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Lesson Three: Resurrection, a Manifestation of God's Far-reaching Wisdom

There can be no doubt that the volitional acts and motions of man, in all their variety, proceed from inner motivations. All our strivings in their different aspects, are reflections of our intentions and ideals, as well as being attempts to fulfil them; they are like so many affirmative responses to the summons of our inclinations and wishes.

Even if we imagine that some of our volitional and deliberate acts completely free of personal motivation, we must not overlook the fact that none of our modes of behavior is ultimately separable from a hidden and unspoken goal. In the depths of every act a secret and apparently unknown aim is concealed.

For example, when we conceive the intention of doing good to someone, we are not inspired exclusively by a humanitarian desire or a generous impulse, contrary to what we imagine. It is the desire for our own peace of mind which is our primary motivation.

The same is the case with any natural factor within the realm of nature; it, too, cannot lack an ideal and goal. The difference is that what man undertakes as a result of knowledge and awareness arises in nature as the product of a natural factor, totally unconnected to knowledge and perception. In both cases, then, the essence of the matter is the same; the presence of an aim and a goal.

The intellect that is free of illusion understands that the whole structure of the universe has the implicit wish to nurture within it a being that will be endowed with thought, capable of development, empowered over its own destiny, and able to emerge from the confines of subjection to the instincts, to move in the orbit of guidance by the light of its own intelligence, and to choose freely the path of ascent or that of decline.

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In addition, science presents to us the picture of a well-ordered universe that is regulated by precise and

unfailing laws and norms. It is a universe in which all things the wing of a moth, the leaf of a tree, a grain of sand follow precise systems peculiar to themselves and regulating their motions with geometric precision. From the atom to the galaxy which contains several suns within itself, from the galaxy to infinite space which in turn contains numerous galaxies within itself, the whole infinitude of being, ranging from the smallest particle to the largest of heavenly bodies everything moves in accordance with a unique and amazing regularity.

This being the case, it is quite incompatible with man's intelligence as well as with his scientific thought to assert that in all the extensive indeed infinite activities that take place in the world there is no connection between the doer and the deed or the doer and his purpose.

Once we assume that the wondrous system of the universe has been created by an infinite knowledge and power, we cannot believe that the Creator should place in the very heart of the universe and all its creatures, whether animate or inanimate, laws that regulate their functioning, and equip each of those creatures with the means necessary for subsistence, without pursuing a definite goal in all this planning and ordering.

A society composed of believers in the unity of God, recognizing Him to possess all forms of perfection, also accept without equivocation that the order of the world has a purpose.

How can one simultaneously bear witness to the infinite knowledge and the eternal power and wisdom of the Creator and deny that all the activity of that sublime being has an ultimate goal?

It is inconceivable that we should assert that the seed of purpose has been sown in the smallest of our bodily organs and on the other hand claim that the destination of man as a totality is emptiness and aimlessness.

Beginning with the moment that his sperm is formed, man cannot be conceived of as a being that is left to its own devices, to follow the various stages of growth simply in accordance with natural instinct. It is also not sufficient if out of all the concerns that are necessary for him he contents himself only with assuring the means of existence.

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Generally speaking, the summons of all divine religions are based on the responsibility and accountability of man. The prophets and messengers of God have always declared, in the categorical manner that is peculiar to them, that in the vast, indeed infinite, world which lies before man, all of his deeds are subject to an accounting.

Accordingly, they have emphatically exhorted those who have accepted their message to prepare themselves for the great event which will take place throughout creation, causing it to enter a new stage, be submitted to a new order and take on a new life.

They have further commanded their followers to make use of their potentialities for growth, development and change in order to let all dimensions of their existence flourish and to prosper and attain salvation. They have warned them against doing anything which would earn them misery and wretchedness in the hereafter and cause them to burn in the fire of eternal regret.

With his own hand, man sows in this life the seed of his life in the hereafter; he determines himself the fate that will be his in the next world. To express it differently, his eternal life is formed from the materials he himself provides in advance.

Imagine a skilful painter who spends a great deal of time in creating a true work of art and then destroys it. Is it possible to regard such a person as rationally sound? There can be no doubt that no intelligent person would do such a thing.

Can the purpose behind the creation of the vast and magnificent scheme of being, woven together with such consummate skill, or the creation of man with all his restless faculties and powers, be the restricted, confined life of this world, with all the contradictions it contains? Is it the destiny of man to struggle hopelessly in a whirlpool of fantasy and blind imaginings, to be the captive of false criteria of his own fashioning, and then to be scattered like a handful of dust particles in the infinitude of space once death closes the book on his life?

