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Man and the Universe: What Should Man Do?

There are four basic aspects to man's relationship with the universe:

- 1– Knowing the universe
- 2– Perceiving the universe
- 3– The changes in the universe
- 4– Changing the universe

The factors that can activate the four basic aspects mentioned above are:

1. Scientific, 2. Philosophical, 3. Intuitive, 4. Moral, 5. Wisdom, 6. Mystical, 7. Religious.

There are several points we must consider when discussing the aspects and factors mentioned above:

- 1– The identity and boundaries of these aspects and factors is not so clear-cut to make it impossible for them to become distinct and unmixable in the human mind or spirit. For example, we may have both scientific and intuitive knowledge of a fact; however, some people may not be capable of understanding one thing by two different ways simultaneously, so they must sacrifice one to gain the other.
- 2– The criterion for categorizing the aspects into these four kinds is that when the “self” encounters “anything other than the self” – the world outside and the world inside – it either engulfs and dominates it, thus gaining knowledge about it, or understands anything other than the self by the powerful universe–discovering senses it has in it, which is called receiving the universe. The human self–gains knowledge about facts by means of its communication with the human mind. If it proceeds to abstract, judge, compare, analyze, prioritize and theoretically select, and achieve a supreme kind of influence by means of extremely high feelings, it will have achieved reception.
- 3– There is a time in every human being's life when one realizes that there is a much higher state than their current one, and if the human being decides to achieve that more elevated position, the changing

process has already begun. Free will, of course, plays a highly significant role in man's changing process.

4– Man cannot change evolutionarily unless he recognizes his unity with others. In other words, the “self” (the ego) must be harmonious with other “selves;” the “self” cannot change without changing the other “selves.”

Thus, man cannot be indifferent about others on the path to evolution. For a developed, elevated human being cannot bear to see others suffer or be oppressed, and always endeavors to help them develop. Man will never change without trying to change others, too. There is also a good deal of *hadith* supporting this:

من أصبح و لم يهتم بامور المسلمين فليس بمسلم

“Muslim is not the one who wakes up in the morning without caring about other Muslims.”

5– Now let us take the seven factors into more detailed consideration:

a) Scientific knowledge: includes making contact with facts about the universe by means of observation and experiment.

Generally, any form of scientific knowledge consists of contact with facts about the universe for the purpose of learning them, by means of experiments, observations and conclusions about directly or indirectly observable topics or phenomena concerning the universe, whether in the world inside or in the world outside.

b) Intuitive knowledge: involves direct reception of facts without making use of sensory or experimental observations; i.e., Perceiving the truth beyond qualitative or quantitative phenomena and observable beauties. Intuitive reception requires going through the appropriate preliminaries and paths. Intuitively recognizing beauty, for instance, it is necessary to make sensory contact with beautiful phenomena.

This contact is not, however, in manner in which man can understand how and when he will intuitively recognize beauty. In other words, specific intuition about beauty cannot be regarded as a synthesis based on the previous interaction of several units, or as a certain result of direct logical comparison arising from two major and minor premises.

c) Moral knowledge consists of the development and flourish of knowledge gained by the senses and other tools of knowledge and intellect in an inside guided by conscience. Thus, when a human being of high moral ethics and values gains knowledge of mankind and the universe, the knowledge will always flow through him like something that is continually renewing itself. The knowledge will never form a barrier between man and the truth; it will never be used for selfish desires.

d) Knowledge by wisdom: If we consider the first four forms of knowledge mentioned above as man's motive and guide in life, the mystic knowledge they acquire can be called wisdom. Here, man harmonizes the four kinds of knowledge, and uses them in order to move toward intelligible life.

e) Mystical knowledge: If the aspects mentioned above are accompanied by a divine light than places man in the domain of the attraction of the truth, making man move toward it, man will achieve mystical reception and understanding.

f) Religious knowledge: Religious knowledge consists of faith in the properness of acquiring these six aspects in order to move along the path of divine attraction with the determined principles based upon what holy prophets of God preached.

6– None of the seven factors are produced by the human mind. One or several factors of knowledge have arisen and been used by man depending on the conditions of the time and locations he existed in. Most people have only used some of them; very few have been able to gain them all; Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi) and Avicenna were among those very special ones.

