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Lesson Eighteen: The Inexhaustibility of the Different Dimensions of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is a book which has brought about the greatest and most astounding changes in the history of the human being. It possesses an everlasting vitality and shines continuously throughout every age of history. With the profound insight it exhibits in legislating for the human being and providing for all his genuine and natural needs, it is the richest and most abundant resource available to the human being. The comprehensive scheme proposed by Islam rests on a perception of his primordial nature. With a realism that is all its own, Islam analyzes the human being as he is and assumes a determining role in all the dimensions of his life. This is one of the reasons for the lasting validity of Islam.

Taking into account the extensive developments that have occurred in science, bringing in their wake fundamental and irreversible changes, the characteristics that set Islam apart from other schools of thought must be examined with great care.

Were the principles and regulations of Islam to belong to the same category as those of other schools, the ascending level of the knowledge of human beings would necessarily invalidate them.

But we see exactly the opposite is true. In circles that concern themselves with scientific and legal problems, the position of Islam is stronger than ever before; it enjoys increasing prestige and receives more attention than at any other time.

One of the clear characteristics of the Qur'an is that by means of a finite verbal form, it expresses an infinity of meaning that derives from the infinite knowledge of God. This is in contrast with all other books and writings where both the verbal form and the meanings they express are finite.

Imam Sadiq, upon whom be peace, said to Hammad: "I swear by God that I am aware of all that is in the heavens and the earth, and all that is in Paradise and hellfire." Hammad then looked at the Imam with astonishment, whereupon he continued: 'Oh Hammad, it is by means of the Book of God that I have this knowledge.' He then recited this verse:

'On the day that We raise up a witness for every people from among their own messengers and bring you forth as a witness for this people. We have sent this great Qur'an to you to make plain the reality of all things and to be a source of guidance, mercy and glad tidings for the Muslims.'

[1](#)

One of the companions of Imam Sadiq, upon whom be peace, related that he heard the Imam say: "I swear by God that I have in my possession all the truths of the Qur'an, from beginning to end. This book contains an account of the heavens and the earth, of that which is and that which has been, for the Qur'an makes apparent the reality of all things."

The Qur'an may be regarded as a transcript of the world of nature, the hidden secrets of which the passage of time and the expansion of knowledge have brought to light. The appearance of new and profound concepts in the Qur'an is therefore a continuing process.

God made His Book comprehensible so that human beings might reflect on it. Nonetheless, the secrets and mysteries of its verses become more apparent, and its rays exert a more powerful attraction, the more the scientific capacity of the human being increases and his researches concerning the scheme of the universe continue to expand. This is true also of researches into the psychology of the human being and the laws governing social and legal relationships. Thus thinkers who spend their lives studying exclusively civil or international law will never be able to reach the lofty pinnacle of the Qur'an.

As 'Ali, the Master of the Pious, said, "The Qur'an is a burning torch, the light of which will never be extinguished; it is a deep ocean, the depths of which will never be penetrated by human thought."[2](#)

From the dawn of Islam, scholars and believers have applied their lofty intellects to the study of the Qur'an in order to understand its various verses. In each age, hundreds of specialists have worked on the concepts of the Qur'an, each according to his degree of talent, and they have carved out paths for attaining knowledge of the Qur'an. Even in non-Islamic environments, some people have engaged in careful researches to bring out the meaning of the Qur'an, and the results they have attained have played an influential role in the dissemination of Islamic culture. These properties and attributes belong exclusively to the Qur'an, the value system of which is regarded as a precious legacy for all of mankind.

The unparalleled comprehensiveness of the Qur'an, when compared with other systems of legislation in the advanced and civilized world, is entirely apparent. It is here that we discover the vast difference between the Qur'an that was revealed to purify the human being and enable him to ascend, and the other source of legislation in the world. In countries where reliance is placed on those sources, laws are established with the aim of establishing human happiness but only through drawing on the abstract and imaginary ideas of thinkers and specialists in the field of law, in the hope that a fitting answer to all the material and spiritual needs of the human being might thus be provided.

But since those laws take into consideration only objective and external aspects of human life and fail to confront a whole series of fundamental realities, to such a degree that motive is sometimes regarded as

being dictated by material circumstances; and since, moreover, they take no account of the norms that prevail in the human being's inner being, they yield undesirable results and prove to be defective cones put into practice, despite their apparent soundness. Their modification and revision then become inevitable.

