranny against them. In view of this mental background, our people are not yet accustomed to faithfully abide by the state orders. However, for those who are bound to this affair, this issue will be a very strong executive guarantee.

Regarding what is related to my personal life in social issues, so long as it is credible law and religious proof, I regard myself bound to faithfully act upon it, though it might be against my material interests or personal opinion. Once the Islamic government ratifies this law and it is approved by the Supreme Leader, I consider it obligatory for me to observe it and many people are the same.

**Question:** Based on the previous discussions, there are three types of relationship between the people and the government: (1) statism, (2) populism, and (3) meritocracy (with leniency). As you have said, in the Islamic government, the only righteous position for legislation is the Divine Sacred Essence. Yet, we know that God does not come to rule over the people. He instead sends the Prophet (S) and the Imams (‘a). Up to the time of the Infallibles, we do not encounter any problem. But after the Infallibles, considering the openness of the gate of *ijtihad* among the Shi‘ah and the multiplicity of the views of prominent jurists, we are facing multiplicity of views and diversity of understandings.

Now, the first question is this: Which understanding should rule? Or, which understanding is now ruling?

On the other hand, if the gate of *ijtihad* is open as it is and since the Constitution has been codified based on certain juristic understandings, in case of difference in the juristic foundations and understandings of a jurist-guardian with the former jurist-guardian, what should be done regarding the amendment of the Constitution? Secondly, it seems that Islam expresses the principles and foundations, and not the method, of implementation. Method of implementation is a rational affair. Based on the rational understandings of the people and experts of the society, methods anchored in the same Islamic principles and foundations can be selected. Why should we insist that the method of implementation, which is totally time-based, be also deduced by the religious text and then its outcome is for the inefficiencies to be attributed to the religion?

**Answer:** This is an elaborate question. If we examine all its details sentence to sentence, it will take time. Nevertheless, the gist of this question consists of two points: One is that since the head of the government is not infallible, mistakes will be committed. What is the guarantee that once a person who is not an infallible heads the government will not commit any error?

The reply is this: Are the experts who are responsible based on prevailing foundations in the world to enact the law and determine the methods infallible or do they have differences among themselves? Does the difference among parties existing throughout the world, each suggesting a particular method of implementing the government programs with the aim of providing for the welfare of the people, lead to the negation of the essence of existence of the parties and the government? Their reply is that different parties present to the people their considered views and policies, and whichever garners the highest votes must be acted upon. Is it other than this?

The jurists [*fuqaha*] have their own differences in religious edicts [*fatawa*], but in practice, the edict of the one who is superior to all and whose superiority is proved, shall be observed. Is not there any dispute in other issues?! Are not the physicians' prescriptions different from each other? If you consult two doctors and they give you two different prescriptions, which prescription will you follow? Undoubtedly, it is the prescription of the one who is more proficient. Thus, the existence of differences of opinion among people about many cases is undeniable, and in the end they prefer the view of the majority or the most learned, and act upon it. Therefore, this affair is not a problem pertaining only to the Islamic system because there is difference of opinion everywhere. You will notice in the most advanced countries in the world that there are different parties, and the foundation of the multiplicity of parties is the diversity of viewpoints and difference of opinions. In spite of all this, a party will finally rule through alliance or as the majority and act upon its own view. Once the jurist-guardian is determined, his view is credible vis-à-vis that of others.

The other issue is: Has Islam mentioned the foundations but not the methods, or mentioned some methods but not the others? This discussion has three possibilities. One is that Islam has mentioned the foundations but not the methods at all. The second is that it has mentioned all the methods and left no stone unturned for man. The third is that it has mentioned some methods and delegated the other

methods to others (to mention).

At the outset, it must be clarified what is meant by “foundations” and “methods.” By saying that Islam has mentioned the foundations, does it mean that Islam has only ordained that there should be security and that is all?! Or, has it only said that justice must be established? If that is so, it does not bring any excellence for Islam because all people have said so and Islam has not mentioned anything special. No wise person on earth says that justice must not be established in the society. Every wise person dictates that there must be justice. No one claims that security is something bad. All the wise in the world say that security is something good. Therefore, Islam having mentioned the foundations means that it has only mentioned these things and then ordained that the human beings have to maintain security and establish justice through whatever way they can and know.

If this understanding of Islam is correct, it follows that the people have no more need for Islam because they know that security is something good. We are not in need of Islam to teach us the way of maintaining security. God the Exalted explicitly says in the Holy Qur’an, “*As for the thief, man and woman, cut off their hands as a requital for what they have earned. (5:38)*” This means that one of the ways of maintaining the society’s security is for the hands of the male and female thieves to be amputated.

Of course, those who intend to annihilate religion or confine it to the personal affairs say that these are part of the methods, and methods change—one time it is like this and like that at another time. They sometimes say that 1,400 years ago Islam ordained that the hand of the thief should be cut off. Now, this method is not appropriate and has no use. They say that this kind of ordinances of Islam is like medicine whose expiration date has already passed, and thus, it must be thrown away! This statement implies that “*As for the thief, man and woman...*” must be removed from the Qur’an because this order belongs to the time 1,400 years ago and now its expiration date has passed! Does it mean anything except denial of Islam? Does denial of Islam have another specific form than this?!

It must not remain unsaid that there is a set of methods of implementation upon which the circumstances of time and space have effect and it is for this reason that Islam has placed them at the disposal of the ruler. In the words of some authorities such as the eminent martyr, the late Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr, they are part of the *mantiqatu’l-faragh* of the Islamic laws which serve as administrative laws. In cases where Islam has no specific order as to which method of implementation is to be used, the jurist-guardian through consultation and based on the Islamic standards chooses the method which is not against the laws of Islam.

Thus, there are three assumptions here. One is that Islam has mentioned the foundations only, but the other ordinances including the penal laws are the methods of realization of those foundations. The methods have nothing to do with Islam, and even if they are mentioned in the Qur’an, they belong to the time 1,400 years ago and can be of no use today. In our opinion, this assumption is totally inaccurate because this statement means the denial of Islam and setting aside and burying the Qur’an like the

burying of medicines whose expiration date has passed.

The other view is that whatever we need is stated in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, and there is no more room for legislation and decision-making. With only a bit of reflection, it can be realized that this statement is definitely false.

The correct view is that in some cases Islam has not promulgated a specific law and has delegated this affair to the infallible Imam or the jurist-guardian as the Islamic ruler such as the traffic and driving rules which are not mentioned in the sources of the Islamic legislation; namely, the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, and yet their existence is necessary for the social order. Therefore, some methods which are not mentioned in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* and are needed by the society are to be worth followed by the order of the jurist-guardian.

**Question:** In Islam, what are the preventive measures to ensure that the jurist-guardian does not commit an offense? And in case the jurist-guardian intentionally or unintentionally commits an offence, what measure is undertaken in the Islamic government to supervise and control these cases so as to assure the people?

**Answer:** One of these measures is that the designation of the jurist-guardian is not done through direct vote of the people. If the election of the jurist-guardian (like the elections of the president and Majlis representatives) is directly delegated to the people, the way for error and mistake will be opened from the very beginning. As you know, in such kinds of elections, even in our country, there is space for cheatings. For example, sometimes a candidate has thousands-and-so votes in a ballot box but it is said that so-and-so has a zero vote! Now, if the jurist-guardian is supposed to be elected in this way, what credibility does it have? To what extent do the people trust such a jurist-guardian?

As such, in designating the jurist-guardian, a precaution is made that the elite or experts trusted by the people designate him to this office so that possibility of committing error reduces, especially given the fact that membership in the circle of the experts has no material and worldly rights and advantages for a person to aspire for it. In accordance with their religious duty, the people make their own investigation and among the righteous '*ulama*' they choose the more meritorious for the Assembly of Experts. Then, these experts conduct discussions in their meetings so as to see who among them or outside their circle is worthy to be designated. Thereafter, according to the law, the same Assembly of Experts continuously supervises the Leader and his performance so that, God forbid, no error or deviation is ever made.

Therefore, measures and arrangements for this purpose are anticipated, but since the jurist-guardian is not infallible after all, this preventive measure does not mean that there is no probability of the committing of error at all. However, does the jurist-guardian's fallibility make us say that he has no right to rule and he should not be obeyed? Let us assume that we live during the time of an infallible Imam, the Commander of the Faithful ('*a*) for example, and he dispatched a person like Malik al-Ashtar to Iran for an administrative post. Malik al-Ashtar is a person about whom the Imam ('*a*) said, "You are to me

as I was to the Prophet.”<sup>4</sup> So, the best person to govern a country has been chosen. Yet, Malik al-Ashtar is not infallible and he may commit error.

Does this probability prompt us to say that Malik al-Ashtar and his likes should not be given a responsibility? In this case, is it possible for the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) to directly govern such a vast Islamic land?! Of course, the Imam (‘a) used to give orders to his officials which if properly observed, the territories under his jurisdiction would be duly administered to the extent possible. An illustrious example of these admonitions has been stated in the famous epistle to Malik al-Ashtar. All these are preventive measures so that mistakes and errors are minimized. But not to commit a mistake at all is an impossible thing in the social life of a non-infallible person. Man, except the one under the special divine grace and possessing the quality of infallibility, is always prone to commit error and mistake. Therefore, the best system is the one that takes a measure to minimize mistakes and errors therein. This is anticipated in the political system of Islam and if properly acted upon, we will see that this system is the best one in terms of the realization of objectives.

**Question:** Whatever is stated in the Islamic government theory (in this discussion or in the previous ones) is all correct and factual. In practice, however, we can observe that the best way of governance which leads to the progress of countries is the same democratic way. It has been made clear that real democracy does not exist anywhere, but the same existing form of government in the West has these effects and benefits in those Western societies. What is your opinion regarding this?

**Answer:** Before anything else, one has to reflect on the judgment of this respected questioner. What does he mean by saying that the best existing form of government is democracy? Does it mean democracy even where the laws are anti-Islamic? Democratic government which is based on the will of the people may enact any law even if it is against the text of the Qur’an and the Islamic standards. In the opinion of the respected questioner, is such a government the best form of government? Or, by democracy and populism, does he mean democracy within the framework of the Islamic laws and values which is called “religious populism”?

The falsity of the first notion is clear and definitely this is not what the respected questioner means. But if he means democracy within the framework of the Islamic values, this is the same thing which exists in our Constitution and is supposed to be faithfully acted upon as it is. Of course, as to whether it is observed in a corner of the country or there is violation of it in some cases, these words are raised throughout the world. As we have stated earlier, the fact is that real democracy is nowhere to be found in the world. Not too long ago, it was published in the newspapers that a writer in Egypt has written that real democracy in the world exists only in one country and that is Iran.

Anyway, democracy within the framework of the Islamic values exists in our Constitution as well as in the way of governance of the eminent Imam (‘a). The people have the right to elect their representatives for the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the Assembly of Experts and other cases, and to choose a person for the presidential post. But if by democracy it means the second notion in which the people may even

abrogate the laws of Islam and as in the words of that gentleman, demonstrate against God if they want, this notion is not consistent with Islam. Who has said that such a government is better than the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Is that government in which annually thirty thousand people are killed as the result of crimes committed therein better than the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran? This statistic has been given by the American government itself that every year more than thirty thousand are killed as the result of crimes. Moral corruptions and social misconducts as the outcome of libertarianism of the Western democracy have afflicted the entire world and the American people in particular. Their own voice scholars, reformers, congressmen, and senators is loud, and corruption, family breakdown, parentless children abandoned in the streets and thousands of other adversities have made their groaning louder. Is this system better than the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

**Question:** God the Compassionate said that if the Holy Prophet (S) acted beyond His order, He would deal with him severely and “***We will cut off his aorta of life. (69:44-46)***” This legal threat shows in reality the lofty station of the government of God the Exalted. Now, since the Islamic government is the government of truth, why is it that whenever some of its officials act against the law, they are not dealt with severely so that another person, group, or official, in whatever position he is, will not do wrong? In fact, the same inopportune carelessness and indulgences lead to the spread of numerous problems in the Islamic society.

**Answer:** There are two issues at hand. One issue pertains to the time when an Islamic government can implement properly the Islamic laws. In a short discussion in which it was pointed out, we said that an Islamic government can properly discharge its duty if the people extend help. If the people do not cooperate, the Islamic ruler cannot singly implement the Islamic laws. This incapability is not a fault of the government but that of the people who have left the government and the just ruler alone.

Meanwhile, the other issue pertains to this: During this time, where should there be severity of action and where should there be leniency? This question is a religious decree. Who should determine this religious decree? Based on some of our defective comparisons and pieces of information, we say, for example, that the Prophet (S) did so and the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) also did. Thus, we have to do it. Yet, we have to bear in mind that there are numerous cases where the Imams (‘a) or the Holy Prophet (S) acted differently.

They used to show leniency. Given this, as to where leniency should be shown and where severity of action should be shown is an issue which must be decided upon by the jurist [*faqih*]. We say that it is obligatory to obey the *wali al-faqih*. Here is one of the cases where such obedience is necessary. If the *wali al-faqih* is the most informed of people, the most pious of all and knows best what is for the interest of society, it is he who should decide where severity of action should be demonstrated and where leniency should be displayed.

Yes, there are cases where we imagine that more severity of action is supposed to be shown and maybe we are indeed correct, but the reason for not executing it is that through our own performance we have made the social circumstances in such a manner that the ground for the Leader's measures is not ready. During the period of rule of the Commander of the Faithful ('a), did this problem not happen to him many times? During the Battle of Siffin, he wanted to get rid of Mu'awiyah but the behavior of his people did not enable him to do what he wanted. At the present time, if we had only properly responded to the call of the Leader, the ground for implementation of the Islamic laws would have been paved better. It is better for us to consider our actions and behavior and to see if the behavior we have and the duties we are supposed to do are properly discharged or not.

[1.](#) This is the same thing which is described as the "minimal government". That is, the government has the least right to interfere in the affairs of people and what the government has to strive to materialize is the maintenance of order and security of society. This outlook is a liberalist one which is founded on the absolute freedom of individuals and except in case of necessity, this freedom should not be limited. According to this outlook, the case of necessity is the same public order and the absence of encroachment on the freedom of others. See 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 29, Section 2.

[2.](#) As Imam 'Ali ('a) says in Nahj al-Balaghah, "And it is an obligatory right of Allah over the people that they should... cooperate with each other for the establishment of truth among them. No person, however great his position in the matter of truth, and however advanced his distinction in religion may be, is above cooperation in connection with the obligations placed on him by Allah." Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 207.

[3.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Sermon 34.

[4.](#) For more information about the salient features and station of Malik al-Ashtar with respect to Imam 'Ali ('a), see Nahj al-Balaghah (Faydh al-Islam), Letter 38 and Saying 435.

## Chapter 16: Faith as the Essence of Invitation of the Prophets (Part 1)

The subject of the discussion is: Faith as the Essence of the Invitation of the Prophets ('a). In order to clarify the subject, its importance and the pertinent discussions to be made, we shall make a short introduction:

### Introduction

The emergence of the prophets is recognized as a historical event throughout the thousands of years of human history. Of course, among them there have been false claimants to prophethood and forgers of religion who presented fake goods in this sphere and concocted "heavenly scriptures and religions." In spite of this, among the claimants to prophethood throughout history, there have been certainly tens of thousands of worthy people who had been truly chosen for the prophethood by God the Exalted. Based

on what is mentioned in the narrations of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a), there were 124,000 prophets, out of whom only twenty-four are mentioned in the Holy Qur’an and an equally very few numbers are mentioned by name in the Islamic narrations. Therefore, regarding most of these divine prophets (‘a) apart from having no information about their life accounts, we do not even know their names.

Now, concerning this historical trend which had always surfaced in human life as shown by history and as authentic religious sources show, this question is posed: What is the cause of emergence of this trend and what objective had the divine prophets (‘a) been trying to attain? Had all the prophets the same axis for their invitation, or each of them had his specific aim? Have there been any comparisons and contradictions between the prophets’ objectives and promulgations for the religion?

Those who have materialistic inclinations and explain the philosophy of history based on the historical materialism have their own specific interpretation of the emergence of this historical trend. You may also remember how some Marxist groups existing in our country prior to the Revolution used to interpret the emergence of the prophets (‘a) and their call. They believed in certain stages of history, regarding contradiction as the essence of all historical movements. Accordingly, they used to present the origin of the emergence of the prophets in the scene of history as a kind of class struggle.

However, we have to set aside this kind of sociological interpretations and philosophies of history based on materialism (Marxism) and refer to the religious sources (particularly the Qur’an and narrations explaining the Qur’anic texts) ask them to explain and interpret for us the emergence of the prophets (‘a) and specify the axis of their invitation. We will arrive at conclusions which are totally different from the ones presented by the sociologists and philosophers of history.

## **Faith as the Main Axis of the Invitation of the Prophets**

What can be inferred from the religious sources, particularly the Holy Qur’an, is that faith is the axis of the prophets’ invitations. In our religious culture, the concept of faith [*iman*] and unbelief [*kufir*] has taken form. To accept the prophets’ invitation is called faith, while their followers are called faithful. In Arabic literature, the word *mu’min* (faithful) is an active noun which means he who has *iman* (faith). On the contrary, those who used to oppose the prophets (‘a) and deny their invitation are called unbelievers [*kafir*]. *Kufr* means to conceal, and *kafir* is one who conceals the truth.