The seven factors can support and complete each other. Some thinkers believe that each of the seven factors have a specific, distinct identity, and conflict with each other, but this calls for criticism and further consideration. In fact, the seven factors cannot be separated, for each completes the other. For instance, man can use technology to discover some aspects of the human nature, but he can never claim that he has discovered man scientifically as man really is. Likewise, it is wrong to claim that one has explored the entire universe intuitively. When the human character gains one of the factors, in fact, if it realizes what other factors exist and what they can do, it will feel insufficient, and attempt to achieve the other ones, too. If man only pays attention to philosophical knowledge of the universe but knows that some of his research must rely on scientific data, he will feel that his explorations are not complete unless he gains scientific knowledge, too.

Knowledge of the Universe by means of the Seven Factors

1– Scientific knowledge of the universe: consists of identifying the phenomena in the universe in order to discover the laws and principles that control them. The fact that water boils at 100 degrees Centigrade is a natural reality, and understanding it is a purely scientific issue. Likewise, $2 \times 2 = 4$ is a mathematical fact, for first we make contact with the limited by means of our senses, and then our mind abstracts from them.

2– Philosophical knowledge of the universe: The fact that we mentioned above – water boiling at 100 degrees – has several aspects, and one of them is philosophical. Heat involves motion, and motion is a philosophical issue. $2 \times 2 = 4$ also can be considered from a philosophical point of view, for the question arises whether these numbers are conventional or abstract.

3– Intuitive knowledge of the universe: It may be imagined that the examples given above have no room for intuition, but if we look at scientific contact from a much higher point of view, intuition will also play its part. As Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi says:

ذرّها دیدم دهانشان جمله باز گر بگویم، خردشان گردد دراز

I saw tiny, open-mouthed particles. If I were to tell you everything about them, it would take ages.

The above verse implies intuition.

Intuition involves the reality that activates interaction of substances from movement or movement out of substance interaction, guiding particles toward the field of factors that prolong and preserve their existence and also guiding the preserving field toward the particles. In a nutshell, it moves the identity of every being.

Thus, we must say that all scientific theories involving nature and its relationship with man, include a general subject upon which intuition is possible, and other subjects concerning the world of nature where intuition is possible are those that enter science by means of discovery. As we know, no discovery is possible without intuition.

Intuition also takes place in discoveries, too. Abstraction, which takes place in mathematical theorems, is an intuitive matter, for the truth of numbers cannot be reflected in the mind by any qualitative or quantitative aspects at all.

4– Knowledge of the universe from a moral ethics point of view: Separating the moral aspect from the scientific and philosophical aspects has led to harmful effects on man's life. Those who defend such a separation believe, "When we are studying and doing experiments about an observable phenomenon in the lab, it does not matter whether our relationship with people is based upon affection or hatred and revenge. It is not important whether we are using the lab by force or legally.

Even when we are busy testing, we should not think whether the results of our research will be advantageous to man or not." Moral knowledge makes man accept facts as he has understood them, and reflect them to others. Such a human being will never make other facts fade away by learning about one fact; he will never let his character be imprisoned by a certain fact, making him fall behind other facts.

5– Wisdom and knowledge of the universe: Studying the two mathematical and natural theorems mentioned above from the viewpoint of wisdom makes man aware of the great potentials in his brain and soul that are activated by gaining knowledge of these two theorems; he also realizes that the universe is founded on a supreme wisdom that has made all creatures move toward a certain end.

Here, man realizes that knowledge of the two above mentioned theorems is the effect of a universal wisdom that has been presented to us.

ای خدا ای خالق بی چند و چون آگهی از حال بیرون و درون

قطرة دانش که بخشیدی ز پیش متصل گردان به دریاهاى خویش

قطرة علم است اندر جان من و رهانش از هوى، وز خاک تن

O God, O Indisputable, O Aware of all inside and out Creator! Connect the drop of knowledge you gave us to your seas. Free the drop of knowledge in me from desires and lusts.

Here, Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi) means that if the knowledge man has gained is freed of lusts and desires with God's help and kindness, it will shine with wisdom and mysticism.

6- Mystical knowledge of the universe: here, man achieves an understanding beyond formal sciences, and sees a brilliant light in the universe that is not due to senses, reason or intellect; such a light can change what you know into what you see. Thus, in this form of understanding, man recognizes his dependency – and that of his knowledge – upon the universe in the form of intuitive knowledge.

7- Religious knowledge of the universe: Religion approves of any knowledge that reveals facts and knowledge of them to man. Religious knowledge creates a kind of light in man that makes his soul more fertile and productive. The religious aspect has all the other six aspects mentioned above.

Perceiving the Universe by means of the Seven Aspects

It seems that knowing differs from understanding (i.e. receiving). Knowing is the product of a fact arriving the mind and its awareness. Science and knowledge means man merely has a form of the fact in his mind, but when he understands it, the fact understood becomes a part of his character. He finds himself dependant upon it.