No one can claim that his scientific writings and researches or his technical innovations will remain unsurpassed in every age, for progress and development make it inevitable that with the passage of time, scientific research should enter new channels and both theory and practice change fundamentally.

Indeed, each individual scientist will revise his ideas and his works as the degree of his knowledge increases and the level of his awareness improves. He will seek to compensate for previous deficiencies. The door is always open for such revisions and corrections.

Furthermore, every human work, however valuable and precise, is of ultimately limited utility: its value is finite, such that a few experts and specialists learned in their trade will be able to clarify every part of the book and exhaust its contents.

But the Noble Qur'an is revelation, deriving from the knowledge of a Creator in Whose infinite ocean of wisdom all the intelligence, thoughts and perceptions of human beings are but a drop; compared to the blinding brilliance of the vision and knowledge that embrace all of being, they are like a feeble and flickering lamp.

The potentialities of the Qur'an for further investigation, discovery, and deduction are endless. This principle is not restricted to questions of law and jurisprudence; researchers in every branch of human knowledge can discover some new dimension of the Qur'an.

Even specialists in some of the modern sciences of the human being, such as psychology, sociology and the philosophy of history, can deduce new and exact points of scientific validity from the Qur'an. This shows that the Qur'an has a whole series of different capacities that cannot be exhausted by the imagination of a single culture or a single age. There is no other book on the general and particular aspects of which so much effort has been expended for fourteen centuries across such a vast area and which yet retains the capacity to be investigated still further.

It is obvious that the results obtained by thought and investigation will depend on the originality, skill and intellectual power of the individual scholar, so that the multidimensional meanings of the verses of the Qur'an cannot be restricted to what one individual has been able to deduce from them.

We should study carefully the topics contained in the Qur'an such as the origin of beings, the ineluctable future that is the afterlife, ethics, jurisprudence, law and historical narratives. Our aim is such a study should be more than a simple re-telling of events, a dry summary of contents; we should try to discover how the Qur'an has impelled human beings to advance intellectually from one stage to the next. Then we will encounter the true teachings of the Qur'an, and by opening up new fields of new knowledge and

enquiry, we will come to appreciate the unique richness and profundity of the Qur'an.

The spiritual, cultural and scientific richness of the Qur'an is such that if we tried to establish a kind of statistical bibliography for works written on the Qur'an including commentaries on the entire text, commentaries on its legal verses, and commentaries on certain surahs, the total would run into the tens of thousands.

Can this unique comprehensiveness of the Qur'an be explained by attributing it to the mind of a man who had never studied and who lived in an age of darkness and in one of the most backward of all countries – the Arabian Peninsula? Does anyone exist, even in today's world, who is capable of drawing up such a detailed and comprehensive program as that which Islamic law provides, a program moreover which is not purely abstract and theoretical but includes among its effects the spiritual ascent of the human being and the moral purity of society?

When we speak of the miraculousness of the Qur'an, we are not speaking on the basis of speculation or mere personal opinion, nor are we talking of something legendary or of purely historical significance. We base ourselves on scientific, rational and logical criteria, for the miraculousness of the Qur'an is a palpable truth comprehensible to any person of intelligence who has at his disposal the necessary information. Such a person will easily see the Qur'an is connected to a power superior to that of the human being.

Can all these unique properties and features of the Qur'an, which have retained their scientific significance and value for many centuries after the revelation, be regarded as something natural or commonplace? Or are they, on the contrary, a clear proof that the Qur'an, possessing these attributes to an infinite degree as it does, is to be ascribed to the Creator Who possesses Himself infinite existence?

Bartholome Heller, a French orientalist, discusses the comprehensiveness of the Qur'an in the following terms: "Just as we are obliged to appreciate the beauty and eloquence of the Qur'an by means of a translation, we also appreciate the beauty of the Psalms and the Vedas by means of a translation. There is, however, this difference: the Psalms do not contain a code of civil laws for the Jews, nor the Vedas for the Hindus, whereas the Qur'an contains an unparalleled variety of subject matter. The Qur'an is both a hymn in praise of God and a code of civil law; it is both prayer and supplication, and a warning and exhortation. It teaches both the methods of warfare and those of debate, and it is a book of history and stories." [3](#)

In 1951, the College of Law in Paris organized a week long seminar on Islamic jurisprudence in which the views of Islamic law on a variety of subjects were examined. The following communique was issued at the end of the seminar: "Islamic jurisprudence undoubtedly deserves to be regarded as one of the principal sources of law in the world. The views and opinions of the different schools of Islamic law contain abundant resources which are truly astounding and which can be drawn on by Islamic jurists to furnish answers to all the questions of modern life."