If this were to be the case, would it not make the Creator resemble that hypothetical artist, nihilistic and purposeless? Would it not be quite incompatible with the knowledge and wise power of that aware and creative Being the light of whose far-reaching purposiveness is manifest in the inner and outer aspect of every atom of creation?

Were the divine wisdom to be thus drastically reduced, it could no longer be a broad river irrigating the whole plain of existence.

The caravan of being is bound, in the course of its journeying towards perfection, ultimately to reach absolute perfection, and we, too, whose source of being is God, will also return to that ultimate truth.

In the general order of the universe the coming of resurrection has a certain natural inevitability. Just as darkness brings light and justice emerges from oppression and injustice, so too the life of this world is succeeded by resurrection. If we deny this truth, we are in effect belittling the exact and precisely calculated ordinances that rule over creation, as well as the vast expanse of nature and the world which is too infinite and complex for our thought and vision to encompass. In addition, we are forgetting the principle of advance towards perfection that can be deduced from the careful observation of creation and the motion of all parts of the universe.

How can we accept on the one hand that this principle prevails over the entire system of creation, from the smallest particles of the atom to the huge and awe-inspiring heavenly bodies, and suppose on the other hand that the final result of the operation of this principle will be obliteration and utter non-being?

If this be our concept of the order of the universe, it will be incompatible with infinitude of creation and the countless phenomena that it contains. Wisdom and intelligence will be unable to reconcile with the wisdom of God, that infinite essence, the great planner of creation, the choice of this transient, material life as an ultimate goal.

Apart from the relative and transitional goals that can be observed throughout the system of the universe, there is a point of termination for all things, which the Qur'an describes as eternity and everlasting life.

“Whatever exists in the heavens and the earth belongs to God, and to Him is the return of all things.” (3:109)

“Whatever exists in the heavens and on the earth belongs to God, and to Him do all affairs revert and return.” (42:53)

The Maker has created the sublime order of being with limitless power and wisdom; He has brought into being countless creatures throughout the expanse of the world; and from among them He has chosen man as the supreme product of His workshop, even subordinating to his will all the phenomena of creation. If this Maker were then to decree that the whole existence of man should come to an end with his death, He would render fruitless and meaningless the very foundation for the existence of the world and the presence in it of so noble a creature as man.

However, based on the principle of growth towards perfection, the attainment of everlasting life represents the last stage of perfection. Otherwise, what growth would it be that after traversing a whole series of motions and changes the final destiny of all beings should be annihilation? For what is implied by the principle is progress and advancement, not change and development leading to nothing. Even a cyclical concept of motion and change would be meaningless, because it too would lack a final outcome and goal.

Apart from all this, human knowledge and science exclude the possibility of absolute annihilation for any phenomenon whatsoever; given the imperishability of matter and energy, the material particles that make up this world cannot be destroyed within the context of the present order of things.

All things will attain the perfection they seek when another order, based in immortality and eternity, comes to prevail over the scattered elements of this world, irrespective of whether the universal movement towards perfection takes place in the outer form of things or in their essence and content.

This comprehensive process of change, this permanent motion, becomes rationally acceptable and capable of being correctly understood only when it has a direction and an aim toward which it advances.

With its regular and precisely calculated motion, the entirety of the universe is moving forward to its final maturity i.e., resurrection just like a child advancing to the higher stage of development that maturity

represents. In short, the universal and innate progress of all things from defectiveness to a series of relative perfection has as its aim absolute perfection, just as the Qur'an declares:

“To Him you will return” (10:4).

Thus not only does the wheel of material progress never stop, and the entirety of the universe never cease advancing. At the same time, man's inner and spiritual progress and his lofty ideals cannot be completed under the conditions of his present existence. It is in fact the ending of the present order of things that brings about the beginning of his eternal life and the conditions that are required for him to attain lofty degree and sublime station. Freed from all kinds of material impurity, he discovers for himself a realm overflowing with both material and spiritual pleasure; it is there that his faith and deeds come to bear fruit, and everyone is requited for his convictions and acts.

Thus the Qur'an says: ***“We did not create the heavens and the earth and all they contain in vain and for no purpose” (28:27).***

Those who in all states standing, sitting, or lying remember God and reflect constantly on the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say,

“O Creator, you did not create this magnificent universe in vain; You are pure and exalted; preserve us from hellfire through Your grace.” (3:191).