Those incapable of such understanding or reception had better go to the mountains one night of bright moonlight and put their physical, chemical, mathematical, astronomical and all their other viewpoints aside for a few minutes, and observe the spectacularly harmonious flow of the stars, the glorious silence of the mountains, the beautiful silvery moonlight spraying over them, and the exquisite music of the waterfall which amplifies the meaningfulness of the scenery. If man's mind and soul is even normally sound, his reception of these units and their whole will reach a limit where he will wish to be a part of them, or feel them as a part of him.

1- Perceiving the universe from a scientific aspect: Scientific knowledge differs from understanding it. Scientific knowledge is mental understanding of facts, but scientific understanding means man's soul acquiring the facts. We must remember that scientific knowledge and scientific understanding and acquisition do not depend upon each other. Man may have scientific knowledge, but he can be quite far from scientific reception, or even vice versa. However, the more comprehensive and complete scientific knowledge is, its reception and understanding will also be greater.

2- Perceiving the universe from a philosophical aspect: Philosophy means the knowledge of the basics and fundamentals of the universe or its creatures as they are, so philosophy can provide the human soul with the factors needed for understanding the universe. Man can gain complete knowledge of the universe, and achieve internal recognition and understanding of the basics and fundamentals of the universe. The best reason for such reception in man is the unique sense of excitement and joy man feels when its basics are founded in him. No sound man would say:

به جهان خرم از آنم که جهان خرم از اوست عاشقم بر همه عالم که همه عالم از اوست

I see the world lovely and beautiful because God, the most beautiful of all, has created it.

when watching beautiful scenery, Sa'adi must have received basic knowledge about the universe when he composed the above verse.

3- Perceiving the universe intuitively: In intuitive understanding, man's inside makes direct contact with facts. In fact, intuition is the highest form of understanding, and it can discover the truth. Thus, the certainty it results in is clearer than that of science and philosophy.

4- Perceiving the universe with a moral aspect: Morals make the human soul flourish, so that it can attract the good and intelligible ideals with an aware conscience. Moral ethics clarify man's understanding of the universe. Those who do not have good manners and temper, see the universe as dark and illusive, for their internal refinery is unable to purify the facts about the universe pouring into them. Their inside is already full of wishes and desires, so they regard as facts as baseless; the world never seems serious to them.

5- Perceiving the universe by wisdom: Understanding the wisdom of the universe and man's own existence, which has been emphasized by the holy prophets and great men, too. One cannot understand the universe without recognizing its value. Here, man uses all of his potentials and powers to achieve the truth about the universe and his own existence. In philosophical recognition, man's existence understands the general basics of the universe without realizing its value and properness.

6- Perceiving the universe with a mystic point of view: Here, the brilliant light of the universe, which is a ray of divine glory and beauty, is realized. This form of reception of the universe cannot be put into words. One cannot possibly understand such an extreme feeling without getting a taste of it.

7– Perceiving the universe with a religious aspect: As religions aims to make the human character and all of its potentials and aspects flourish and develop, all of the six forms of reception mentioned above are necessary to man. In Islam, if one is to make contact with his own existence intuitively, one must take all of these forms of reception into consideration, and take any necessary measures to gain them.

Changing by means of the Seven Aspects

Gaining knowledge about the universe by means of the above seven aspects can bring about “change” in man. Such change, which includes development of man's spirit, is the ideal of all prophets and men of wisdom. No thinker familiar with man and his various aspects would ever doubt the innate desirability of this form of change. Generally, by change, we mean revolutions in the human ego, from degraded levels to higher degrees of wisdom, reception and acquiring divine ways and values.

1– Change with a scientific aspect: If man separates his change and development from knowledge, and considers the two as totally distinct things, he is in fact battling his own self. Such a separation means, “I am a being for my own sake, and my knowledge of scientific issues, like $2 \times 2 = 4$ or explosives are dangerous are something totally separate.” We must remember that man gains knowledge and uses it to make weapons that can be used to save or destroy mankind. A human being full of animal desires and selfishness may take steps toward the annihilation of humanity. That is why we say that we must create the proportionate kind of development and change in each specific person by means of education or any other scientific knowledge.

2– Change with a philosophical aspect: Since the aim of philosophy is achieving general knowledge of the highest basics and concepts of the universe, and it saturates man's sense of seeking generalization and unity, philosophy can have a significant role in changing man profoundly.

3– Intuitive change: True intuition causes man's development.