The Permanent Attraction Exerted by the Qur'an

Another aspect of the Qur'an which serves to indicate its unique and exceptional nature is the remarkable and inexhaustible attraction that it exerts. Take the best poems or pieces of literature, and read them several times. You will come to see that for all the interest you have in reading them and all the pleasure they give you, a repeated reading of them will tire and even bore you in the end.

The effectiveness and attractiveness of the best writings produced by geniuses of the past and present is not something fixed, immutable, and permanent. For a time, they can hold the reader under their sway but they will gradually forfeit their attractiveness so that in the end they can neither command attention nor cause any pleasure.

However, if we examine the Qur'an, this transcript of a heavenly archetype, from this point of view, we will see that those who are acquainted with the Qur'an and have acquired some of the riches contained in its teaching are well aware that there is a direct relationship between the repeated reading of the Qur'an and the attraction that it exerts. They read or recite God's verses hundreds of times, and each time the Qur'an acquires a different aspect for them, an aspect that conquers and overwhelms their soul and their spirit.

Their experience of spiritual pleasure is in direct proportion to their comprehension of the exalted concepts of the Qur'an, and indeed anyone can satisfy his spiritual needs by referring constantly to the Qur'an and benefiting from it to the degree of his capacity to know and perceive.

The rays of attraction exerted by the Qur'an spread outwards from Mecca together with the movement of the Muslims. They shone in the Christian court of Ethiopia, thanks to the recitation of Ja'far bin Abi Talib, despite the unfavorable situation prevailing there and the pressure brought to bear by the opponents of Islam. Equally, they shone in Medina, the base for the formation of a new society, where the Qur'an was recited by Mus'qab bin 'Umayr.

Active people such as these were dedicated to destroying false values and bringing into being a movement that would result in fundamental changes in the way of life and thought and society. They sought to spread awareness among human beings and to encourage them to adopt a realistic attitude towards the truths of the Qur'an.

With its message, the Qur'an provided human beings with the means needed for making a choice between falsehood, on the one hand, and the new values that were enabling human beings to refashion their lives, on the other. For the life of the human being has no meaning unless he adheres to a certain worldview, a vision of existence and history, and a concept of the aim of creation.

Today, more than fourteen centuries after the revelation of the Qur'an, the captivating sound of the recitation of the Qur'an can still be heard in different parts of the world.

From buildings in cities and villages, from tents in the desert, from places of temporary lodging, along the routes where people travel, at every hour and minute of the day and in the heart of the night when all things are veiled in a profound and meaningful silence, the profoundly moving sound of the Qur'an being recited arises, leaving its impression on hearts and minds that have been attuned to its message and transforming fundamentally the spirits of all who listen to it. This happens continually without the Qur'an losing any of its freshness.

Although the Qur'an becomes intermingled with the various affairs and concerns of the human being's life as well as his emotions, it has always been immune against distortion and corruption.

If human knowledge and artifice had played any role in the codification of the Qur'anic text, the Qur'an would have resembled works of human origination that are always capable of being improved on at a later stage of development; for a time they possess a particular excellence, but they exert little effect on history and the ultimate destiny of the human being. They become obsolete, and the passage of time places the seal of death on them.

But God, Whose power and knowledge are infinite, has so adorned the Qur'an with harmonious and well-ordered speech that it always preserves its freshness and eternal validity.

The mission of the Qur'an is to plant the seed of monotheism with all of its dimensions everywhere in the history and civilization of the human being. It is eloquent and categorical in conveying its message; it negates all forms of purposelessness in the human being's existence and condemns superficiality, shortsightedness, which necessarily fail to lead the human being to reality.

As for the teachings of the Qur'an concerning the knowledge of God, they so draw the truth-seeking spirit of the human being to the exalted concepts they expound that it rises up far above the values of the material world and fixes its gaze on horizons where new dimensions of reality become visible.