In a simple mathematical example, we can consider the totality of the prophets’ invitations throughout a historical event in the form of “axes of peculiarities.” In this portrayal and similitude, all laws, decrees and rules that the prophets presented shall be drawn in the x-axis. The vertical axis (y-axis) is where the main axis of this totality of the laws, decrees and rules is specified. Let us identify this axis as “faith.” Thus, in short, let us consider the x-axis as the axis of teachings and the y-axis as the axis of faith. Now, let us call the positive y-axis as “faith” and the negative y-axis as “unbelief.” Those who have accepted the invitation of the prophets (‘a) and acted upon their ordinances are on the y-axis.

They have moved toward the positive direction, progressed, advanced, and attained perfection. The scale of progress of every person on this axis is actually an indication of the magnitude of his perfection, and naturally, the more a person advances on this axis, the more perfect he becomes. In other words, at the time of birth, man stands at the center of the axes of peculiarities, i.e. the zero point (the point of intersection between the x- and y-axes) while his humanness is “potential”. The grounds for growth and perfection are inherently endowed in him, but for them to blossom and put them into action depend on the will and movement of man himself. On the contrary, by utilizing the same grounds, instead of progress and perfection, he takes a descending and downfall trend and moves from the zero point toward the negative direction of the y-axis. This is a backward, inhuman and anti-perfection movement.

In this manner, we can consider a general axis called “the axis of faith and unbelief” for the invitation of all the prophets (‘a) throughout history. We call those who moved toward the positive direction of this axis as “faithful” and those who moved toward the negative direction of this axis as “unbeliever.” By utilizing the same example, we can consider stages for each of faith and unbelief. Keeping in view of the same example, it becomes clear that none of the two ascending and descending trends of man has an end, because they are infinite; that is, in the axes of peculiarities, each of the two axes (x and y) continues up to infinite positive ( $+\infty$ ) and infinite negative ( $-\infty$ ). Thus, faith and unbelief are of different stages, and man can move in any of the two directions (ascending and descending) up to infinity.

Our claim is that the axis of invitation of all the prophets (‘a) is not more than one. This axis has two directions (positive and negative) to any of which man can choose out of his own volition and freewill. Advancement along the positive direction leads to the increase in faith, while advancement along the negative direction leads to the aggravation of unbelief. All religious teachings revolve around this axis, and all other issues will be evaluated in relation to this axis and through this barometer.

## **The Correct Method of Conducting Research on this Issue**

The above claim cannot be proved through empirical science or mathematical proofs; rather, it must be sought from the religion itself, and its correctness or otherwise will become clear by referring to the religious text. One should ask the prophets (‘a) who have made such an invitation does the totality of your invitations have a single axis or not? As such, examining this issue through an extra-religious outlook which has been raised by some is not a correct approach. They say, “We have to see what we need from religion and the prophets so as to be made clear what function religion and the prophets have and which need of man they should meet and to what they have made invitation.” In our opinion, this subject is basically false and since we are presently not examining the authenticity or falsity of the extra-religious outlook, we shall only take a short and cursory treatment of this discussion:

Regarding any set of things, one general ruling is that if we want to know its content, we have to look inside it. If there is a set of knowledge called “physics” and you want to know what this set is all about, you have to read and study a book on physics. If you want to know what problems are dealt in the

science of geometry, you have to refer to a geometry book and see its content what sections and chapters it has and consist of which subjects. In this kind of cases, without having any information about the subjects and topics dealt with in a science, we cannot just sit down in a closed room at home and prove that this science should deal with what issues and which of our needs it has to meet!

The same is true in the case of religion. Religion is a set of things and in order for us to know what subjects constituting religion and what things are expected of it, we have to refer to the content of the religion. We are not supposed to sit in an empty space and decide for ourselves what it has to deal with, with which things it has to get involved and in what issues it should not interfere! At any rate, the correct method of examining this issue is the intra-religious outlook, and even assuming that through the extra-religious outlook, it can be guessed which issues religion has to deal with, this venture beats around the bush. The certain and correct way of examining it is for us to refer to religion from within and see what issues it has dealt with.

## The Axis of the Invitation of the Prophets (‘a) from the Viewpoint of the Qur’an

The source which is credible for us and to which we have absolute certainty is the Holy Qur’an. By referring to the Qur’an, it will become clear that the main axis of the invitation of all prophets (‘a) is faith, and its opposite point is unbelief. For example, it is stated in these verses:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ مَن تَدْخُلِ النَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْزَيْتَهُ ۚ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِن أَنْصَارٍ رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا ۗ رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ

***Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for those who possess intellects. Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [and say]... ‘Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith, declaring: Have faith in your Lord! So we believed’... (3: 190-3)***

The expression of the Qur’an in this verse is *uli’l-albab*; that is, the people of intellect, wisdom and astuteness. Here, what is meant by “mind” is not that which is located inside the skull; rather, it is the opposite of empty skull; that is, those who have minds and not only mere skull without a brain. It can be deduced from this expression that from the viewpoint of the Qur’an, human beings are classified into two groups; one comprises those who are idle and brainless and in terms of humanness they have only eyes, ears, hands, and feet. Sometimes, their inner and esoteric beings are more base and abject than the animals.

The Qur'an mentions this group with the expression, ***“the worst of beasts (8:22)”*** and likens some people to a donkey (62:5) or a dog (7:176). The second group comprises those who have minds. These people arrive at conclusions by thinking, reflection, and use of their intellects, and discern the truths, which are the very roots of religion. They then engage in litanies and open-hearted prayers, and one of their litanies is this: *“Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith.”*

The perfect manifestations of this summoner are the prophets of God: *We heard a caller from You calling, ‘Have faith in your God.’ We thus accepted this invitation.* The reason for the acceptance of invitation is mentioned in the previous verse; they reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, the divine wisdom and the purpose of creation, and the genesis and resurrection. Then, they say to God, “Now that we believe, we ask You something:

رَبَّنَا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا ۖ رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ

***Our Lord, forgive us of our sins and absolve us of our misdeeds, and make us die with the pious. (3: 193)***

At any rate, our concern in these verses is presently the part that says, *“Our Lord, we have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith, declaring, ‘Have faith in your Lord!’ So we believed.”* What did those callers who had come from God for the guidance of humanity call for? What was the axis of their calls, invitations and guidance? The answer is: *“calling to faith.”* They said, *“Have faith in your Lord.”* The main axis was for you to have faith, and all other things they used to mention were branches of the same axis. The faith is the root and by setting it up, the branches and fruits will come out. What is important is the root. If the root is corrupt, there is no hope for leaves and fruits. Once the root is firm and sound, it will bear fruits for years:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ تُؤْتِي أُكْلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا ۖ وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

***It is like a good tree: its roots are steady and its branches are in the sky. It gives its fruit every season by the leave of its Lord. (14:24-25)***

Its fruit-bearing has no limit and it can extend toward the sky infinitely. This is the faith that grows, acquires lofty stages and stations, and shows itself in the different spheres of life. It is this faith that can play a role in the individual, familial, social, and international prosperity, and finally, in the eternal life of man. This life in the world with all its length and width, and all the importance and extensive dimensions it has is a prelude to arrive at the Hereafter, just as for the fetus to be inside the womb is a prelude to come into this world:

رَبَّنَا أَمَتْنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ وَأَحْيَيْتَنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ

**“Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life. (40:11)”**

Man is born twice: One is at the time when he is conceived in the womb of his mother and from the stages of conception to the moment of transfer to the world. The other one is at the time when he transfers from this material world to the purgatorial world and the Hereafter. In this condition, life in the world with respect to the purgatory and the Hereafter in comparison is regarded as an embryonic period. Of course, these two embryonic stages are different from each other. The first fetus is nine months old while the second is ninety years old.

But these ninety years in the world, in comparison to the otherworldly life which is infinite, is so much shorter than the nine months a fetus spends in the mother’s womb. The other difference is that to make the first fetus is not at the disposal of man, and it is totally subservient to the external factors. Factors such as the father’s sperm, the mother’s womb, nourishment, and the mother’s internal conditions which are all beyond the control of man combine together to make a fetus. During the period of the second fetus, however, so many factors are in the hands of man and it is he who builds his main personality, because we regard life in the world as the embryonic stage and prelude and the main life of man is in the Hereafter, as the Qur’an says:

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ ۗ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ ۗ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

***The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known! (29:64)***

In any case, what constitutes the root of our felicity and the nucleus of man’s felicity in this embryonic period that must grow, mutate and form other cells, tissues and limbs is the same “faith.” If man, out of his own freewill, plants the seed of faith in his heart, makes it grow, irrigates it and protects it, then he will attain eternal bliss. Therefore, one proof that the axis of invitation of all prophets (‘a) is faith is this noble verse, “We have indeed heard a summoner calling to faith.” By taking a survey of the Qur’anic verses, many other testimonies can be established on this subject, such as the verses mentioning the characteristics of the righteous people and those who benefit from their lives and will be safe from perils. In all these verses, the quintessence which is always highlighted is “faith.” In most cases, there is talk about “Those who have faith” and “those who do good deeds.” Even if in some cases, in terms of position, the action is mentioned first, it will immediately require that this action must be accompanied by faith:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أَنْتَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً ۗ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

***Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he (or she) be faithful, verily We shall quicken with good life. (16:97)***

## **Denial as the Prime Origin of Deviation**

The opposite of faith is “denial” [*kufr*]. The lack of faith is *kufr* and the one who does not possess faith is called *kafir* [unbeliever or denier]. The Qur’an says: Finally, the unbelievers will be wretched and misfortunate. Even if they do good deeds, these will be of no avail, because these do not stem from faith but motivated by their carnal desires and material instincts; motivated by popularity among people or at least to satisfy and please their own human emotions. Whoever does a good deed for inner happiness and sense of contentment, his reward is the same inner happiness and sense of contentment he experiences, and he cannot expect anything else from God. This is especially true if the person is basically evil and mischievous and does this good deed owing to a momentary emotional excitement and instantaneous uproar of feelings.

As to why no deed of man in a state of *kufr* and absence of faith can give him felicity is not problematic (to discern). Let us assume that you have done a great service to a person. For example, you have spent a significant portion of your property and assets to save him from a serious ailment such that you have become poor. Now, if this person did not pay attention and was heedless of you and would not even express a lukewarm empty gratitude, and after sometime met you and said, “I do not know you at all,” what judgment would you really have regarding this person? Even if you do not express it verbally, at least you will say in your heart: “What an ungrateful man he is! He does not even deserve to be called “human” because many animals do not forget the good things and services that man gives to them.

Now, imagine a person who forgets God, and not only is he heedless of God but also he says, “I do not recognize a being called God at all.” Which God? It is the same God who has created us from nothing and endowed the entire universe and our existence. It is the same God who has placed the nutritious milk in the breasts of the mother so that the helpless baby does not remain hungry. It is He under whose blessings we live day and night. It is He who ordains that “any breath that is inhaled extends life and as it is exhaled, it enlivens the person.” Thus, there are two blessings in every breath, and thanksgiving is obligatory for every blessing:

*Whatever gratitude the hand and tongue could express must be given for the air. [1](#)*

Now, after all these compassions, blessings, graces, and generousities, should man say, “Who is God by the way?! Such a being does not exist in the external world!” What an ungrateful applause indeed! In the words of the Qur’an,

وَجَعَلُوا لَهُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ جُزْءًا ۗ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ مُبِينٌ

### ***Man is indeed a manifest ingrate. (43:15)***

This is the gravest ingratitude a person can show. If because of the thanklessness for a kindness, you regard that person as unworthy of being called “human”, if a person shows such ingratitude to the boundless ocean of blessings, he is not worthy to be called “human.”

## **The Unbelievers from the Viewpoint of the Qur’an**

The Qur’an confirms the idea that the label “human” is not worthy for the unbelievers:

إِنَّ شَرَّ الدَّوَابِّ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

***Indeed the worst of beasts in Allah’s sight are those who are faithless; so they will not have faith. (8:55)***

In this verse, God refuses to use the word “human” for the unbelievers and mentions them with the expression “beast” which is even more despicable than the expression “animal.”

Therefore, the first stage in which man can be situated along the correct path of humanity and in which he can activate his talents is to pay heed to the same innate demands and values which are discerned by every person through his God-given natural disposition *fitrah* which is truth-acknowledging and grateful of the blessings and their Source. The grateful-of-the-blessings-and-their-Source *fitrah* is not only confined to man as it exists in many animals. An illustrious example of them is the dog. In this attribute, this animal has reached such a point that it becomes a symbol of truth-acknowledgment and gratitude for blessings. The dog recognizes its benefactor and has total regard for him. In front of him, it bows down and places its head and face on the ground.

If those who are not willing to admit the existence of the All-benefactor Lord neither express gratitude for His blessings nor assume any responsibility for them, such people will never have any hope for their own advancement and perfection. The one who denies the existence of his Benefactor, even if sometimes he does good deeds, it has an arrogant dimension and no effect on the essence of his being. His essence has become inhuman and filthy and such a person has killed and annihilated the spirit of humanity and spirituality in his self. Through such works, one cannot revive the dead spirit. Yes, his good deeds may have effect on him in this world and he may benefit from them:

وَيَوْمَ يُعْرَضُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَلَى النَّارِ أَلَّذِينَ أُذْهِبَتْ طَبِيبَاتِكُمْ فِي حَيَاتِكُمُ الدُّنْيَا وَاسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ بِهَا فَالْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا كُنْتُمْ تَفْسُقُونَ

***The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, [they will be told,] ‘You have exhausted your***

**good things in the life of the world and enjoyed them. So today you will be requited with a humiliating punishment for your acting arrogantly in the earth unduly, and because you used to transgress. (46:20)**

If he has ever done a good deed, in return of it he will receive benefit in this world, but in the Hereafter he will receive nothing but the hell, chastisement and the fire. One who believes in neither God nor the Resurrection and naturally has no hope of receiving any reward from God on the Day of Resurrection, from whom does he expect any reward?!

The Qur'an has elegant parables in this regard. For example, in *Surah al-Furqan*, we read:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ نَرَى رَبَّنَا ۚ لَقَدِ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ وَعَتَوْا عُتُوًا كَبِيرًا

يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَا بُشْرَىٰ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ وَيَقُولُونَ حَجْرًا مَّحْجُورًا

وَقَدِمْنَا إِلَىٰ مَا عَمِلُوا مِنْ عَمَلٍ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ هَبَاءً مَنْثُورًا

**Those who do not expect to encounter Us say, 'Why have not angels been sent down to us, or why do we not see our Lord?' Certainly they are full of arrogance within their souls and have become terribly defiant. The day when they see the angels, there will be no good news for the guilty that day, and they will say, 'Keep off [from paradise]!' Then We shall attend to the works they have done and then turn them into scattered dust. (25:21-23)**

The deeds of those who are at war with their Creator are like ashes which are blown by the wind. If one stormy day, ashes are carried out by the wind, what will happen? How much will remain and what benefit can they give?

In *Surah an-Nur*, we read in this regard:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيَعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّاهُ حِسَابَهُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ أَوْ كظلماتٍ في بحرٍ لججٍ يعشاهُ موجٌ من فوقه موجٌ من فوقه سحابٌ ۚ ظلماتٌ بعضها فوق بعضٍ إذا أخرج يده لم يكد يراها ۚ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَجْعَلِ اللَّهُ لَهُ نُورًا فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ نُّورٍ

**As for the faithless, their works are like a mirage in a plain, which the thirsty man supposes to be water. When he comes to it, he finds it to be nothing; but there he finds Allah, who will pay him his full account, and Allah is swift at reckoning. Or like the manifold darkness in a deep sea, covered by billow upon billow, overcast by clouds, manifold [layers of] darkness, one on the top**

***of another: when he brings out his hand, he can hardly see it, and one whom Allah has not granted any light has no light. (24:39–40)***

The deeds of the unbelievers are like a mirage which appears to those who are thirsty in the desert; they think that it is a stream, pond or spring, but when they approach it, they see that it is nothing; it is a barren and desolate desert. The unbelievers expect something from their deeds, thinking that when they are thirsty of success and prosperity, those deeds will benefit them, while it is nothing but false notion. The mirage is “*supposed to be water.*” Those who have killed the spirit of “faith” in their selves have annihilated the capability for human growth in them. No matter how much good deed they may do, it will be of no use for them:

وَمَثَلُ كَلِمَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ اجْتُثَّتْ مِنْ فَوْقِ الْأَرْضِ مَا لَهَا مِنْ قَرَارٍ

***It is like a bad tree: uprooted from the ground, it has no stability. (14:26)***

Since the root is corrupt and not attached to anything, whatever good deed they may do will not be attached to the root to become lasting. There is no correlation between the root of *kufr* and good deeds. As such, they will not be attached to each other. Once the root conceals the truth, it is ungrateful to God and it denies the lofty human values; so, how can it see good and sublime deeds? This bond will fade and not last long.