4– Change with a moral change: Acquiring elevated moral values guides man toward perfection. Moral change provides the grounds for mystical change. Mystic ecstasy and excitement will be useless without man having purified himself of everything immoral. Alas, some jump to mystical change before achieving moral change, and this is premature maturity – better called “out-of-place” maturity.

They expose their soul to unreal expansions and contractions and fluctuations, and fall into despair and depression because they have not yet suitably adjusted or purified their own standing and duty with regard to the universe.

If man's internal wishes and lusts are not harnessed, he will fall for crude, mortal desires, and see himself and his personal ideals as the absolute. Such people will fall into conceit and arrogance, although it will seem like extreme modesty and humbleness. All in all, man will never achieve mystical change and development unless he acquires moral values.

5– Change with wisdom: By wisdom here we mean not pretending to be wise or drowning in fascinating jargon, but awareness of the supreme aim of life and the universe, and acting based on that awareness. By awareness, of course, in wisdom we refer to mental and spiritual clarity, not usual awareness.

6– Change with a mystic aspect: In real mysticism, the human ego is not regarded as the end; in fact, the ego is put on the path of change and development, freeing it from its natural self. In this form of change, all of man's forces and potentials are attracted by God. In mystical development, man's knowledge shines with mystical intuition in any state he may be.

7– Change with a religious aspect: Here, all of the six aspects mentioned above receive attention, for religious change covers all aspects.

Changing Others by means of the Seven Aspects

When man is on the path of change and has achieved spiritual evolution, he can also guide others to the path. He cannot say, “Others are not my business, for I have achieved spiritual completeness.” It is only in negative mysticisms that those who claim to be perfect ignore others' development. In order to guide others toward perfection, the guide himself should be a total master. In other words, the trainer must have achieved what he intends to provide his trainees with. As the renowned Philosopher Mirdamad is believed to have said:

ذات نایافته از هستی بخش کی تواند که شود هستی بخش

خشک ابری که شود ز آب تهی نآید از وی صفت آبدهی

How can one who has not been blessed try to bless others? How can a dry cloud ever produce rain?

1– Changing others from a scientific aspect: Scientific knowledge is as important in changing others as it is in changing oneself. Those who intend to develop other people should not separate people from the universe in their effort to help them focus on the domain of concepts and supernatural meanings.

2– Changing others from a philosophical aspect: As we know, by philosophical knowledge we do not mean mental chess games with a bunch of rigid concepts and sacrificing the facts of the universe with pleasant jargon; in fact, here we refer to understanding the basic fundamentals and principles of the universe. Philosophical training and development differs from teaching philosophy, for it requires preparing the trainees' minds to comprehend philosophical facts, and allow their human ego to develop having understood the basic fundamentals of the knowledge of the universe. Then, the great world inside man can flourish. Thus, philosophically developing and changing means the conversion of the little knowledge he has of the universe into its complete, detailed form.

3– Intuitively changing others: The trainer cannot create intuition in his trainees. What he can do, however, is to prepare their souls and minds to understand and receive intuitively. The trainer should intrigue mental concentration and the ability to focus in his trainees, free them of their predefined principles and basics and make them aware of their hidden potentials. We must remember that two kinds of intuition can be possible in intuitive developing:

a) General intuition about the universe, which occurs in great explorers of mystic knowledge.

b) Intuition about some facts of the universe and the supernatural. However, intuition of all facts and realities without need for intellect, sensory preliminaries and experimental activities is possible – at least, on the path of normal life.

4– Changing others with a moral aspect: Acquiring moral qualities can make man's potentials flourish. In fact, man's life cannot be changed without developing his moral values. Those trainers and instructors who ignore man's great moral aspects and only focus on scientific and technical issues, achieve no more than preparing man for his battle for survival. Man cannot be made to develop mystically unless he is also morally developed, too.

5– Changing others by wisdom: Here, man must acquire the highest of human qualities, to such an extent that he uses the qualities for decorating and transacting with his own disposition. Trainers and instructors cannot guide their trainees toward this aspect merely through moral aspects, for the basic aspects of wisdom must exist inside the individual himself if he is to exactly feel the necessity to follow them. In fact, only wisdom can provide the basis for moral ethics; wisdom to moral ethics is as the soul to the body.

6– Changing others with a mystical aspect: Self-knowledge is the first step in mystical change. Perseverance – the preliminary to action – and accepting facts are other important steps.

7– Changing others with a religious aspect: This is the main goal of all prophets God has sent. The other six aspects mentioned above are added advantages for human life, which if added to the religious aspect, can bring about man's ultimate development and perfection. In this aspect, one can move on the path of divine attraction and reach intelligible life by means of belief in basic religious principles and observing its soul-developing mandates.

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