God Who presents the Qur'an to mankind is a unique force who cannot be compared with any created being. The norms He has established rule over all the phenomenal world, and in His infinity, He cannot be contained within the conceptual world. The Qur'an proclaims:

"He is God, the One without like; He is all-hearing and all-seeing." (42: 11)

We know that all existing things can be classified either as matter or as energy, and the Qur'an refutes clearly the possibility that the exalted essence of God be compared either to matter or to energy. This is the categorical statement of the Qur'an:

"No eye can perceive Him, but He observes all eyes; He is subtle and invisible, and well-aware of all things." (6: 103)

The Qur'an guides the human being to reflect carefully on the scheme of creation, to ponder deeply the inner nature of the bounties with which he has been blessed as well as the phenomena which surround

him. A believer who travels through creation and reflects on the purposiveness of phenomena and contemplates the inner and outer aspects both of his own being and of his surroundings will reach the conclusion that all things are advancing – each by means of its specific path – toward a certain goal. If the human being wishes to attain his own salvation, he must conform to this universal tendency of all phenomena and join the caravan that is proceeding to the meeting with God.

The Noble Qur'an regards awareness of God as something innate in the human being, deriving from the very essence of the laws that govern creation. It depicts materialists and atheists as being caught up in a realm of mental abstraction and struggling against their innate disposition to seek God.

Similarly, all kinds of deviation from the path of monotheism, whether it be the dualism of Zoroastrianism or the Trinitarianism of Hinduism and Christianity (for the followers of Christianity imported the belief in the trinity into their faith from other religions), are condemned by the Qur'an. It regards all such deviations as attempts to conceal the truth:

"Those who say that God is one among three are unbelievers." (5:73)

When condemning the belief that Ezra and Jesus were sons of God, the Qur'an describes this belief as a remnant of the beliefs held by ancient peoples:

"The Jews and the Christians say that Ezra and Jesus were the sons of God. This is what they say with their tongues, following those who were unbelievers before them." (9:30)

The Qur'an makes this clear proclamation to the Prophet:

"Say: All praise belongs to God Who has never taken a son or a partner and Whose might and power can never diminish so that He might stand in need of a friend or a helper. Always praise the Divine Essence with mention of the greatest attributes of perfection." (17:111)

Finally, in a short surah, the Qur'an thoroughly refutes the false thinking that underlies polytheism as follows:

"Say: He is God, the One; He is not empty of content; He is not the offspring of anyone, nor is anyone His offspring; nor is anyone like unto Him." (112)

The statement that God is "not empty of content" (this being one of the possible meanings of *samad*) may relate to the fact that matter is hollow, generally speaking; there is a remarkable vacuum at the hearts of the atoms that make up the material world. This surah may thus be proclaiming that not belonging to the category of matter, God is "not empty of content."

Paul Clarence Ebersold, a physicist, poses this question: "Is God a person? Some people might reply that he is, but I do not think this scientifically correct. Scientifically speaking, we cannot form a material concept of God, for He exists beyond the realm of material perception. It is true, on the other hand, that

numerous phenomena prove His existence; the works of His creation show clearly that He possesses infinite intelligence, knowledge and power."^{[4](#)}

Weinhold, a well-known chemist, writes: "God does not represent some finite, material energy. Our limited ability to experiment and conceptualize is incapable of defining Him. Belief in the existence of God is a matter of the heart, although science may prove Him to be the prime and ultimate cause and thus indirectly reinforce the belief of the heart."^{[5](#)}

This is how the logic of science approaches the question of describing the existence of the Creator. That which the Qur'an says concerning His unique essence is, therefore, in exact conformity with the highest truths of science.

The true value and significance of the fully rational teachings of the Qur'an concerning God become particularly apparent when we adopt a comparative approach in examining the relevant verses of the Qur'an. We could compare them, for example, with the teachings of Ancient Greece, the beliefs of Buddhism or Zoroastrianism or those held by the Arabs in the Age of Ignorance, for each of these covered a considerable portion of the world at that time.

A neutral and objective comparison of this kind would enable us to appreciate better the value of the conscious belief preached by Islam, a belief based on pure monotheism in all of its aspects and aimed at channeling all human activities toward a single goal.

Such a comparison would also help us to understand more fully the miraculous nature of the Qur'an as an abundant source of truth, first made available to us more than fourteen centuries ago.

No one who is armed with the weapon of religion and is fully conscious of the true teachings of Islam will form attachment to anything apart from his faith and whatever he needs to attain his high goals.

^{[1.](#)} al-Qur'an wa'l-Ulum al-Islamiyya, p. 4.

^{[2.](#)} Usul al-Kafi, p. 591.

^{[3.](#)} Muhammad va Qur'an.

^{[4.](#)} Isbat-i Vujud-i Khuda, p. 58.

^{[5.](#)} Ibid., p. 230.

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