This is contrary to the case when the root is sound. If the root is sound, there is hope for fruit and produce. *Kufr* dries up and burns the root. Once the root is dried, there is no hope. But those who have faith, even if they sometimes commit mistakes, their case is like that of pests that have affected only the branches and leaves, and by means of insecticides and proper care, it can be treated and remedied, since the root is sound. Through reformative measures, the tree can bear fruits again.

It can be inferred from this group of verses that the main criterion of human progress, advancement and perfection is faith, and on the contrary, that which burns the root of humanity and shatters everything is unbelief.

Other examples make us prove that from the viewpoint of the Qur'an, the axis of the invitation of the prophets (‘a) and the main factor for the salvation and felicity of man is faith, which also has requisites that we shall deal, God willing, in the next session.

## **Some Fundamental Questions on the Issue of Faith**

After paying attention to the fact that the essence of the invitation of the prophets (a) is faith, numerous questions in this context are raised. Some of these questions are as follows: What is the definition of *iman*? What is the relationship of *iman* with love [*hubb*] and hypocrisy [*nifaq*]? What is the relation of

*iman* with Islam? Is *iman* identical with Islam, or are they different from each other? If they are not identical, can Islam replace *iman* and play the same role for the felicity of man, or that Islam without *iman* has no effect on the attainment of felicity?

What is the relationship of *iman* with knowledge and learning? Is the existence of *iman* possible without any prior understanding and knowledge? Granting that knowledge and faith have a positive relationship, is it a kind of correlation in the sense that whoever has knowledge must have faith too? Is faith something more than knowledge and knowledge does not necessarily end up in faith? Is it possible for a person to have knowledge of God, the hereafter and the Resurrection and yet be an unbeliever? What is the relationship between faith and action? Can faith alone and without any action lead to the felicity of man? Is action a part of faith, or is it regarded as an affair outside of faith?

Does faith have a specific and determined degree in the sense that having or not having such degree is tantamount to *iman* or *kufr*, and that all the faithful and unbelievers are in the same degree of faith, or do *iman* and *kufr* have different levels? If they have different levels, what is the effect of each of these levels? In the philosophical parlance, does *iman* change the nature of the existence of man, or is it an accidental affair and does not change the nature and essence of man? In other words, are the faithful and the unbeliever common as far as the human nature is concerned and only in one of the attributes that they differ from each other? If *iman* and *kufr* are only an accidental affair, they are like beautiful and ugly clothes that change the external aspect of man and have no effect on his essence and nature.

The abovementioned questions are indeed serious questions on the subject of *iman* some of which have been explicitly raised and discussed in the pertinent usual talks and writings, while some others are given less attention and not examined thoroughly. In the future sessions, we will hopefully be able to discuss the most important of them as much as time allows us.

## Question and Answer

**Question:** You pointed out in your talks that if we want to know, for example, the coverage of physics, we have to refer to physics itself, while the present discussion is what religion is supposed to deal with and with which spheres it should get involved, and not what religions deals with. As such, it seems that the answer you have given is not consistent with the question.

**Answer:** If you observe well, I pointed out in the discussion that as of the moment, I do not want to embark on the issue: regarding our expectation from religion, shall we inquire from religion or shall we prove it from beyond religion? I wanted to raise skepticism. If we accept that religion has a set of precepts and teachings and proves “beings and non-beings” as well as “musts and must-nots” and values, it follows that religion is like any other form of knowledge. In any field of knowledge (such as physics, chemistry, sociology, etc.), if you want to know what the said field of knowledge deals with, it is clear that its logical and direct way is for us to refer to its content and resources and see what it really deals with. Since religion is a set of accounts and knowledge, it is natural that the best way of

discovering what it deals with is to refer to its very text and resources.

Sometimes, it is asked if we can prove outside religion that it must definitely exist and in which realm it must get involved and interfere with. The answer to this question is positive. Yes, prior to entering the realm of religious knowledge, we can prove “the need for religion” on fundamental basis. In brief, there are many subjects to which the common intellect and knowledge of man are not responsive and end up in “I do not know.” In many values, it is such that the intellect is incapable of identifying them, and its manifestation is that we can see that there are many views among different individuals and societies on the issue of values.

The intellect usually does not comprehend these affairs. For instance, whether God should be worshipped or not, and how this worship should be performed are things which the intellect is incapable of comprehending. Is the form of worship of the Muslims correct, or that of the Jews or Christians? In such cases of disputes, if we want to find a decisive answer that solves the disputes, its way is not to refer to the intellect, because we said that in these cases, the human intellects have diverse views. In such cases, there is another way; that is, to refer to the divine revelation and apostleship.

In the theological discussions and the roots of religion, we prove the need for apostleship through the same way. There, we say that since there is a set of vital and exigent issues in the life of man to which the human intellect and knowledge are irresponsive and end up in “I do not know”, it follows that God Who has created mankind must have set another way of identifying them for mankind, because if He did not allow mankind to understand them, there would be something wrong with the purpose, and that purpose behind the creation of man (proximity to God] and human perfection will not be realized.

It is at this juncture that God has given to mankind the answer to these questions through the divine revelation and apostleship. It is clear that the framework of divine revelation and apostleship is nothing but the same religion. In this manner, we can prove the essence of man’s need for religion. But for us to elaborately ascertain how many issues are incomprehensible by the common human intellect and knowledge which must be elucidated by religion is something to which we cannot get a clear answer. In order to clarify this matter, the only way is for us to refer to religion and its content in order to see which issues it has explained for us.

In short, even assuming that these issues can be established through extra-religious ways, the direct and best way is for us to refer to the content of religion as a specific field of knowledge, like any other, and identify the issues it has dealt with.

1. Golestan-e Sa’di, preface. [Trans.]

# Chapter 17: Faith as the Essence of Invitation of the Prophets (Part 2)

## The Truth of Faith

In the previous session, by citing Qur'anic verses, we arrived at the conclusion that faith is the essence of the prophets' invitation a fact that can with utmost clarity and explicitness be deduced from the Holy Qur'an. In the end, we raised questions which must be answered in order to make clearer the discussion.

One of the important subjects which are tackled in this issue and also the subject of many discussions nowadays in the academic circles inside and outside the country is "the truth behind faith." All of us know that once a person has faith in something, a kind of confirmation of its existence exists in his self whether it is faith in a person or the existence of an attribute in a person or faith in a thing. In both cases, faith is accompanied by confirmation. Now, the question is: What kind of confirmation is this?

In a bid to better clarify the question, we have to say that it is sometimes a logical confirmation while at other times, psychological. Sometimes, confirmation is such that we consider the relationship between two elements of a case (subject and predicate, or antecedent and consequence) and we can observe that the relationship between them is logically positive. We then confirm the case and its authenticity. The status of confirmation to the existence of this logical relationship is either because it is among the obvious things such as the case of "The whole is bigger than the part", or because it is among the analytical cases, for example, or some other existing ways. This is a logical confirmation; that is, once the intellect considers both sides of the cases, a positive relationship between them will logically become clear.

The point here is that logical confirmation is not always accompanied by and linked with psychological confirmation. For example, while a certain relationship is logically present between the subject and the predicate of a case, since it is a theoretical case and the concerned person is not aware of the proofs and evidence substantiating it, the existence of such a relationship may be doubted. It is like the case of a schoolchild to whom a particular geometrical case is not yet proved, and the teacher has not taught it to him. Here, the relationship logically exists and is correct and established, but since it is not yet proved to him, he is psychologically doubtful and he cannot confirm it. The opposite of this case is possible; that is, sometimes a person psychologically believes and confirms the existence of a thing while such a relationship does not actually exist.

## Is to Confirm the Truth Behind Faith?

Now, the question is: Once we say that in faith to confirm the proof of a thing or to confirm the proof of an attribute is necessary for a subject, which confirmation is referred to? Is it logical confirmation, psychological confirmation, or both? The more important question is: If a proof is shown to us and we confirm the existence of a thing, accepting it as such, believing it and have conviction in it,<sup>1</sup> is this enough for us to say that we have faith in that thing? Notwithstanding the demonstration of proof and the confirmation of the existence of relationship, and the presence of both logical and psychological confirmations for the person, is it possible that there is still no faith and it needs an additional element?

Many of those who have talked about the truth behind faith have regarded it as the same confirmation. According to them, the fact that firstly, the proof exists and secondly, the person is informed of the proof and his mind accepts it shows the presence of faith. Accordingly, it is not possible for a person to know something without having faith in it because the definition of faith is nothing but confirmation. Once both logical and psychological confirmations exist, faith will be present. In other words, faith is the same confirmation, and knowledge and faith are the same. Its only condition is that knowledge is consistent with the reality and not imagination and illusion.

It must be noted, however, that the above theory cannot be approved by referring to the verses of the Qur'an. In many instances, the Qur'an points out that there are those who have knowledge of things but do not have faith in them and in fact they have negated and denied them. From these expressions of the Qur'an, it becomes clear that knowledge and faith are different from each other, and that faith requires another element apart from knowledge and something which is more than knowing. One of the differences between faith and knowledge mentioned in the Qur'an is that once the proof of a thing is established, the human intellect has no alternative but to yield and confirm. But faith is an optional matter which cannot be materialized by compulsion.

Once the lamp is lit and you can see its brightness since your eyes are not defective, wittingly or unwittingly, you will acquire knowledge of the lamp being lit. According to this explanation, in this assumption faith will be acquired. According to the explanation of the Qur'an, however, notwithstanding the existence of knowledge, faith on the lamp being lit may not exist in yourself. One of the proofs in the Qur'an substantiating this fact is in the account of the Pharaoh and his people vis-à-vis Musa (Moses) (‘a).

The Qur'an says, “We gave nine signs (miracles) to Musa and sent him with the nine signs to Pharaoh and his people. He showed the signs one after another to the people, the first of which was the same famous episode of his staff’s transformation into a snake. Similarly, “the white (shining) palm” was one of his miracles. The reaction of Pharaoh to Musa (‘a) and his miracles was that he said to his people:

الْمَلَأُ مَا عَلِمْتُ لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرِي

***I do not know of any god that you may have other than me. (28:38)***

The verb in the sentence “*I do not know*” [*ma ‘alimtu*] is derived from the root “*ilm*” [knowledge]; that is, “I do not *know* of any god that you may have other than me.” Through the tongue of Prophet Musa (‘a), the Qur’an rejects this point, saying:

قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ بِصَائِرٍ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا فِرْعَوْنُ مَثْبُورًا

***“You certainly know that no one has sent these [signs] except the Lord of the heavens and the earth. (17:102)”***

From the Arabic literary perspective, there are two emphases in this verse; one is the *lam maftuh* (the letter *lam* “ل” marked with the *fathah* “فتحة” vowel–point) and the word “قَدْ” in “*laqad ‘alimta*” at the beginning. That is, “O Pharaoh! You most certainly know and you have knowledge [*ilm*] that no one has sent down these miracles except the Lord of the heavens and the earth.”

Therefore, according to the text of the Qur’an, Pharaoh had knowledge of God and even knew that He had sent down these miracles. Yet, he was an unbeliever, and his disbelief continued up to the last moment and only at the time of drowning and ascertaining that there is no way out that he had faith with the aim of escaping death and saving himself, which of course was not accepted. Thus, based on an explicit verse of the Qur’an, in spite of recognizing God and knowing that those were His miracles and that Musa (‘a) was His messenger, Pharaoh remained an unbeliever. He had knowledge of both monotheism and apostleship, yet he had no faith in them.

Another proof is again related to the people of Pharaoh. The Qur’an states,

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا ۖ فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

***They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts. (27:14)***

The people of Pharaoh were certain that these were divine miracles, signs and symbols and that Musa (‘a) was a prophet of God, and their minds and intellects confirmed these facts, yet their hearts had no faith and belief in them.

Therefore, by referring to the Holy Qur’an, it is perfectly evident that knowledge and faith are not identical and each is not correlative to the other such that wherever there is knowledge, faith must also be there.

## Is Faith Correlative to Doubt and Ignorance?

Some people assume the stance opposite of those who regard knowledge and faith as the same, and they say that faith is talked about where there is no knowledge at all. Wherever man has knowledge of a thing, there must be faith. Faith is where man, while not certain and sure of a matter and doubtful and skeptical of it, accepts and confirms it. This statement, at this present time, has proponents in our own country, and if you read some national scientific magazines, you will observe pertinent subjects. The first explanation holds that whoever *knows* has faith as well. The second explanation is that faith is indeed related to where man does *not know*.

If we want to know the root of and reason behind the designing of this theory by some local intellectuals and so-called intellectuals, we have to cite two main causes. One cause is related to the imitation of the Western culture. For many centuries, faith has been defined in Europe in such a way that its background is ignorance and unawareness. The famous statement uttered by many ecclesiastical authorities is: "Believe first and then understand." You have to have faith first so as to acquire knowledge and gnosis later!

This stance of the Church originates when it advances issues which are not only lacking rational proof but there is also a proof against it. For example, one of the fundamental teachings of the Church is the doctrine of the Trinity; that is, God has three persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. According to this doctrine of the Church, God, while having three persons, is One, and while being One has three persons! This is a matter which the intellect cannot accept. How can God, while the Father, be the Son and the Holy Spirit at the same time?! In order to solve this problem, the Church says that you have to have faith in Christianity first so as to understand the Trinity later.

As such, according to this way of thinking, the place of faith is in cases which the intellect cannot understand, rather even denies. The intellect dictates that "three" cannot be "one." The intellect dictates that God who is the creator of everything is such Being Who has no place and cannot be in the form of a fetus inside the womb of Maryam (Saint Mary), to be borne by her and then crucified so as to save the entire human race! The Church observes that this affair, apart from lacking any rational explanation, is irrational. As such, it promulgates: "Have faith so as to understand!"

This way of thinking which for many centuries has been rampant in Europe particularly after the Renaissance has gradually spread in other cultures, and through the translation of books, has slowly found its way into other countries. Those who are more or less self-defeated by the Western culture and imagine that whatever comes from the West is the gospel truth believe that faith is indeed where knowledge, intellect and rational proof are not at work. We believe because we cannot understand!

Then, through this way, they wanted to solve the contradictions and irrational subjects in the Torah and the Evangel. Wherever we say, "This subject is not harmonious with knowledge and intellect," they say, "Yes, this subject is 'religious'; it is not scientific and rational." That is, although we do not know and

cannot understand, or the intellect even dictates that it is not correct, we have to have faith in and accept it.

According to them, in principle the realm of religion is such that if a subject is raised therein, the intellect does not accept while knowledge denies it. But if you want to be “religious”, you have to accept it! This is the way Christianity and the West have chosen for centuries for the famous issue of “knowledge and intellect’s conflict with religion”, and wherever there is no reply, it frees itself by means of this technique and says, “This issue is not in the realm of knowledge at all and the subject on the scientific and rational proof of this issue is basically wrong. This issue is a religious one and religion means to have faith unknowingly and to accept blindly!”

## The Qur’an and the Alleged Contradiction between Knowledge and Faith

When this subject reached our xenomaniacs,<sup>2</sup> they imagined that faith which is mentioned in Islam and the Qur’an is the same. In a bid to substantiate their claim, they have cited the fact that the Qur’an does not regard “knowledge” as not the same with “faith.” They quote the Qur’anic verse:

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا

***‘They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts. (27:14)’***

That is, once you have knowledge, you have no faith! It is thus clear that knowledge and faith are two different things which cannot be contained in a single container. Naturally, once there is no knowledge, there is doubt and ignorance. Once the Qur’an points to a case where there is knowledge and no faith, it will become evident that the place of faith is something other than that of knowledge, and no-knowledge is nothing but ignorance, doubt and unawareness. If it is knowledge, the way of acceptance is the same knowledge and there is no need for faith. Once we have doubt and ignorance, the way of acceptance is faith.

In elucidating further their view, the Muslim “intellectuals” who have accepted this interpretation of faith say: “By referring to the Qur’an, it becomes clear that faith is a voluntary affair:

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۚ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ

***And say, [This is] the truth from your Lord: let anyone who wishes believe it, and let anyone who wishes disbelieve it’. (18:29)***

On the other hand, freewill cannot be combined with knowledge because if a person knows something,

he has no option but to accept it. Once a person knows a thing, there is no more room for denial. If he has knowledge, he has no more than one option and that is to accept and the line *“let anyone who wishes disbelieve it”* has no more meaning. Therefore, if faith is a voluntary affair, it must be raised in a case other than knowledge where there is the possibility of choosing either of two ways acceptance and denial. Where is it that both ways of acceptance and denial are open? It is where we have doubt. Once I have a doubt, I can either accept or refuse a thing. In this situation, once I accept it, it is said that I have faith in it.”

I have mentioned are subjects written and published in the existing periodicals in the Islamic Republic, and unfortunately, some of those who advanced these issues have Islamic seminary credentials. Anyway, without considering their personalities and their motives, let us see to what extent this contention is correct.