“We did not create as a game the heavens and the earth and all they contain; We created them in justice and in accordance with wisdom, but most men know not” (44:38–39).

The one who is convinced of the far-reaching wisdom of God knows that in this vast arena where all things are uniquely submitted to His pre-eternal power nothing is left to its own devices or lacks fixed, defined content. He knows that the order of the world is nurtured by perfect wisdom and justice and that all the phenomena it contains are constantly changing and advancing in accordance with an orderly, harmonious, and ineluctable pattern.

Were rebellion and the violation of law to be the principle governing the universe, were the foundation of all existent things to be error, there would be no sign of harmony or orderliness in the world, and in fact we would be obliged to condemn the whole world to non-existence.

The believer in God's wisdom knows that he possesses himself the means of cultivating the inner world that will last unto eternity; he can either build and cultivate his future life, or set it ablaze and turn it into a ruin.

So if man has such a concept of the universe, he will never imagine that all dimensions of human existence are annihilated once this life comes to an end. He understands that the present order of things continues in a profound sense, in a form that is both appropriate and glorious, and that it is within that transformed order of things that his thirst for exalted values and ideals may be finally quenched.

The infinite essence of God is perfect in every respect; lack and need cannot assail His sacred being. It is, on the contrary, created things that stand in need of Him. God bestows the blessings of life, together with all powers and faculties, on man, and it is but natural that the final outcome of His creation should revert to Him. Thus the Qur'an says:

“O mankind, you stand in need of God; it is only His unique essence that is absolutely free of all need” (35: 15).

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God's wisdom thus necessitates that on a certain day men should be called to account for their deeds. The Qur'an promises that such a day will come:

“Of a certainty, God will gather all His creatures on the day of resurrection, all His deeds are inspired by knowledge and wisdom” (15:25).

The ultimate perfection of which man is truly worthy is not attainable in the sphere of this world. His growth towards perfection continues until in the afterlife he reaches his ultimate aim and desire, which is the attainment of union with the sublime origin of all being.

Men will come to meet their Creator in a way determined by their deeds, characteristics, and their conduct in this world. This is true both of the pure and the fortunate and of the wretched whose hearts are blackened with sin. For all creatures must inevitably submit to the irresistible will of God and the unfailing norms He has established; willingly or not, they return to Him.

However, the way in which they meet God is determined by their conduct while in this world and the attributes they have acquired. Once the deeds of men reach their conclusion, the results of their acts are revealed and become apparent. The quality of men's meeting with God depends, then, on the mode of behavior that has distinguished and characterized them in this world.

Thus the Qur'an proclaims:

“O man! To the degree that you strive to obey God you will in the end meet your Creator” (84:6).

“Your ending will be with God Almighty” (53:42).

“He is God Whose might and power are supreme over His servants. He sends angels as guards to watch over you, so that when the time for the death of one among you arrives Our messengers drive him forth. They show no lassitude in taking your soul. Then you will return to the Lord of the Universe Who is in reality the master of His servants. Be aware that judgement over mankind belongs to God, and He is swifter than anyone in calling to account” (6:61–62).

As for those black-hearted ones who are destined for hellfire, they too come face to face with the Most

Sacred Essence of God. However, God does not look upon them with favor and mercy, and they are deprived of His favor. The Qur'an says:

“There shall be no share for them on the day of resurrection: God will not speak to them or look in their direction” (3:77).

“The faces of one group of men will be luminous and smiling on the day when they meet God, while the faces of another group will be as if covered with dust: mired in shame, these will be the unbelievers, evil in conduct” (80:38–42).

Man possesses lofty religious and moral instincts that draw him to God. Under the influence of these instincts he will come to believe in God and desire to cross the boundaries which imprison him throughout his material life. Accordingly, he will eagerly and in a spirit of high aspiration renounce the outer, material life of this world for the sake of great goals and valuable ideals.

Such a transformation in his outlook is made possible by the fact that an eternal ideal wells up from his being and that he possesses lofty instincts which are related to eternity. Those instincts draw him in the direction of eternity so that ultimately he enters his true realm. All of this means that there is innate within man the capacity for life everlasting.

The deeds and conduct of man are like a seed from which eternal life grows, a seed that can flourish and develop only in a life of eternal bliss. The seeds that evildoers plant in this world also earn them a form of eternal life, one in which they reap the fruits of their evil.

`Ali b. Abi Talib, the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, remarked in this connection: “The world is a place of passage and the hereafter a place of abode.” (*Nahj al Balaghah*, Sermon 203)

It is in truth the hereafter that gives meaning to the life of this world.

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