

Lesson 12: Dualism and Monotheism

Good and Evil

Dualists were those who believed that creation are divided into two – good and evil. According to this they believed in two sources of creation for the universe and said that the good things were made by Yazdan and the evil things by Ahriman. Their purpose in this belief was to make God free from imperfection, insufficiency and evil.

However, they were unaware that in this belief they were guilty of the polytheism mentioned in the previous chapter. Moreover, they were mistaken in dividing creation into two compartments – good and evil – because, if the entire order of things is examined, it becomes clear that there is no evil in the world at all, because everything in its place has the quality of goodness.

They also believed that the existence of what they called evil was distinct from the existence of what they called good, and thereby they came to the conclusion that the problem could be solved by positing two sources for the existence of the universe – a good source for the good things and a bad source for the bad things.

In fact, a more careful understanding would show that these two aspects couldn't be separated from each other. For example: Rain is good because it is useful for agriculture, but some people may think that rain is bad because it ruins houses made of mud and straw in which people live in some parts of the world.

Clearly, the dualists' way cannot resolve the difficulty they raised, because the evil of rain is not divorced from its benefit. In fact there are not two existents – one good (from God), and the other bad (from another source). The holy Qur'an and Hadith show the solution. Reason would also acknowledge this solution through considering those things whose goodness cannot be perceived at a glance, such as thirst, hunger, the problems of life, mental difficulties, extreme cold and heat, poisonous animals, etc. In fact, in the complete order of things, all is necessary and good.

For further consideration one may examine the following:

The avoidance of Danger

The human body is composed of flesh and bones, which are subject to attack. Fire alone can reduce the body to ash in a short time, and the same body has no resistance to cuts and beatings one stroke, if powerful enough, can damage it severely.

For protection of man from great dangers, God has designed several agents.

1. Thirst and hunger may, from a short-sighted point of view, appear not to be a very good thing, but, in fact, they play an important role in the economy of the human body. These feelings ensure the life of thousands of millions of cells. If man were without these sensations, the activity of the cells of his body would become depressed in a short time, and he would be in danger of death and, indeed, would eventually die.

2. The sensation of pain and the sensitivity of the nerves are of the gifts of creation. In fact, the nerves of man form a very complex network of communication. With the least feeling of discomfort, they sound a bell of warning, and excite man so that he will avoid or fight the danger. If it were not for the sensation of pain, sick persons would not go for treatment. If the nerves did not feel discomfort, or ignored it, the skin and the flesh could be destroyed by fire and turned into ashes; or, if there were an encounter with something sharp or hard, the bones could be damaged.

Therefore, finding hardship in these sensations would lead to understanding that they serve as a red warning lamp, a reason for man to pay attention to the continuation of his existence and his safety, to seek the path of health and continue his life.

Difficulties and experience

Scientists say that the world of nature is the world of growth and perfection, and that these phenomena are connected with discomforts and difficulties, because hardship and difficulties give experience to the spirit and strengthen the substance of man. It is these discomforts that educate the spirit of man, for it is in the fire of difficulties that man is tried and strengthened and his soul matured. Man's perfection must be achieved through the breaking of his complacency, so that he may find a way through from his inner experience to the outside world.

Great men are those who have met with many ups and downs in their lives and experienced many trials and tribulations. As long as sandal-wood is not burnt it cannot release its fragrance.

Napoleon said that hardships and privations awaken and lend experience to man's intelligence.

Difficulties and the bitterness of life are factors that awaken man's dormant potential. Through them man can increase his achievements in the material, spiritual and intellectual domains.

The reason that most great men are seen to come from poor circumstances is that the poor have to fight

against the difference of life and this causes them to strengthen their intelligence.

The history of science and civilisation shows that progress in these fields is accompanied by difficulties and hardships. Such discomforts lead us to search for a solution, and then move us to find a more favourable situation. Therefore, those who are ignorant of the true reason why we experience hardships and discomforts and thereby consider them to be evil they have made a mistake.

Every soul has to experience the taste of death. We test you with both hardships and blessings. In the end you will all return to Us. (21:35)

People pray as earnestly to gain evil as one should to gain virtue. But people are hasty. (17:11)

You may not like something which, in fact, is for your good and something that you may love, in fact, may be evil. God knows, but you do not know. (2:216)

Criteria for Good and Evil

The error of the ancient Iranians who considered extremes of heat and cold and poisonous animals to be evil lay in their taking their own physical environment as the criterion of good and bad for all the things of this world. The fact remains that benefit and harm cannot be the criterion for the good and the evil in things rather, we must see what role everything plays in the total system of creation.

This same heat and cold, which, according to their short-sightedness and their erroneous assumptions, are bad, are, on the contrary, in the view of the scholar of natural sciences who looks at the world as a unit really a benefit, and their existence is a necessity for the growth of plants, animals and men.

Those who use their own benefit and disadvantage as the criteria for good and evil in the world can be compared with the ant who might consider that man is of no use to squash ants under his foot. Or that airplanes and cars, having no use for him, were therefore totally useless and harmful.

If ants think this about man and his inventions, are they correct? Where does their error come from? Is it not because they have considered only their own situation and what is connected with themselves as the measure of good and evil?

Again, consider those who are new to tropical coasts and think the excessive humidity which causes them to sweat and suffer the resultant discomforts to be only a negative phenomenon preventing people from continuing their normal lives. Is this judgement correct?

We know, in fact, that water-vapour rises up with a wind that comes from the sea coast and brings water to dry and hot areas remote from the sea, thus bringing new life to thirsty trees and moderating the intense heat, so as to enable millions of people to live in those areas.

The mistake in this way of thinking is that those who were on the coast considered only their own

situation and ignored the arrangement of existence as a whole. What is said above is followed by the conclusion that one must not assume from a cursory glance that things are useless. But that one must try to understand the effects of creation as a part of one complete system, not only in the present but also connected with the past and the future. Only then can one be in a position to judge.

Questions

1. Who were Dualists?
2. Who created the good and the bad things? (two names)
3. What was their purpose in this belief?
4. What roll do thirst and hunger play in the human body?
5. What would happen if man were to be without these sensations?
6. What would be the outcome without the sensation of pain and sensitivity?
7. What would happen if we find the hardships in these sensations?
8. What do scientists say about the world of nature?
9. What must man's perfection be achieved through?
10. What did Napoleon say about hardships and privations?
11. Through what can man increase his achievements in the material, spiritual and intellectual domains?
12. What is the reason that most great men come from poor circumstances?
13. What was an error made by the ancient Iranians who considered extremes of heat and cold and poisonous animals to be evil?

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