One question is this: Wherever a person has knowledge, will he definitely have faith, too? By referring to the Qur’an, we will find out that the answer to this question is negative. The people of Pharaoh, according to the text of the Qur’an, had knowledge but had no faith.

Another question is: Wherever we are totally ignorant, or more serious than this, where we are indeed certain to nonexistence and it negates the definite or scientific proof of a thing, in which thing can faith ever exist? For example, although we can see that this lamp is lit, do we have faith that its light is put out? Or, although we are certain that two times two is equal to four, do we have faith that two times two is equal to five? Is such a thing possible? Is it possible for us to have faith in something which we know and have real certainty that it is not true?

In order to answer the second question, we have to return to the additional element which is necessary in faith. At examining the answer to the first question, we pointed it out that an additional element apart from knowledge is required for faith to come into existence, and mere knowledge is not enough. If mere knowledge had been enough, Pharaoh would have believed. The Qur’an said that he was certain and he knew that the miracles were signs from the Lord of the heavens and the earth and that Musa (‘a) was indeed a prophet of God; nevertheless, he did not believe. Let us now introduce the auxiliary element which must accompany knowledge in order for faith to be realized.

## **The Correct Theory on the Truth of Faith**

First of all, we have to take note that many subjects are discernible but not explainable; that is, we can understand it and be totally aware of it, but in explanation and elucidation, we cannot depict to others its nature and at most what we can do is to show its effects. We all know what fear is, but once we want to explain it, instead of pointing out its nature, we embark on mentioning its effects and signs. For example, we say, “Fear is a condition once it is experienced by a person, his hands and feet will shake, he will turn pale and his heart will beat faster.”

In the same vein, if we are asked, “What is love?” we cannot explain what love means; we can only mention its effects and signs. Concepts similar to these are not limited in number. Faith belongs to this sort of concepts; it is an inner state which is discernible through demonstrative knowledge, and in explaining it, we can only describe its effects and signs. Faith is an emotional and psychological state which requires that man should be bound to its requisites; that is, in action, he is supposed to be committed to fulfilling its requisites. There are so many things which are known to many people but they in practice are not willing to observe its requisites.

So many people know that smoking has many destructive effects which may bring about numerous problems, but they are not willing to put this knowledge into practice. They act as if they do not know. Here, there is knowledge and no faith. Why? It is because the decision is not accompanied by putting it into practice and fulfilling its requisites. If a person knows of a thing and then decides to be committed to this knowledge in practice, it means that he has faith in it. And if in spite of the knowledge he has, he makes no decision to act upon it accordingly or decides not to do it at all, he is then a denier [*kafir*] of it though he has knowledge of it.

Given this explanation, the meaning of Pharaoh’s denial [*kufr*] becomes clear; he knew that there is God; Musa is a prophet of God; and his miracles are divine signs, but he was not inclined to put this knowledge into practice; therefore, he was a *kafir*. The people of Pharaoh had the same case concerning knowledge: “*They were convinced in their hearts*” but “*they impugned them.*” They were not inclined to follow it in action.

Meanwhile, as to how man can, in spite of knowing a thing and having definite knowledge of it but being not inclined to follow it in practice is another story which is presently not connected to our discussion. If we want to give a brief to this question, we have to say that this matter is related to the enjoyments that man will experience in indulging in or abandoning it. In general, whims and caprice and emotional attachments hinder man from having faith. The story of the Prophet’s imprecation with the Christians of Najran which has been mentioned in the Qur’an is a good testimony to this fact.

The Christian priests and learned men of Najran (a city in the outskirts of Yemen) came to Medina and wanted to arrange an academic debate with the Prophet (S). Of course, they were prominent and learned men and they imagined that they could condemn the Prophet (S) in the academic dispute and defeat him. It was agreed upon that they would embrace Islam if they would be defeated in the debate. A large crowd gathered in the Mosque to witness the debate. The Prophet (S) engaged in a debate with them.

Finally, in this debate, the Christian scholars were condemned and defeated in the discussion. The Prophet (S) asked them to embrace Islam according to the promise they had given, but they refused to do so with the pretext that they were not yet convinced. A verse was revealed in which the Prophet (S) is asked to say to the effect: “Since you will not be convinced in a discussion, do a certain thing and be ready for an imprecation. The following day, the two parties were supposed to meet at a place outside

Medina and curse each other so that God would send down His chastisement on the false group and annihilate them. The Qur'an thus says in this regard:

فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَلْ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ

***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'. (3:61)***

The Prophet along with Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (who were then children), Lady Fatimah az-Zahra' and Imam 'Ali ('a) were present for the imprecation. Once the Christians of Najran cast their eyes upon these five holy personages, they were frightened and they said to themselves, "If he had only had an iota of doubt, he would not have brought with him the best of his nearest ones and in sum, he would have been present for the imprecation! We will not accept Islam anyway, but we are willing to pay the *Jizyah* tax." Once the Holy Prophet (S) was asked about the reason behind this decision, he said, "They discerned and had ascertained that I am the Messenger of Allah and on the true side while they are on the false side, but because of their habit and interest in eating pork and drinking wine, which are both unlawful in Islam, we were not able to dispense with the enjoyment of eating pork and drinking wine, and thus, they did not yield to the truth."

In spite of being certain about a thing, a person may not yield to it; rather, he may deny it because of whims and caprice, enjoyment, arrogance, etc. For example, if Pharaoh believed in God, his people would no longer acknowledge him as God and he would be forced to abandon all his power, wealth, outward splendor, elegance, and pomp, and would live like a common man.

## **Faith's Relationship with Knowledge and Freewill**

Thus, in faith, in addition to knowledge and awareness, there is another needed element; a mental and psychological element through which man should create in himself a state of submission, acceptance and obedience to the Truth and "to be bound by its requisites." Faith means "knowledge in addition to the state of inner obedience in accepting the requisites of knowledge." From here the issue of faith's voluntary nature becomes clear, because to have or not to have this state of obedience is a voluntary affair. He who is addicted to smoking is still not willing to abandon this habit in spite of knowing its many destructive effects. He is not forced to smoke. In fact, like thousands of other people who decided to quit it and succeeded, he can also make a definite decision and quit smoking. This state of submission which is the resolution to be bound by the requisites of his knowledge is a totally voluntary affair.

As such, "to know" and "to be voluntary" have no contradiction. This is contrary to the claim that if a person acquires knowledge, he has no option but to accept and submit to it, and as such, faith cannot be

reconciled with knowledge. Our reply is: knowledge is one thing, while the resolution to be bound by the requisites of the knowledge is another thing. As we have explained, the latter is an affair totally at the discretion of the person himself. Even knowledge and knowing themselves, from the perspective of their preliminaries, are voluntary. In order to pass the university entrance examination, a person studies and works hard, passes the exam and goes to the university. Is this going to the university voluntary or involuntary for him?

Obviously, it is voluntary. Thus, a person who has gone to the university and studied hard has become a teacher and expert because he himself wanted to do so and has indeed done it. If he had willed, he would not have studied and passed the examination, or after admission to the university, he might not have studied so to be expelled. It is true that if a teacher in a geometry class proves a theorem through a proof, the schoolchild will acquire knowledge and have no way for denial, but attending the class, sitting down there, and listening attentively to the teacher (which is required in acquiring knowledge) are voluntary affairs.

Even if we assume that acquisition of knowledge is not voluntary, faith is not mere knowledge and “obedience” is also a requisite; and obedience is completely a voluntary affair. To decide to be bound by the requisites of knowledge or not is at the discretion of man himself. So, it is not ironic to say that faith is a voluntary affair which is occasionally accompanied by knowledge whose acquisition is not voluntary. The secret behind this matter is that once there is a voluntary element in a set, this is enough for us to regard the set as voluntary.

Citing another example can help make the issue clear. Let us assume that I am now busy talking. Is speaking a voluntary or involuntary affair? Obvious, it is voluntary. But for me to talk and speak has hundreds of necessary prerequisites none of which is under my control. I should have lungs, voice, healthy vocal chords in the larynx, mouth and nose to emit air from my lungs, and many other prerequisites. Are they under my control? Is it under my will and control for me to have lungs, or not? Clearly, God has given me the lungs, but it might not be that I preferred to have lungs.

Is it my choice that there is air? God has created the air, and it is not that since I desired and preferred to have air, there is air. Now, the question is: Although none of these prerequisites is volitional and has formed out of our will, why do we still say that speaking is a voluntary action? The reply is that because a part of it is voluntary. For me to decide to use a certain word and voice to create certain words and expressions is under my control. So, the existence of a voluntary part in a set whose tens of parts are involuntary is enough to prove the voluntary nature of the set.

Faith is voluntary in this sense, although its requisite is knowledge which is sometimes acquired by man involuntarily. Knowledge may be acquired by me involuntarily but the decision to act upon the requisites of knowledge is under my control. This is enough to prove the voluntary nature of faith.

Now, you judge how wrong the one who introduces himself as a philosopher and says that even if it is

voluntary, faith cannot be reconciled with freewill is. Is for me to merely know that smoking is harmful enough to make me avoid smoking? In addition, should we decide not to smoke? Since I have knowledge (of the harm of smoking), am I compelled not to smoke? Does being voluntary necessarily mean being associated with ignorance and unawareness?

What a senseless claim for us to say that the requisite of faith being voluntary is that there should be no knowledge as there are ignorance and doubt! Yes, this statement may be appropriate for the Church authorities who have been entangled with false and baseless doctrines. As we have pointed out, in order to escape the responsibility of the doctrines and teachings which are inconsistent with the intellect, they chose this way, i.e. to say that the domain of knowledge and intellect is different from that of religion, and these are religious teachings which have nothing to do with neither knowledge nor the intellect.

Yes, faith which Islam wants is not blind at all and it is not arisen from ignorance and lack of understanding; rather, we have to understand and be aware first, and then have faith. Blind and ignorant faith has no value. First, knowledge must be acquired and then one has to decide to be bound by it.

## Which is the Premise of Faith, Logical Certainty or Conventional Certainty?

It is necessary to point out that knowledge, which is the premise of faith and whose existence is indispensable for the emergence of faith, is customary. Let us elaborate: One term for knowledge used in logic is that man is certain of *a priori* reality; that is, he has such total conviction that it is impossible to be the contrary. There is no probability, not even one in a million, of being the contrary. Many theorems in mathematics are like this. For example, "To combine two opposites is impossible" belongs to this group of theorems, and there are many others. This terminology is specific for knowledge and what we mean by knowledge which is the premise of faith is this one.

The knowledge which is indispensable in faith is that which is technically called certainty. It is an inner and psychological state in which man has no more inner and psychological worry and anxiety in relation to a matter, and he has peace of mind as far as it is concerned. A hundred percent rational evidence for it has not been established, and there is rational and philosophical probability to be the contrary, but this probability is so insignificant that people usually do not pay attention to it, and in spite of it, they are convinced that the matter is as they believe it to be. This certainty is not philosophical; rather, customary. That is, the same treatment of the philosophers toward the philosophical certainty is what the common people do to certainty. Rationally and philosophically, certainty is a very strong presumption with a very small probability of error. In other words, some subjects in our minds still have the status of uneasiness and agitation, and we do not feel certain peace of mind and tranquility of the heart in relation to them. Some other subjects are not like so, and the minds accept them easily.

We shall cite an example in order to better clarify the subject. Let us assume that you went out of your

home in the morning and to your office or another place. After a few hours, you want to return home. At this moment, if you are asked, “Are you certain that your house is in order to which you want to return?” you cannot prove that it is in order through rational and mathematical evidence. Maybe, God forbid, something bad has happened and your house is totally destroyed. Such a probability cannot rationally be negated. But everyday, without entertaining such a probability, you return home with confidence. In essence, many activities in the custom of the wise and in the midst of people and society are performed on the basis of this very conviction and customary certainty. In spite of having no philosophical and absolute certainty, the wise follow the dictate of their knowledge and certainty without paying attention to the probability of error.

Now, concerning faith, we say that the knowledge which is the premise of faith is the same customary knowledge and certainty, and there is no need to have definite philosophical certainty whose probability of error is absolutely impossible. For example, we are certain that two times two is impossible to be other than four. Philosophical certainty regarding faith is possible for the saints of God and those who are like the Commander of the Faithful (‘a). This certainty is very rare, but different levels, lower and similar to it, are possible for other people. It is here that the discussion on the levels of faith is raised.

## Two Contributory Factors in the Enhancement and Strengthening of Faith

The first level of faith is attainable with the same presumption and certainty mentioned earlier. Once a person’s mind becomes free from agitation, uneasiness and disturbance with respect to a subject and attains tranquility and serenity, if he is asked, “Do you know it?” he will say, “Yes, I know it.” That state is enough for attaining faith. After acquiring faith and deciding to act upon the requisites of this certainty and actually doing so, this thought will be strengthened gradually through further proofs and pieces of evidence and the resolution of man to undertake them will equally become stronger. In this state, faith will be enhanced and its level elevated. The Qur’an thus says:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَّتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

***The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when Allah is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them, they (Allah’s signs) increase their faith. (8:2)***

If a person has a proof for a subject and then acquires another proof, he will become more certain of it. This is one of the ways of strengthening and increasing faith.

Another way of enhancing and strengthening faith is through the effect of the same undertaking which a person acquires in practice. Once he becomes certain of the existence of a thing, closer to it and acquainted with it, his desire, interest and acceptance of it will gradually increase. We have definitely

had such experiences. No one of us had this degree of faith that we have now during our childhood and early adolescence. Initially, they asked us to pray. Little by little, they said, “Pay attention to what you are reciting in your prayers.” They said, “Read the Qur’an and reflect on its meaning.”

They said, “Supplicate and recite litanies to God.” Gradually and slowly, man will feel the munificence of God and become more acquainted with and closer to Him. Therefore, action and practical undertaking contribute to the enhancement of faith. On the contrary, those who acquire faith in the beginning but fail to fulfill its requirements, their faith will not grow. If they indulge in sins and that which is contrary to its requirements, their initial faith gradually weakens and as the effect of further and repetitive sinning, it may end up in the total effacement of faith:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا إِلَى قَوْمِهِمْ فَجَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَاذْتَمَنَّا مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا ﴿٤﴾ وَكَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نَصْرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

***Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of Allah and they used to deride them. (30:47)***

Thus, faith can be strengthened or weakened. How can it be strengthened? One way is to enhance knowledge, which is among the foundations of faith. In doing so, man can enhance his level of certainty. Not only will that certainty find the main point, but also the negation of its opposite. The second way is through perseverance in fulfilling its requirements. The more he is careful and acts upon his certainty, delight, acceptance and obedience will increase.

## **Summary of the Discussion**

Faith is voluntary knowledge and something more than the knowledge which is the premise of faith, and sometimes it may be acquired involuntarily. This voluntary action means that man experiences a state in his heart to decide to act upon the requirements of knowledge and what he knows. If he has knowledge but decides never to act upon its requirements, this is not faith. He who says, “I am certain that the Prophet of Islam is a divine prophet and has said the truth, but I decide not to obey any of his ordinances,” has no faith; what he has is only knowledge. Faith is that state whose requisite is to decide to act.

The condition of faith is not the knowledge of philosophical certainty; rather, the common and customary knowledge which is the same certainty is enough for faith. The mere fact that the mind has no more agitation and uneasiness (with respect to a thing), and although there is the probability of wrong belief, this probability is so insignificant for it to disturb the state of peace and tranquility of the mind and soul and for this reason, it is not given attention.

Faith has levels. Once a person’s attention is drawn to the purport of the verses of the Qur’an and he

reflects upon them, the attraction of the Qur'an will capture his heart and soul and he will earn motivation to act upon them and to be more acquainted with God: *"When His signs are recited to them, they (Allah's signs) increase their faith."* On the contrary, when a sinful person decides not to be bound by the requirements of his knowledge and to indulge in sin upon sin, his initial faith will weaken and may even reach a point where it is totally wiped out: *"Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of Allah."*

Some claim that the requisite of faith and its voluntary nature is ignorance and doubt. This is false and baseless. If a person knows that something is not true, it is impossible for him to have faith in it. If it is proved to you that "one" is not "three" while "three" is not "one", there is no possibility for you to believe that "one" and "three" are identical! The Christian Trinity is nothing but this: God is one in a trinity! Even a state of dilemma and 50–50 doubt will not end up in faith. One has to acquire preference—a considerable preference—so as to acquire faith. Those who have claimed that faith is a correlative of ignorance have not understood faith, ignorance, or knowledge.

- [1.](#) The reason behind using these different expressions along with each other is that technically speaking, there are differences more or less among confirmation, belief and conviction, and since here we refer to them all, we have mentioned them all so that those who are familiar with these terms (and their differences) will not confuse one with the other.
- [2.](#) Xenomaniacs: those infatuated with foreign and especially Western models of culture. This is the translation of a Persian term, *gharbzadegan* or *gharbzadeh*—ha, popularized by Jalal Al Ahmad (d. 1969) who was a writer of great influence in his book *Gharbzadegi* ("Xenomania" or "Occidentosis"). See its English translation, R. Campbell (trans.) and Hamid Algar (ed. and anno.), *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* (Berkeley: Al-Mizan Press, 1984). [Trans.]

## Chapter 18: Faith as the Essence of Invitation of the Prophets (Part 3)

In this session, we will talk about the "jurisdiction of faith." We have said that the essence of the invitation of all prophets ('a) is faith. Now, this question is posed: Faith in what? The importance of this question becomes clearer when we pay attention to the deviant perspectives on the interpretation of religious concepts that emerged in the recent decades. The youths may not remember that during the movement of Imam Khomeini (r), those who were under the name of Islam but with Marxist, atheistic and eclectic tendencies used to embark on interpreting the verses of the Qur'an and explaining religious concepts.

The remnants of these individuals still exist and as in the past, they use labels as such *mujahid* [struggler], *inqilabi* [revolutionary] and *islami* [Islamic]. For example, when they talked about faith which is repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'an, they said, "It signifies that man should have faith in an objective in life and although in the Qur'an it is said, '*faith in Allah*' or '*faith in the Last Day*,' these are only

manifestations of faith, but they do not indicate that faith cannot belong to other than them. What is important is to have an 'objective' and to have faith in it." Everybody used to interpret in this way all that have been mentioned in the Qur'an and narrations about the importance of faith and the condemnation of unbelief and polytheism. They also used to reply in this manner, "Yes, they are all manifestations of faith, and what is important is the essence of faith, and as to what belongs to faith is not important."

Maybe I have mentioned again that at the time a book with the title "Tawhid" [Monotheism] was published and incidentally, its author was a so-called turbaned man and pseudo-cleric advocate of the *Fada'iyan-e Khalq*. In the said book, he claimed that what are meant by *Allah* and *faith in Allah* are not an external being and faith in an external reality. Instead, they mean morally ideal. *Allah* means morally ideal; we have to imagine in our minds the ideal *good* which is the totality of all that is good. This hypothetical and imaginary being is called *Allah*.

The meaning of '*There is no god but Allah*' is nothing but this. It means the negation of all that are other than the morally ideal. Also, *faith in Allah* means faith in all goodness. Of course, other related subjects can be found in the said book. There were similar books by other authors at the time, and even books with the title *Tafsir-e Qur'an* [Exegesis of the Qur'an] contained similar subjects. During those days, unfortunately, these words on account of their novelty and the prevalence of the Marxist tendencies had found buyers from many of our pure-hearted youth and led to their intellectual deviation.

Fortunately, after the victory of the Revolution, especially through the efforts and enlightenments of the late Martyr Mutahhari who also offered his life along this way, gradually these deviations have been uprooted from the society's public opinion, particularly through the statements of the late Imam (r) for the people behind Hujjatiyyah Society, our youth would no longer be deceived by this kind of intellectual deviations and they kept away from those people. Yet, unfortunately, we witness that the same mental tunes are played anew and in the nooks and corners, especially in the universities and academic centers, the same melodies, sometimes with new color and menu, can be heard. Again, so to speak, new readings and interpretations of religion and the Qur'an emerge while new concepts in this context are advanced. There is the danger that the same atheistic inclinations would again gain currency in a new form.

If you can remember, during those days, they used to interpret *tawhid* [monotheism] to mean *the Marxist classless society*. They used to say, "*Tawhid* means homogenization and unification of the society and the same thing which Marx says." They also put its name in their books and writings "The New Class Society," and they meant the same Marxist classless society. Regrettably, there were those who believed in them "Yes, *tawhid* of the Qur'an, the Prophet and 'Ali is the same thing mentioned by Marx, the atheist and denier of God!"

Nowadays, the same games and tricks, though with new forms and expressions and under the rubric of "new readings of religion" are advanced. The foundation of the notion "new readings of religion" is the denial of religion in order to deceive the people and considering that after all our society has been

engrossed with “religion” for hundreds of years, they resort to pretexts and demagogies, and mention terms from Islam and religion in their speeches. In my opinion, there are solid pieces of evidence that they have no faith in any of the truths of religion.

## The Jurisdiction of Faith in the Qur'anic Verses

As such, considering the past and the movements, we can observe in the recent years that there is reason why we have to pursue the issue meticulously and with the special academic scrupulousness so as to see in what we must have faith and what the jurisdiction of faith is when we say that faith is the essence of the invitation of the prophets (‘a). The best and most logical way in doing so is to refer to the Qur’an to see which thing the Qur’an, which has invited us to have faith, has asked us to have faith in. Many Qur’anic verses make mention of “the jurisdiction of faith” and here we shall cite two or three examples only.

One of the expressions common in the Qur’an and repeated many times is *faith in Allah and the Last Day*:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

***And among the people are those who say, ‘We have faith in Allah and the Last Day,’ but they have no faith. (2:8)***

Nowadays, there are also those who say: “*We have faith in Allah and the Last Day*” but they are telling a lie as *they have no faith*. Regarding this “Last Day”, prior to the Revolution there were those who used to say: “The *Last Day* means the Day of Revolution” the revolution of the workers and the hard-working against the capitalists and the affluent. Some of them are unfortunately turbaned men, still living and heading some of these groups and splinter groups. And maybe the tape record of their lesson of *tafsir* still exists in which they used to interpret *Last Day* as the day of revolution. Regarding *sa’ah* [the Hour] which is among the names of the Day of Resurrection in the Qur’an, they said that it is the time that must remain secret so that the Revolution would not be exposed! And there are similar tittle-tattles which are now unfortunately gaining currency as in the past.

Another jurisdiction of faith which is repeated in the Qur’an as correlative is *faith in Allah and the Day of Resurrection*.”

Other verses, such as the following one, have mentioned in more detail the jurisdiction of faith:

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُولُوا وَجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ

***Piety is not to turn your faces to the east or the west; rather, piety is [personified by] those who have faith in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets. (2: 177)***

In this verse, faith in the angels, the heavenly scriptures and the prophets of God are added.

In other verses, faith in the angels is particularly emphasized:

﴿ آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾ كُلُّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ﴿ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

***The Apostle has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each [of them] has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles. [They declare,] ‘We make no distinction between any of His apostles’. (2:285)***

Here, it is worthy to ask about the specific reason why we have to have faith in the angels and *what has been sent down*.

Another verse states:

قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

﴿ فَإِنْ آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدْ اهْتَدَوْا ﴾ وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ ﴿ فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ ﴾ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

***Say, ‘We have faith in Allah, and that which has been sent down to us, and that which was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus were given, and that which the prophets were given from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.’ So if they believe in the like of what you believe in, then they are certainly guided. (2: 136–137)***

This verse means: if you say the truth and have real faith in God, then real and true faith is to have faith in all that have been sent down by God, not only in a particular prophet and what has been sent down to him. If your faith is like this, it shall be accepted “So if they believe in the like of what you believe in, then they are certainly guided.” But if you want to believe in some and deny others, this faith is unacceptable to God:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمَنُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا نُوْمِنُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْنَا وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَاءَهُ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَهُمْ ﴿ قُلْ فَلِمَ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْبِيَاءَ اللَّهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

***And when they are told, 'Believe in what was sent down,' they say, 'We believe in what was sent down to us,' and they disbelieve what is besides it, though it is the truth confirming what is with them. (2:91)***

Another verse states that those who want to make a distinction among the apostles of God by believing in some and rejecting others are the true unbelievers:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ حَقًّا ۖ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا

***Those who disbelieve in Allah and His apostles and seek to separate Allah from His apostles, and say, 'We believe in some and disbelieve in some' and seek to take a way in between it is they who are truly faithless. (4: 150–151)***

In short, it is clear that the Qur'an which calls on us to have faith is not referring to faith in any other thing than Allah, the Last Day, the apostles of God, the heavenly scriptures, and the angels. Among them, it is clear that faith in the apostles and the heavenly books are intertwined; that is, once we have faith in and confirm the apostles of God, we will affirm and have faith in the subjects and books which they claim to have been from God. But the question that still remains is this: What is special about faith in the angels? The answer will be made clear by considering the preliminary remarks below.

## **The Relationship between “Belief in the Angels” and the Discussion on “Prophetic Experience”**

One of the points of skepticisms raised nowadays is that the prophets are humans, and human understandings and knowledge have the probability of error and mistake, and that technically, they are prone to commit error. No person on account of being a human is safe from understanding a subject wrongly, or although he understood it correctly, he might make a mistake when expressing and narrating it to others. For this reason, considering that all prophets are human beings, neither their understanding nor transmission of what they understood can be trusted, because there is the possibility of error and mistake in both cases, not to mention the fact that historical and time distance between us and the prophets increase extremely the possibility of error in transmitting the subjects from them to us or the intentional distortions in their subjects.

Even assuming that we disregard this issue, the speech or word is with the prophets and since they are humans, they have no immunity from error and mistake both in understanding and transmission of the subjects. In addition, the divine revelation is actually a demonstrative knowledge in which concepts and words have no role rather, it is the perception of a thing which a person finds within himself; therefore, understanding the divine revelation and connection with it is only at the time that the Prophet perceives

and experiences such a state within himself.

In such a state, there is no word and concept, but once he wants to express to us his personal experience and feeling, it is only an account and report of that demonstrative knowledge which the prophet or apostle expresses and pours out in the form of words and concepts. So, what the prophet expresses to us is not revelation at all; rather, his account of the revelation and prophetic experience of the revelation, in essence, has no concept and word, and it is a kind of demonstrative knowledge. Hence, these verses of the Qur'an are the words of the Prophet and not God's Word. They are an interpretation of the revelation and not the revelation itself. In interpreting the revelation, the Prophet would naturally act based on current literature as well as knowledge and learning of his time, society and environment. Similarly, the literary style and taste as well as his understanding of the sciences of his time would affect this interpretation. Therefore, the Qur'an cannot be trusted at all, and the probability of mistake and error exists therein!

The outcome of such a frame of mind is clear. No matter how we strive to prove a matter for religion and attribute it to religion, it will be of no use, because our firmest source and document is the Qur'an, and the status of the Qur'an became such that it was grouped along with human knowledge of theoreticians and exegetes, while its credibility and prestige are questioned.

This skepticism which nowadays has posed itself as *scientific* and been presented as such, had been advanced before in this manner: We cannot see that God and the angels really send down the words the Prophet is uttering. From where is it obvious that these are not insinuations of the jinn and devils?

During the time of the Prophet (S), they used to raise the same skepticism, and it is narrated in the Qur'an from the words of the unbelievers and polytheists, saying:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُ بَشَرٌ ۖ لِّسَانُ الَّذِي يُلْحِدُونَ إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِيٌّ وَهَذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ

***We certainly know that they say, 'It is only a human that instructs him'. (16:103)***

The Qur'an strongly rejects these attributions, saying:

وَمَا تَنْزَلَتْ بِهِ الشَّيَاطِينُ

***It has not been brought down by the devils. (26:210)***

It also says:

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ

***And it is not the speech of an outcast Satan. (81:25)***

In any case, since such skepticisms and insinuations have existed from the beginning and God has foreseen that later on, during the period of modernity and postmodernism, some people will advance these claims that the Qur'an is not God's Word but the word of the Prophet or even his imagination, thoughts and personal feelings, He has emphasized on *faith in the angels*. God stresses that His angels reveal these subjects to the Prophet (S), and are not insinuations of the devils and their own opinions:

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ إِن هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

***He does not speak out of [his own] desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed [to him]. (53:3-4)***

What kind of creature are the angels? We do not know the angels and although the prophets and saints of God have talked about them and they are mentioned repetitively in the Qur'an, the truth behind the existence of the angels is not clear for us. We know of only some attributes of the angels. The distinctive characteristic of the angels in opposition to the jinn and any other force such as human imaginations is that they do not err or commit mistakes:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ

***...who do not disobey whatever Allah has commanded them, and carry out what they are commanded. (66:6)***

So, you should have faith in the angels; that is, you should have faith in the creature which brings down the divine revelation and in whose action there is no error or mistake:

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ

***It is indeed the speech of a noble apostle, powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne, one who is heard and trustworthy as well. (81: 19-21)***

These verses were revealed in Mecca during the early part of the Prophetic mission. From the beginning, it is emphasized that this Qur'an being revealed to you is not your speech, but that of an angel: "*It is indeed the speech of a noble apostle*" and that angel is "*powerful and eminent.*" In *Surah an-Najm*, it says thus: "***Taught him by One of great powers. (53:5)***"

What is the purpose behind the emphasis on this attribute (powerfulness) of the angels? This is because the Qur'an wants to convey that this angel that receives the revelation from God is powerful and he can

overcome all the devils and forces trying to distort the revelation. By mentioning this attribute (among tens of others), it is intended to express that the angels are so powerful that they can convey the divine revelation to the Prophet (S) just as they receive it “*powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne,*” and for this reason, God has appointed him to be the carrier of revelation.

“*One who is heard and trustworthy as well*” means that the said angel is obeyed. Many verses are brought down by Jibril (Archangel Gabriel) along with other angels, and here it says that he is a commander whose command is obeyed. In addition to his being heard, he is trustworthy. It thus says elsewhere:

نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ

**[It (Qur'an) was] brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit, upon your heart, so that you may be one of the warners. (26: 193–194)**

It is again an emphasis that “The revelation is brought down to you without any error, mistake, addition, or lacking. Perhaps the most explicit of verses in this context are the last verses of *Surah Jinn*:

عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَى غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا إِلَّا مَنِ ارْتَضَىٰ مِنْ رَسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْلُكُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَدًا لِيَعْلَمَ أَنْ قَدْ أَبْلَغُوا رَسُولَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَحَاطَ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ وَأَحْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا

***Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except to an apostle He approves of. Then He dispatches a sentinel before and behind him so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord, and He comprehends all that is with them, and He keeps count of all things. (72:26–28)***

Firstly, it says that God, the Knower of the Unseen, does not inform anyone of His Unseen. It is not because He is stingy but because not everybody is inherently worthy and deserving to receive revelation:

اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ حَيْثُ يَجْعَلُ رِسَالَتَهُ

***Allah knows best where to place His Apostleship! (6: 124)***

وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْتَبِي مِنْ رُسُلِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

***But Allah chooses from His apostles whomever He wishes. (3: 179)***

After designating the Prophet (S), He sends down His revelation to him in this manner: *“Then He dispatches a sentinel before and behind him.”* Since our concern is the perceptible, sending down of the revelation is embodied in such a way that it is as if it wants to be transferred from a location in the Sublime Throne to a lower location on earth. This distance actually is the existential distance of the Station of Lordship to the blessed heart of the Prophet (S), and not really a spatial distance. In any case, in its perceptible similitude, it is such that along this distance from the Divine Station to the heart of the Prophet (S), this revelation is well guarded at the front and rear, and with a perfect entourage it reaches its destination safely.

*Rasada* means lurking place; that is, through the way, they are totally lurking and on guard to ensure that the divine revelation and message is free of even the least harm and distortion. The reason behind it is clear *“so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord.”* That is to have perfect and absolute assurance that the divine message is faithfully delivered to the people without any addition or subtraction. It says: *“We also have the account of the number of words of this message and We are watchful so that even a letter is not added or subtracted from it “and He comprehends all that is with them, and He keeps count of all things.”* If it is not so and there is the probability of error and distortion in the transmission of the divine message, the objective of the apostleship and the apostolic mission, which is guidance, will not be achieved.

Thus, the description of the Qur’an of the manner of sending down the revelation is that it is revealed through the powerful carriers that have the power to repel any force aiming to distort the revelation. These carriers are trustworthy, venerable messengers and honored servants (21:26) who act by the command of God the Exalted. Also, at the moment of revelation, complete protection of it is undertaken and with a special entourage it is sent down from the Sacred Station of Lordship to the blessed heart of the Prophet (S). All this is meant to have complete assurance that the divine message and revelation is received and conveyed correctly without any addition or mutilation *“so that He may ascertain that they have communicated the messages of their Lord.”* [1](#)

Now, compare these clear and firm verses with the statements of these so-called intellectuals and national religious figures about the Qur’an and revelation that the Prophet is a human and every human being is prone to commit error; thus, from where is it known that he understood it correctly and then expressed it correctly? These blind-hearted have never read the Qur’an; they feign ignorance or attribute lies to it.

Of course, they may say that these very verses you quoted have the same probability of error. If that argument is advanced, in short, the reply to it is that in addition to the textual proof, we have also rational proof for the point that the divine revelation should be immune from any form of error and mistake while being conveyed to the people. That rational proof is based on the wisdom of God the Exalted that if the purpose of the All-wise God is to guide the people and through the apostolic mission of the prophets (‘a)

and the sending down of the heavenly scriptures, He wants the people to receive guidance, then there must be some measures undertaken to ensure that the message of guidance will reach the people without the least distortion, exaggeration and mutilation.

## **Belief in all the Prophets as a Requisite of True Faith**

In conclusion, the jurisdiction of faith in a nutshell is God, the Resurrection, the angels, the heavenly books, and all the prophets. We must have faith in all of them and all of the prophets, and not take any one of them as exception “*We make no distinction between any of them.*” If we say, “We accept one while denying the other,” this is tantamount to the denial of them all “*It is they who are truly faithless.*”

This question may come to the mind: Why is denial of a prophet tantamount to denial of all the prophets and true faithlessness? One who accepts, for example, ‘Isa (‘a) or Musa (‘a), he accepts one prophet at least. So, how can we say that he denies all the prophets? In reply, we have to say that we ask those who accept one of the prophets, ‘Isa or Musa (‘a) for example: Is this faith of yours based on the fact that ‘Isa or Musa belongs to your community and tribe, or because of the fact that he is a prophet of God?

If they say, “It is because he is a relative and next of kin of ours,” it is clear that this is worship of kinship and tribalism, and is not worship of God. In short, it is not faith but true faithlessness. The other option is for them to say, “Our faith is anchored in the fact that ‘Isa (or Musa) is a prophet of God, and what matters to us is God and His command, and not ‘Isa, Musa or kinship. In this case, we say that if the main criterion is the command of God, let us assume that God initially sends prophet A and gives him commandments, and then sends prophet B and abrogates some of the previous commandments sent through prophet A, and issues new commandments. Here, faith in God requires what? If a person has true faith in God, will he obey the commandments of prophet A or prophet B?

Obviously, if a person is really bound by the commandments of God, once God through prophet B annulled the commandments of prophet A, he will obey the second set of commandments. Or, if a prophet initially brought a commandment from God and after sometime, the same prophet brought a new decree contrary to the earlier decree from God, annulling the first commandment, it is clear that faith in God requires that the second order be executed.

This case which is technically called *abrogation* has happened to some of the decrees of our religion of Islam. One of them is the issue of the *qiblah*’s direction. Based on a divine commandment, the Holy Prophet (S) used to pray for many years toward Jerusalem. After some years, this verse was revealed: “***So turn your face toward the Holy Mosque (2:144)***” and the order was given that “From then on, you pray toward the Masjid al-Haram and the *Ka’bah*.” If a person really believes in the Prophet (S), after the revelation of this verse, he will pray toward the *Ka’bah* and not toward Jerusalem. When two contradictory orders are issued by the master, one after the other, everyone can understand that the second order must be obeyed.

In our discussion, God has initially sent Musa (‘a) and then ‘Isa (‘a), and the assumption is that we have accepted them on account of being prophets of God. For some time, we acted upon the commandments brought by Musa (‘a) from God, and after Musa (‘a), ‘Isa (‘a) brought commandments from God some of which contradicted the decrees of Musa (‘a). Here, if a person has faith in Musa, he has to accept ‘Isa because both of them are prophets who came from the One and Only God. The true follower of Musa is he who has faith in ‘Isa, and the true follower of ‘Isa is he who has faith in the Prophet of Islam, because one of the things mentioned by ‘Isa is that “After me a prophet whose name is Ahmad shall come.”

وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدُ

***“To give the good news of an apostle who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad. (61:6)”***

As such, denial of the Prophet of Islam means denial of the saying of ‘Isa and his apostleship. If a person says, “I have faith in ‘Isa but I will not believe in the Prophet of Islam,” his faith in ‘Isa is a lie, because one of the statements of ‘Isa is the glad tidings of the advent of the Prophet of Islam and obedience to him. That is why we say that faith in some of the prophets and denial of some others is actually denial of all prophets. For the same reason, the Qur’an emphasizes, thus: *“We make no distinction between any of them.”* For this reason too, we in Islam regard not only blasphemy against the Prophet of Islam (S) but also blasphemy against any of the prophets as tantamount to disbelief and apostasy.

## **Other Viewpoints on the Jurisdiction of Faith**

As we have mentioned, opposite to this interpretation of the jurisdiction of faith which is clearly deduced from the verses of the Qur’an, the other interpretation of faith during the period of prevalence of Marxism in Iran was that as they used to say, “What is important is the essence of faith. What is important is for a person to have faith in an ideal and objective, and strive hard to attain it. Once a person has no faith in any ideal and objective, he will not strive hard and experience passivity and decadence. The Qur’an gives emphasis on faith for the same reason that man has to struggle, move, exert efforts and make use of his talents to attain that considered ideal.”

Of course, during those days, they used to say, “That ideal in which is the paradise of man is the communist and socialist classless society.” Nowadays, they say, “That ideal is the liberal and democratic society,” and they promote to have faith in such a society and to strive to attain it faith is the fact that the source of everything is the will of the people, and other than the people no one and nothing, including God, should interfere in their destiny and determine their duties. Anyway, this is a kind of interpretation

of faith which is 180 degrees the opposite of what can be understood from the Qur'an, and its falsity is more vivid than the sunlight, and it does not need further discussion.

Another group is of the opinion that the jurisdiction of faith cannot be anything except God and the prophet. Yet, faith in a particular prophet is not necessary and faith in any of them is enough. Each of the prophets is a straight path and faith in any of these straight paths is enough for the attainment of felicity.

By studying the Qur'an, it became clear that this view is wrong. According to the Qur'an, faith in all the prophets is necessary, and faith in some and denial of some others is true faithlessness *"It is they who are truly faithless."* The implication of the statement that any of the prophets is a straight path is that if you have faith in only one of them and set aside the rest, there is no problem and you have attained guidance. This is while from the viewpoint of the Qur'an even if you accept all the prophets and have faith in all of them and deny only one of them, you have taken a step along the path of falsehood and the way of unbelief:

﴿ آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾ كُلُّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ﴿ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

***...and all the faithful, each [of them] has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles. [They declare,] 'We make no distinction between any of His apostles'. (2:285)***

## **The Relationship between Faith and the Acceptance of the Prophets Historically**

The other point which must be noted is that faith in the prophets is not faith in a historical episode. For example, faith in the Prophet of Islam (S) does not mean mere acceptance that 14.000 years ago, there emerged a person name Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula who said, "I am the Messenger of Allah," and brought a book named Qur'an from God. Then, we believe what he brought at the time can neither be of use nor implemented at this time! This faith is "the history of the prophets" and not faith in "the prophets and the Messenger." This is like believing in a person called Hitler in Germany who was one of the most notorious criminals in history.

Paying attention to this point is important, because nowadays, there have unfortunately emerged people who present a historical interpretation of faith in the Prophet of Islam. While claiming to be Muslims and intellectuals, they say that the Prophet of Islam's call was monotheism and the acceptance of One God, and the essence of religion and that which is the kernel of religion is this one matter while the other matters are among the secondary things of religion and are changeable according to the demands of time and space. Accordingly, even the Prophet himself never claimed that the laws and orders he

brought are eternal. They add that the decrees and ordinances the Prophet brought were appropriate for that time and society, and for this time, they are neither useful nor executable. So, everything must be changed.

We have earlier explained that faith is a state of the heart which must be put into practice. And if this obligation to put it into practice does not exist, and it is mere knowledge and mental confirmation, it is not faith. We pointed out that Pharaoh knew that Musa was a prophet of God and his miracles were divine signs which manifested through him. The people of Pharaoh also knew these facts:

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا ۖ فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

***They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts. (27: 14)***

Mere knowing is the criterion; undertaking it is necessary. For us to merely know and accept that a prophet came fourteen hundred years ago and to say that his words are of no use today is not faith. This is faithlessness, indeed. What does *kufr* mean by the way? It means this non-application into practice and for us to say, “I know that the Prophet has said these words, but I do not act upon them.” Is *kufr* other than this? Does to be a Jew or a Christian merely mean for us to know a prophet named Musa or ‘Isa and a book called Torah or Evangel? If to be a Jew or Christian is this knowledge, then all of us throughout the world are Jews and Christians! The criterion of being a Jew is that the person put into practice the sayings of Musa and whatever is mentioned in the Torah. To be a Muslim means that you regard yourself bound to put into practice what was brought by the Prophet of Islam (S). (Of course, for one to commit sins sometimes on account of the carnal desire and Satan is another story.) If a person only accepts the history of the Prophet and is not supposed to act upon the Prophet’s decrees and ordinances, this verse must be recited to him:

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا ۖ قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

***The Bedouins say, ‘We have faith.’ Say, ‘You do not have faith yet; rather say, “We have embraced Islam,” for faith has not yet entered into your hearts’. (49: 14)***

Is one who accepts the advent of the Prophet of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula fourteen hundred years ago and say that his ordinances are of no use and cannot be implemented, a Muslim?! Does such a person have faith in “what Allah has sent down,” “His books” and “His messengers,” and among the faithful believers whom are described by the Qur’an as follows: “All the faithful. Each [of them] has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His apostles”? This is sheer disbelief. This amount seems simple. If a person denies even one decree, and one decree only, which he is certain to have been brought by the Prophet of Islam (S), he goes outside the path of faith. If faith in the laws is because God

ordained them, has God not ordained this one? If acting upon the rest is motivated by the fact that they are consistent with his like and desire, this is self-worship and sheer disbelief, and not worship of God.

Of course, sometimes, it is not proved to a person that this is a decree of God and is among the decrees which has no decisive proof and in which there is still room for juristic differences. That is another story. The discussion here is that we are certain that God and the Prophet have made a decree, and in spite of it, we do not submit to it. If that is the case, this is *kufr*. It is not important whether that decree is among the decrees on obligation or prohibition; rather, it is the same for every decree. If a person is certain that the Prophet has really recommended a certain recommended prayer and notwithstanding this, he denies it and does not accept this decree to the extent of being recommended, he is definitely *kafir*.

Of course, it must be borne in mind that many of these are inner disbelief which can be reconciled with the outward Islam and it is referred to by this passage: “*The Bedouins say, ‘We have faith.’ Say, ‘You do not have faith yet; rather say, ‘We have embraced Islam,’ for faith has not yet entered into your hearts’.*” The outward Islam which is mentioned in this verse can be acquired through the recital of the profession of faith [*shahadatayn*], though it is ostentatious and nominal, and many of the laws of Islam are applicable to it. Such Islam brings about the ritual purification of the body and one can take a Muslim woman as wife, his daughter be married, inherit, and be buried in the cemetery of Muslims, etc. The hypocrites during the time of the Prophet were of the same type of Muslims, about whom the Qur’an says:

وَلَا يَأْتُونَ الصَّلَاةَ إِلَّا وَهُمْ كُسَالَى

***And do not perform the prayer but lazily. (9:54)***

Even if they pray, it is out of compulsion and social considerations:

إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كُسَالَى يُرَاءُونَ النَّاسَ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا  
مُذَبَذِبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ لَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ وَلَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ ۗ وَمَنْ يُضِلِلِ اللَّهُ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُ سَبِيلًا

***The hypocrites indeed seek to deceive Allah, but it is He who outwits them. When they stand up for prayer, they stand up lazily, showing off to the people and not remembering Allah except a little, wavering in between: neither with these nor with those. (4: 142–143)***

There are also those whose prayers are politicking and out of sociopolitical considerations, and not motivated by submission of the heart in front of God. This is outward Islam the follower of which may marry a Muslim woman and whose daughter can be asked for marriage and on whom the other laws are applicable. Yet, from the perspective of the real decree, he may be worse than any unbeliever:

إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ فِي الدَّرَكِ الْأَسْفَلِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا

**Indeed the hypocrites will be in the lowest reach of the Fire. (4: 145)**

At any rate, the account of outward Islam is separate from faith in God, and our present discussion is about faith and not what will make the body ritually pure and the like issues. The discussion is about the thing that will bring about man's felicity, bliss, success and salvation from the hellfire and chastisement, and not that which is reconcilable with *the lowest reach of the Fire*. Yes, according to the explicit text of the Qur'an, there are those who pray to assume the name of Islam and the combatants of Islam, yet they are in the lowest ebb of the Fire.

1. – In Surah al-Anbiya' 21:26–27, the Qur'an thus says in describing the angels:

بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُكْرَمُونَ لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ

They are [His] honored servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command.

## Chapter 19: Faith as the Essence of Invitation of the Prophets (Part 4)

### A Review of the Previous Discussion

So far, we have covered many subjects about faith. We said that, as inferred many Qur'anic verses, faith is the essence of the invitation of all the prophets of God. In particular, there were discussions about three subjects, viz. “the truth behind faith,” “the degrees of faith” and “the jurisdiction of faith.” Regarding the jurisdiction of faith, we said that faith mentioned in the Book and the *Sunnah* and leads to man's success in this world and the Hereafter, while the lack of which leads to eternal damnation, is not faith in anything. From the viewpoint of the Book and the *Sunnah*, the jurisdiction of faith in the first degree is faith in God and the Messenger:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ

**Indeed the faithful are those who have faith in Allah and His Apostle. (24:62)**

In discussing the degrees of faith, we said that just as faith has degrees and levels, unbelief which is its opposite, also has degrees and levels. In the same vein, we mentioned the obstacles to faith and the factors weakening it. One of these hindrances is the intellectual and academic skepticisms about God, the Prophet and the Resurrection, and in general, religion and religious issues. Because of the importance of this discussion, it is appropriate to embark on this discussion further.

## **“Prophetic Experience” and “Hermeneutic Interpretation” as Misgivings Aimed at Weakening the Faith**

The discussion begins here when they say, “A prophet, whoever he is, is a human after all, and the human perceptions and understandings are prone to err. So, the perceptions of a prophet are subject to error and are thus not reliable.”

On the contrary, it is said that the perceptions and knowledge of a prophet (at least in the realm of issues pertaining to religion) is through the way of the divine revelation and since it comes from God the Exalted and that He has Absolute Knowledge and ignorance has no place in His Essence, it is free from error and is reliable.

The deniers of the reliability of the perceptions of the Prophet (S) advance the issue of “prophetic experience” in reply. This is the explanation of their contention: Revelation is a kind of demonstrative knowledge, and an extensive mental state is experienced by the Prophet. This is the same thing which is called “prophetic experience.” In the demonstrative knowledge, word and concept do not exist; rather, the known thing itself (and not its concept) will be present to the knowing person.

So, in revelation which is a kind of demonstrative knowledge, there is no word and concept. Those perceptions called “revelation” which the Prophet acquires and have no word and concept must come out in the form of utterances, concepts and words in order to be expressed to others. Here, discussion on “prophetic interpretation” comes in. What the Prophet perceives as revelation is a demonstrative knowledge and totally personal and individual inner “experience” which is never accessible to others. In order for us to understand what transpired in himself and what perceptions he acquired, the Prophet embarks on speaking so as to bring out the non-transferable demonstrative knowledge in the form of transferable resultant knowledge (concepts and words).

This “interpretation” no longer comes from God; it is a product of the Prophet himself. That which comes from God is that inner experience which only the Prophet “feels.” The “Qur’an” is nothing but “a set of the Prophet’s interpretations of the revelation” because the Qur’an consists of concepts and words, and as we have stated, there is neither word nor concept in the revelation. The Qur’an, therefore, is the product and pursuit of the Prophet’s mind and the interpretation of the psychic perceptions, mental state, “feeling” and “experience” which the Prophet has acquired.

Now, as it became clear that the Qur’an is the interpretation of revelation and not the revelation itself, the

additional point here is that every interpretation is affected by “the interpreter’s way of thinking.” A manifestation of this point is that you observe a lot that different, and even conflicting and contradictory interpretations of a thing or phenomenon will be presented. This is because “interpretation is affected by the interpreter’s way of thinking.”

Furthermore, the way of thinking of a person is a product of the time, society and environment of him and the individuals he deals with. The mindset of the Prophet is not exempted from this rule; it has taken form under the influence of the knowledge, learning and culture of that time and society. It is clear that the knowledge and learning of that time, especially in the Bedouin society of the Arabian Peninsula, was very defective in relation to the knowledge and learning of this time. Many superstitious and false elements existed at that time whose falsehood was established with the advancement of science and the progress and perfection of human civilization. Given this, the definite conclusion of these preliminary talks is that the Qur’an and its content are unreliable.

During these days, you heard or read elsewhere that some say that the Qur’an, like any other book and speech, can be criticized. Regarding this statement, we have to test the content of the Qur’an by means of knowledge and experience so as to know its truth or falsehood, or we have to see if the Qur’an is responsive and proportionate to the needs of society and humanity at this time, or not. If it is responsive, we will act upon it, and if not, it is clear that its consumption period has expired and must be set aside!

These are the contentions of the so-called religious or non-religious intellectuals during the recent years. All these statements and their likes are based on the same analysis that regards the revelation as the “prophetic experience” and the Qur’an as “interpretation of the revelation” and saying of the Prophet himself, and holds that the perceptions of the Prophet, like all other human perceptions, are prone to error.

## [A Concise Reply to these Two Misgivings](#)

As we have mentioned earlier, these accounts are baseless and untenable. We explained that in all the stages from the time of its issuance from the Source up to the time of having been sent down to the blessed heart of the Prophet (S) and the Prophet’s communication of it to the people, the divine revelations are under full protection. There is no doubt or skepticism about it and no force can bring disorder along this path. How could the Prophet memorize the entire Qur’an, and in the words of these gentlemen, interpret by himself while the Qur’an says that if he attributes to God even a letter, word, or verse, “*We shall cut off his aorta and no one can hinder Us from doing so:*”

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَاعِرٍ ۖ قَلِيلًا مَّا تُوْمِنُونَ وَلَا بِقَوْلِ كَاهِنٍ ۗ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ تَنْزِيلٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ فَمَا مِنْكُمْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ عَنْهُ حَاجِزِينَ

***It is indeed the speech of a noble apostle, and it is not the speech of a poet. Little is the faith that***

***you have! Nor is it the speech of a soothsayer. Little is the admonition that you take! Gradually sent down from the Lord of all the worlds. Had he faked any sayings in Our name, We would have surely seized him by the right hand and then cut off his aorta, and none of you could have held Us off from him (69:40–47)***

The other skepticism in this context is related to a stage prior to this stage (i.e. the stage of interpretation) and about the principle of the apostleship of the Prophet. They say, “To which we have access are the same words and utterances which, as we said, are not the revelation itself but only its interpretation. Revelation is that demonstrative knowledge and personal experience happening to the Prophet, and we have no access to it negatively or affirmatively.

Practically, there is no essential difference whether we believe in his apostleship or not. What is tangible and accessible to us from his apostleship is this Qur’an which is supposed to be open to criticism, and if it wins in an acid test of knowledge and experience, we shall accept it and if not, we shall set it aside. That which exists in the demonstrative knowledge and the self of the Prophet from his apostleship is inaccessible to us, and in confirming and criticizing it we can say anything and pass a judgment. Therefore, the Prophet is at most like a scholar for us. So long as his presented ideas and views are not tested by means of common human knowledge, he will remain unacceptable to us. That is, in any case, the acceptance or non-acceptance of his apostleship has nothing to do with this issue.”

What we have said in reply to the previous skepticism is applicable here. The Qur’an says to the effect: “That which issues forth from the Divine Sacred Essence is identically, without any addition or lacking, transmitted to the heart of the Prophet, and the Prophet, in turn, recites exactly the same to the people, and in doing so, if he falsely attributes even a single letter or word to Us, We shall cut off his aorta.”

## **The Alleged Contradiction between Revelation, and Knowledge and Reason**

Yet, another skepticism in this context is related to the Qur’an and its content. They say, “Whenever we refer to the content of the Qur’an or some narrations reported from the Prophet, we encounter some subjects which are not harmonious with science or reason. The same wrong facts inconsistent with science and reason are enough for us to doubt the correctness of all the verses and narrations and not to have faith in them.”

Similar to this skepticism existed from the very early period of Islam when there were devils from among humans and jinn who strived hard through different ways to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Qur’an. One of these ways which were employed during the time of the infallible Imams (‘a) was to look for alleged contradictions among the verses of the Qur’an. In doing so, they wanted to prove the Qur’an to lack credibility. We are doing a similar thing with respect to the New and Old Testaments, especially regarding the Four Gospels. For example, we say that there is something in the Gospel of Luke whose

opposite exists in the Gospel of Matthew or Mark. So, it is obvious that none of them can be reliable.

At any rate, throughout history, some people strived to find such contradictions in the verses of the Qur'an, thus putting into question its credibility. Nowadays, the venture continues and many books with the subject of contradictions in the Qur'an have been written. The same skepticism is advanced in a different form and the main point they emphasize more today is the subjects in the Qur'an which are allegedly inharmonious with science and reason and are thus false. In this regard, they have a general proposition and then they embark on citing its manifestations and examples.

The gist of their general proposition is that the scientific subjects mentioned in the Qur'an are based on illusions and fancies of the scholars at the time, the falsity of many of which has been proven today. It is from here that all the subjects and content of the Qur'an will be deprived of credibility.

In mentioning the manifestations, they have enumerated numerous cases all of which cannot be covered here. We shall suffice ourselves to mention only one or two cases.

One of these cases is the issue of seven heavens which has been mentioned in numerous verses of the Holy Qur'an:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ

***“The seven heavens glorify Him (17:44)”***

and

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا

***“He created seven heavens in layers. (67:3)”***

Some people came out to say that these seven heavens are consistent with the Ptolemaic astronomy and planets. As you know, until prior to the new astronomy which is well-known as the Copernican astronomy, for a long time extending to many centuries, the prevalent and dominant theory in the science of astronomy was the Ptolemaic astronomical. The followers of Ptolemy believed that the universe is in the form of an extremely huge plan in which the earth is located in the center and there are nine spheres surrounding it and encompassing one another. The similitude they always used to cite is the different layers of the onion each of which is located over the other and surrounding it.

The Qur'an was revealed at the time when the Ptolemaic theory had absolute dominance in astronomy and no one doubted its accuracy. Anyone who expressed a contrary view would be ridiculed as if he had denied the day as day. As such, the Qur'an also makes mention of seven heavens.

The objection which usually comes to the mind is this: If it is such, the Qur'an is supposed to use the expression *nine heavens*, and since it has used the expression *seven heavens* which is inharmonious whatsoever with Ptolemaic astronomy, it follows that the said justification cannot be true.

In reply, they say, "Apart from the seven heavens, the Qur'an has also made mention of another thing called "Throne" [*'arsh*]:

قُلْ مَنْ رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ السَّبْعِ وَرَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ

**Say, 'Who is the Lord of the seven heavens and the Lord of the Great Throne? (23:86)**

Similarly, it has mentioned another thing called "seat" [*kursi*]:

وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ

**His seat embraces the heavens and the earth. (2:255)**

Given this, the seven heavens plus the "throne" and the "seat" become "the nine Ptolemaic spheres.

Many Muslim scholars who were influenced by the Ptolemaic astronomy at the time used to receive such statements and explanations with acceptance. Of course, later on and through the research of scientists such as Kepler, Copernicus and Galileo, it became clear that neither the earth is the center of the universe nor the nine spheres ever exist.

Now, today's "intellectuals" say that the Qur'anic expression *seven heavens* was based on the acceptance of the science of astronomy at the time and for years, Muslim scholars have interpreted this verse on the same basis. Now, since the falsity of the Ptolemaic theory is proved, the falsity of the view of the Qur'an and these Muslim scholars will become clear.

Another example to be mentioned in this context is related to Darwin's theory of "the evolution of species." As you know, Charles Darwin has a hypothesis in biology which holds that as the effect of mutation and leaps that have taken place in their chromosomes, animals have changed throughout the past millions of years, and the emergence of new generations of animals has been based on these leaps. For example, man has been regarded as originating from the monkey race.

In some cases, they have found manifestations to confirm this theory. Of course, this subject has not yet been accepted in biology itself, and at most it is regarded as a hypothesis and probability. Anyway, some have desired to cite this theory as one of the examples of the alleged conflict between science and religion regarding the Qur'an. According to them, what the Qur'an states about the origin of Adam and human beings is totally in conflict with this "scientific" theory, and this itself is the proof of the falsity of

the Qur'an.

## The Qur'an and the Nine Ptolemaic Spheres

In reply, we have to say thus: Concerning the comparison of the seven heavens with the nine Ptolemaic spheres, we have to complain against that group of our scholars who have made such a comparison notwithstanding the clear difference between seven and nine. Of course, none of these scholars has absolutely said that “the seven heavens” plus the “throne” and the “seat” is the same “nine Ptolemaic spheres” and they have dealt on it only as a probable case. Be that as it may, although they have accepted it only a probable case, gradually it became widespread that what is meant by “the seven heavens” is the same “nine spheres.” At any rate, if we pass by this issue, the fundamental problem is in such a comparison. The Qur'an mentions nowhere about the nine spheres, and it mentions the seven heavens in such a way that they cannot be compared whatsoever to the nine spheres.

The characteristics which it mentions about the heavens are different from the characteristics they have said about the spheres. One of the most vivid differences between the heavens described by the Qur'an and the heavens the Ptolemaic astronomy says is in the “permanence” or “mobility” of the stars. The Ptolemaic astronomy hypothesis holds that each of the stars is fixed and immovable in its own orbit. They said that what moves is the orbit itself and not the stars, and the movement of the stars follows the movement of the orbit. It is like a page in which you pin certain stars and then you turn it around. Here, the stars are fixed and the page turns around. Of course, following the movement of the page, the pinned stars on it spin around. Such a portrayal of the stars is in no way harmonious with the description of the stars in the Qur'an. The Qur'an describes the orbit [*falak*] in only two places, and in both places, it uses the expression *yasbahun* (swimming) in referring to the movement of the stars. In *Surah al-Anbiya'*, it states:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ ۚ كُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ

***It is He who created the night and the day, the sun and the moon, each swimming in an orbit. (21:33)***

It also says in *Surah Ya Sin*:

لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ ۚ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ

***Neither it behooves the sun to overtake the moon, nor may the night outrun the day, and each swims in an orbit. (36:40)***

If you imagine a sea in the form of a sphere, it states that the sun and the moon are like fishes

swimming therein. At most, it is an orderly movement, but it says anyway that they “swim” and “to swim” and “movement” are consistent. Therefore, the statement of the Qur’an about the stars is not harmonious with the hypothesis of the Ptolemaic astronomy, and according to this view, a movement is against that hypothesis and not acceptance of it. If, God forbid, the Prophet was under the influence of the scientific hypotheses of his time and he interpreted his demonstrative perception (revelation) in accordance with it, firstly, he would say that the spheres are nine, and secondly, he would say that each of the stars is permanent in its own orbit.

Similarly, other verses describe the heavens in some expressions and subjects that are not harmonious with the Ptolemaic astronomy. The followers of Ptolemy said that out of these nine spheres, eight are related to the planets and one is the sphere of “the fixed and other stars” which is the eighth sphere and the ninth one is the sphere of “Atlas.” The “planets” mean the planets of the solar system which until that time more than eight planets had not yet been discovered. They said that each of these planets is in one sphere and there are eight spheres all in all. All the so-called fixed and other stars are located in the eighth sphere which is above the seventh sphere, and the last sphere is Atlas. This was the Ptolemaic astronomy’s portrayal of the nine spheres.

The Qur’an, however, as we have said, has firstly nowhere used the number “nine” in this regard; rather, it used “seven” instead. Secondly, it has not again said “seven spheres,” but it used the expression “seven heavens.” Besides, concerning the heavens which it has mentioned, in one place it states thus:

إِنَّا زَيْنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ

***Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the finery of the stars. (37:6)***

In another place, it says:

وَلَقَدْ زَيْنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ وَجَعَلْنَاهَا رُجُومًا لِلشَّيَاطِينِ ۗ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابَ السَّعِيرِ

***We have certainly adorned the lowest heaven with lamps. (67:5)***

In these two verses, *dunya* is not the genitive of *sama'* [heaven], and *sama' ad-dunya* does not refer to the heaven of this earth, as it is used conventionally. Instead, *dunya* is an attribute of heaven and it means “lower.” *As-sama' ad-dunya* means “lower heaven”—the heaven which is closest to us. Keeping in view of this point, the meaning of these two verses is that “We have placed all these stars you can see as adornments of the heaven which is the lowest.” The Qur’an says that all these stars and planets are lamps of the lower heaven; that is, the lower heaven encompasses all these stars and above them. This is the view of the Qur’an about the “lower heaven” and we have no knowledge regarding the higher heavens, and the Holy Qur’an has not given explanation of them.

Now, how can this explanation be compared to the Ptolemaic astronomical theory? The Ptolemaic astronomy maintained that the seven planets of the solar system are in the first up to the seventh sphere while all the so-called fixed and other stars are in the eighth sphere. The Qur'an says that all the eight planets that had so far been discovered then, the planets that have been discovered later and all stars have been placed in such a manner that they are below the lower heaven, and as if "the lower heaven" is like a plane which is ornamented by stars.

This statement, on one hand, and that which the Ptolemaic astronomy says, on the other, are heaven and earth apart. Thus, how can it be claimed that the Prophet under the influence of his own astronomical hypotheses said such things?! These are contrary to the Ptolemaic astronomy. At the time, there was no hypothesis that a star "swims" in an orbit. Today, the science of astronomy has not obtained anything which encompasses all these stars and planets and what exist beyond it. From time to time, we witness the discovery of new galaxies and stars, which sometimes are millions of light years away from us, and in the language of the Qur'an, they are all below the first heaven.

The Qur'an has not given account of what this first heaven is and how the six other heavens are, and up to now, no science is able to discover them and it may remain so up to eternity. Yes, the interpretation of these verses given by some Muslim scholars and others who have desired to compare the seven heavens with nine spheres is a moral lesson for us not to rush in comparing the Qur'an with a scientific theory. In a bid to propagate and defend Islam, so long as there is a scientific theory or hypothesis to ride on, some Muslims strive by means of conjectural interpretations and exegesis to establish a relationship between Qur'anic verses and a certain theory, saying that the Qur'an has said so before and this is one of its miracles.

This practice is scientism. In such comparisons, necessary care and enough insinuations should be observed and one should not unreasonably go outside the pale of the Qur'an. One of the great '*ulama*' of Egypt, named Tantawi, writes an exegesis entitled *Jawahir al-Qur'an* [Ornaments of the Qur'an] and tries to reconcile new scientific hypotheses with Qur'anic verses. In doing so, he has sometimes embarked on making so astonishing interpretations and commentaries. Anyway, this kind of works is not correct, and so long as we have not acquired lucid and definite confirmations, we should not mar the Qur'an. In brief, we have to behave with utmost caution. In most of these cases, man embarks on a thing which is beyond thinking and is improbable, and usually, to be certain that a verse speaks about the same thing which a certain scientific theory claims is very problematic.

In any case, one group of alleged contradictions between science and religion is like this one we have mentioned whose root is inappropriate and inopportune comparison of the Qur'an with some of the scientific theories.

## The Qur'an and the Theory of Evolution of Species

Concerning the creation of Adam ('a) and the different kinds of creatures, and the lack of conformity of the statement of the Qur'an in this context with Darwin's theory of evolution of species, we have to say:

Firstly, the theory of Darwin has still remained a theory that is opposed by a great number of biologists. Just as some proofs of its accuracy are gathered, there are also numerous pieces of evidence proving that this theory is incapable of justifying and against and inconsistent with the claims of this theory. The opposition of the said biologists has been based on the fact that on one hand, it has no firm and credible proofs to substantiate this hypothesis, and on the other hand, there are abundant manifestations bearing contrary testimonies. Therefore, who has said that the theory of Darwin is a firm and definite theory in the science of biology? This theory is merely a hypothesis and probably will never be proven.

Secondly, let us assume that the theory of Darwin is an established theory. Yet, are the laws of empirical sciences perfect without having any error? Those who are familiar with the scientific laws and theories know well that many scientific laws have exceptions. For example, in mathematics, it is said that every number to the power of two and higher is greater and more than the number to the power of one.

However, in the same mathematics, it is said that number one is an exemption to this rule, and one to the power of any number is still equal to one. In chemistry, it is said that all metals are solid in normal temperature, but in the same science of chemistry, it is said that mercury is a metal but is an exception to this rule. In the normal temperature, mercury is liquid. In any case, once a thing becomes a scientific law, it does not mean that there is no exception. Now, assuming that scientific evidence established that the emergence of different species of plants and animals on earth is based on the chromosomal leaps and the same thing claimed by Darwin, is it impossible that this law has an exception or exceptions? We believe that the Qur'an is certain that even in case the hypothesis of Darwin is proved, there must be exceptions.

For example, one of these exceptions is about the birds which Prophet 'Isa ('a) made from clay (by God's leave), and breathed into them and they turned into real living birds. We know that Prophet 'Isa ('a), like many other prophets, had not only one but many miracles. One of these miracles was that he made from clay forms of bird and then breathed into them a spirit and they became living birds. This was one of the miracles and signs that he performed to prove his apostleship. In this regard, the Holy Qur'an says:

وَإِذْ تَخْلُقُ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ بِإِذْنِي فَتَنفُخُ فِيهَا فَتَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِي ۗ وَتُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَامَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ بِإِذْنِي

***And when you would create from clay the form of a bird, with My leave, and you would breathe into it and it would become a bird, with My leave. (5: 110)***

Even assuming that we accepted Darwin's theory on the evolution of species, should we say that this bird of Prophet 'Isa is a result of mutation and evolution of earlier species? Here, we either have to say, God forbid, that the Qur'an is telling a lie, or to accept that the emergence of such a bird is an exception to the theory on the evolution of species and outside the realm of it. The acceptance of exception to a scientific theory does not bring any harm. Now, what is wrong (assuming that the theory on the evolution of species is correct) if we say that the emergence of Adam ('a), the father of mankind, is one of the exceptional cases of this theory?

The overall reply in these cases is that in principle the contradiction between two definite matters is impossible. It is impossible for a person to absolutely be certain and have faith in a thing, and at the same time, to be certain and have absolute knowledge of a contrary thing! As such, it is impossible for a definite knowledge (for definite certainty of being in consistence with reality) to say a thing, and on the contrary, to convey an opposing definite and firm verse or tradition. If such a thing seems true, it is a basic notion and through scrutiny and reflection, it will become clear that one of these definite things or both of them are allegedly and imaginarily definite, and in reality it is nothing but a mere idea and imagination or even an illusion. Just as in the said examples, we explained and clarified this issue.

## [Allegory and Metaphor in the Qur'an](#)

The other issue they raise in relation to the Qur'anic verses, in a bid to undermine confidence to its outward meanings, is the following one. Yet, before embarking on discussing it, it seems necessary for us to give an introduction:

In every language, some words, expressions, sentences, and proverbs have come into being based on stories and legends, repeated in similar cases, and established with the passage of time. Nowadays, we use these expressions and proverbs without minding and knowing in most cases what their roots are and whether they are legendary or true stories. In any case, once it comes out in the form of a prevalent expression and proverb, no one will ask what its origin is, where it comes from, whether it is fiction or not, etc.

For example, there is a famous proverb in Arabic which says, "*In summer, you spoiled the milk.*" This proverb is used when a person wants to do something but because of misdeed and error being committed, he has earlier lost the opportunity at his disposal to do so, and it is no longer irreversible and of use. Similar to this proverb in Persian, we can mention, "*Drinking medicine after the death of Suhrab.*" In the Arabic proverb, the verb is marked with *kasrah* vowel at the end, which means that the addressee is feminine; so, a more accurate translation of the proverb comes in this form: "O woman! You spoiled the milk in summer."

According to Arab men of letters, the story of this proverb happened to a woman. The gist of the episode is that a man made proposal for marriage to a woman, but she refused to marry him. This man was affluent with abundant wealth, retinue and servants, but the woman still refused to become his wife. This

took place in summer. Later, the woman was married to a poor man and gave birth to a child. After sometime, it came to pass that the woman and her husband had nothing to eat and their efforts were to no avail.

In order to ask for help, the woman was forced to knock on the door of the man who had first made proposal to her and to request an amount of milk for her child. The man refused her request, saying: “In summer, you spoiled the milk.” We do not know whether this story is real or not; yet, it is regularly used in analogous cases. As to what extent the story of Rostam and Suhrab is true is not very clear. Yet, we use the proverb, “Drinking medicine after the death of Suhrab.”

In these cases, no one asks why you use this proverb though its origin is a legend or it is not clear if it is true. Here, we are not concerned with its being a legend or a true story, and it does not bring any harm to us. In these cases, the aim is the transmission of the concept, message and secret pointed out in the proverb, and as to whether the origin of the story is fictitious or not has no importance at all.

For example, the Persian word *divaneh* [insane] means one whose mind is not working well. The origin and root of this word is the word *div* [demon]. Of course, demon is an imaginary and superstitious creature which has no external existence. Yet, it is imagined that one who is not in his mind is overpowered by the *div* and as a result, he has turned *divaneh* (literally, *div*-like]. Nowadays, as we use this word, we are not concerned about where this word is derived from or whether the demon is a real or imaginary creature. What is important is the concept. We apply the word *divaneh* to a person who is not in his right mind. In Arabic also, many Arab men of letters have said that the word *junun* [insanity] is derived from *jinn*, which is its root-word. *Junun* means to become *jinn* while *majnun* indicates one who has become *jinn*-like.

Like any other language, such words and proverbs are found in the Arabic language some of which have been used in the Qur’an. For example, in *Surah al-Baqarah*, we read:

الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِّ

***Those who exact usury will not stand but like one deranged by the Devil's touch. (2:275)***

The verse means that usurers are in a state of insanity and madness. The meaning of this expression of the Qur’an is that as the effect of extreme and beyond the limit attention of man to the world’s affluence, everything he thinks of will be money, account, book of records, being a creditor, and asking for payment of the credits. All his attention is this: “What percent it became; how much profit I had there; in this dealing what percent I lost; whether a certain credit is received or not... etc.”

The usurer is constantly engrossed with this thinking. Sometimes, he reaches a point when he experiences a state of insanity and always talks to himself about checks and jewelry while unconscious of the people around him. I myself have encountered such persons. Regarding this kind of individuals,

the Qur'an says, thus: "Like one deranged by the Devil's touch." The Arabic word *khabat* is a kind of ailment, and among the Arabs, it is applied to those afflicted by mental disorder, describing them as having been deranged by the Devil's touch. The Qur'an has taken from the Arabs' customs and used this expression.

Once a person experiences a mental disorder, it has nothing to do with Satan, and it is not true that Satan has come and touched his head! This is exactly like the Persian expression *divaneh* which we use and whose etymological origin is *div* [demon]. Nonetheless, nowadays, when we say *divaneh*, we do not refer to the *div* at all. Instead, we refer to a person whose psychological condition is not good. Of course, let us not mind that at the present in some nooks and corners of the world there are such superstitions and those who think that the insane became such because of an encounter with the *jinn* and the like. I myself watched a movie in Germany in which there were insane people. They were brought in a so-called clinic where they were tied up and whipped in a certain fashion so as to cast out the devils from their bodies!

For example, they say that in some traditions in which the term Satan is used, it actually refers to microbes. However, since the Arabs and people of the time had no idea about microbes, the term Satan which was prevalent at the time was used.

At any rate, they again say that this type of cases is a proof that the Qur'an does not intend to express the truth and reality. The Qur'an aims to express the purport and substance, and along this way, it may use expressions and sentences which have no real basis, but the purport which is the expression of the meaning to the addressee is attained.

## [Reply to this Misgiving](#)

In reply, we have to say that the existence of such expressions in the Qur'an does not weaken it or make it defective. This literary style is common in literatures in all languages, and if it is properly used in its own place, then it is among the literary rhetorical figures which imbue merit and excellence to the utterance. Sometimes, a figurative expression, metaphor, allegory, proverb, story, or the like is very effective in the conveyance of messages as it carries to the addressee a certain message.

As we have pointed out, in the literary and conversational usage, once such expressions are used, the speaker does not intend to endorse the origin of the story from which the word, expression or proverb is derived, nor does he intend to negate it. The aim is to convey a particular message through this word or proverb and not more than that. In so many cases, when using this kind of expressions, the speaker does not pay attention to its root and origin at all as he is heedless of it because it is not his concern. Besides, doing so brings neither benefit nor harm to his talk.

The Qur'an has adopted the same manual. God, Who sometimes wants to make the people understand a point, uses the same common and well-known proverb among them without concern for the negation

or affirmation of its origin. When the Qur'an says,

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّتِي نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ

**“Do not be like her who would undo her yarn, breaking it up after [spinning it to] strength, (16:92)”**

It only wants to state, “Be careful not to unthread your knot.” But as to whether the story of the woman who spins the cotton to make yarn and then undoes her yarn again is true or not is a thing which the Qur'an does not intend to affirm or negate. Similarly, as the Qur'an uses the expression *majnun*, it does not mean affirmation of the point that one who experiences *junun* [insanity] has been touched by the *jinn*.

In any case, the essence of the use of literary rhetorical figures such as allegory, figurative expression, metaphor, similitude, and proverb which the Holy Qur'an uses in numerous cases, does not weaken it and make it defective; rather, it can be regarded as among its strong points.

Meanwhile, is the existence of some figurative expressions, allegories and proverbs in the Qur'an a proof that the entire Qur'an is figurative, allegory, metaphor, and the like and nowhere have their corresponding senses been expressed? The answer is negative. Some have imagined or intended to convey such skepticism that the existence of this kind of expressions and cases in the Qur'an is a proof that no verse of it aims to convey the similar sense and the literal and outward meaning of its words. Instead, it points to a message and secret which must be understood.

It is clear that such a notion is false and such a misgiving is unjustified. If a person delivered a speech somewhere and cited proverbs in his speech, could it be concluded that his entire speech is a proverb? Figurative expressions, allegories, metaphors, and proverbs are the spices of speech and not the entire speech. In conversation and discourse, the accepted principle between the speaker and the addressee (in every custom and language) is that the similar sense of the words is the aim of the speaker.

If the speaker wants to use figurative and allegorical expressions, he will bring analogy. Of course, analogies are not always verbal. Non-verbal and so-called core analogies may be used. Sometimes, analogy is so clear that the addressee understands it and there is no need for the speaker to mention it. For example, when a person says, “This is ‘drinking the medicine after the death of Suhrab’,” everyone understands what he means and everyone knows that the speaker does not want to claim that Rustam, Suhrab and the drinking of medicine really existed or not. Everybody knows that here such a thing is not meant.

In the Qur'an also, like any other conversation and dialogue, the essence is to express the truth and convey the meanings of the words and sentences. If we want somewhere to claim that here are allegory, metaphor... etc. and the real meaning is not the aim, we are in need of analogy. If there is no analogy,

we interpret it according to its real meaning. For no reason and without any analogy, we cannot always say that here is figurative and not the reality only because in some places allegories and metaphors are used.

## Summary

In general, we have three classes of verses which are the subject of such misgivings: The first class consists of verses which are unreasonably compared by some individuals as their own personal conjecture to wrong scientific hypothesis and as the falsity of the hypothesis has become clear now, the falsity of this comparison is exposed. For example, the “seven heavens” were compared to the Ptolemaic nine spheres and its falsity is disclosed. In such cases, the defect cannot be attributed to the Qur’an. Instead, the problem is related to the improper comparison made by some individuals who wanted, come what may, to impose a scientific theory on the Qur’an.

The second class covers the verses that have expressed subjects in the framework of figurative expressions, allegories and metaphors, and some people by resorting to this group of verses want to conclude that the entire Qur’an is analogy, allegory, metaphor, and similitude, and none of its subjects is consistent and in accordance with the truth. In this case, we mentioned that the prime essence in the common conversations and dialogues of the wise is that the speaker conveys the real meaning of words and if it is other than this, he has to give an analogy. The existence of proverb, allegory, metaphor, and analogy in a language does not make all speeches and talks of the people speaking that language as interpreted figuratively and non-literally!

The third class constitutes the verses from whose exoteric meanings it can be deduced that they are not harmonious with the common scientific theories. For example, verses stating the manner of creating Adam (‘a) can be claimed to be inharmonious with the theory of the evolution of species; so, this point has been regarded as a proof of the falsity and lack of credibility of the said subject in the Qur’an.

Regarding this group of verses, we said that we should bear in mind that many of these scientific theories are still to the level of assumptions and not yet established. Secondly, the cases established have again in many instances not been established definitely and certainly and are only at the level that no defect in them has been detected so far. Yet, even their authors and proponents do not claim that the theory in question is definite and certain and that there is no possibility of being falsified. It is clear that if we assume that a subject can be deduced in the Qur’an in a definite form (real certainty and consistent with the reality), the conjectural scientific theory cannot serve as the proof of falsity of a definite subject understood from the Qur’an and traditions. Thirdly, so many of the scientific theories have exceptions, and the solution may be in paying attention to this point just as we have explained regarding Darwin’s theory of the evolution of species.

## Question and Answer

**Question:** You said that the lower heaven consists of the stars and planets a part of whose boundless expanse has been discovered by science today. You can add to this expanse the expanse of the seven heavens which according to you as deduced from the Qur'an encompass these stars and planets and are located above them. Then, how did the Prophet (S) in a winking of the eyes traverse this distance and expanse while the wings of angels could be burned? How could the issue surrounding distance be reconciled with lifespan?

The other question is: Has Satan not vowed to lead astray the human beings, and is usury not one of the ways of perdition and one of the prohibitions to which man succumbed through the temptation of Satan? It seems that contrary to those who want to examine the Qur'an by scientific principles, you try not to accept any solid fact, and to compensate man's lack of knowledge with devotion? Why is it not possible for Satan to have communication with man? In view of this role of Satan in the deviation of man, how can the issue of man's duty be justified?

**Answer:** The issue of the Holy Prophet's ascension [*mi'raj*] in which he traversed the distance between the territorial spheres and the galaxies in a very short span, witnessed many things and returned and according to some traditions, its time span was so short that the water jug that fell had not yet dried (during the Prophet's return from the ascension) how could such a thing be reconciled with the scientific laws? This is a question that must be approached in two ways. One way pertains to the verity of traversing such a great distance not to mention its time span which is beyond our comprehension. How could it be possible for man?

This is especially true if we consider the fact that at the time, advanced technological devices such as space missile, spaceships, oxygen tank, solution to the problem of weightlessness, and others were not yet at the disposal of mankind. The answer to this question is related to this famous discussion what relation does miracle have with natural factors? In this respect, this question is exactly like asking: How did the staff of Prophet Musa (‘a) turn into a snake, swallow all the snakes of the magicians and turn again into a wooden staff? Every answer we give to the rest of miracles and their comparison to the natural factors will be the answer we give here. In brief, the general reply is that concerning miracles, a set of metaphysical factors which we do not know play in. God is aware of them and He grants those factors at the disposal of His prophet or any other person He wishes. Given this, once there is the discussion on the intervention of metaphysical factors beyond the reach of man, it no longer makes a difference whether the Prophet (S) would have gone as far as Mars or traversed all the seven heavens. This journey took place by the will of God and by means of metaphysical factors at the disposal of God the Exalted, and we have information of their details.

The second aspect of the issue of ascension is this: How could such a very short span of time apart from the manner of conducting the journey be possible? This answer to this question is easier than the

previous. You know better than I do that time is a relative thing. It is different among various spaces and spheres. In Einsteinian physics and the law of relativity, it can be shown well how time is a relative matter, and at the speeds closer to the speed of light, how two different times will expire, for example, for a person seated inside an airplane which is moving at light speed and for a person on the surface of the earth witnessing and watching the airplane moving.

Therefore, keeping in view the issue of the relativity of time and the law of relativity, to some extent it can be imagined how it could be possible to travel a long distance and expanse at such a very short period. An example is “traveling around the world” which you have heard, and apart from the prophets and the Imams (‘a), some saints of God can, for example, in a winking of the eyes, traverse a long distance from a desert to Mecca, Medina, or any other place. Of course, the main answer in all these cases is that which we have to accept, i.e. apart from these natural and common factors, there is a set of metaphysical factors which we do not know.

Regarding the third question on the issue of man’s derangement by means of Satan in the explanation of verse, “*Like one deranged by the Devil’s touch,*” and the issue of usury we have cited, we have to say that different interpretations of this verse have been given. Some have said that for the usurer to be like someone deranged by the Devil’s touch means that the said person will gradually lose his business-related memory. Just as if a person became insane he cannot think properly and analyze issues, the usurer commits error and mistake in analyzing his business concerns.

The Arabic verb *yatakhabbat* [deranged] means that Satan, as the effect of his touch, damaged the person’s mind. The erroneous thinking of the usurer can be attributed to any evil source including Satan. Of course, we have to bear in mind that ‘Satan’ is not identical with “Iblis.” Iblis in reality is the name of the devil (*shaytan*) who deceived Adam and Hawwa’ (Eve), but ‘Satan’ is a common name which can be applied to every devil and source of evil, including man and *jinn*. The ‘Satan’ who is in touch with the usurer is a person who inspires erroneous thoughts to him. Of course, what appears in the text is that the usurer is likened to a person deranged by the devil’s touch.

Whatever the case may be, the question here is: Why has the Qur’an used this expression: “*deranged by the Devil’s touch*”? Does the Qur’an want to say that insanity is the effect of the Devil’s touch? Some have said that it is true that Satan is actually in touch with the insane, but it is not known to us the mode of this touch and how it contributes to the person’s insanity. For example, in *Surah an-Nas*, the Qur’an says that Satan puts temptations into our breasts: “***Who puts temptations into the breasts of humans. (114:5)***” Can we really feel anything of this insinuation [*waswasah*] in our breasts? In case of insanity, Satan is in touch with the mind and senses of the person, but it is unknown and imperceptible to us.

In any case, what I have mentioned about this verse along the discussion was based on such an interpretation. Yet, there are other interpretations which are in no need for these justifications at all. For example, some have said that this expression is used only as a proverb and it is like the verse which

says, “*Like her who would undo her yarn, breaking it up.*” From the second verse, it cannot be concluded that the Qur’an wants to endorse the real existence of an old woman who undoes her yarn and the story about her; rather, it is only a proverb. In this verse which says, “*Like one deranged by the Devil’s touch,*” it cannot be concluded that the Qur’an wishes to endorse that the cause of insanity is Satan’s being in touch with man. In the same vein, it cannot be concluded from the terms *junun* and *majnun* that insanity is the result of the touch of jinn and devils; rather, it is a word set for the concept of insane in Arabic and the Qur’an which is also in Arabic has used it.

## Transliteration Symbols

Symbol	Transliteration Symbol	Transliteration
ء	’	أ
		A
ب	B	ت
		t
ث	th	ج
		j
ح	h	خ
		kh
د	d	ذ
		dh
ر	r	ز
		z
س	s	ش
		sh
ص	s	ض
		dh
ط	t	ظ
		z
ع	‘	غ
		gh
ف	f	ق
		q
ك	k	ل
		l
م	m	ن
		n
هـ	h	و
		w
ي	y	ة
		ah
<b>Long Vowels</b>		<b>Short Vowels</b>
آ	a	َ
		a

و	u	؛	u
ي	i	;	i
<b>Persian Letters</b>			
<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Transliteration</b>	<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Transliteration</b>
پ	p	چ	ch
ژ	zh	گ	g

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