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## Man as the Arena of Conflict between Good and Evil

Once we accept the previous principle, we can then deduce that the human being has a dual personality; this is part of the well-established Islamic anthropology. According to the Qur'an, God Almighty created man out of odorous black mud, which had been transformed into dry clay, and then He breathed His Spirit upon it; thus, emerged man. In other words, man is a muddy creature, which has the Spirit of God. The Glorious Qur'an describes the creation of man, thus:

***“And (remember) when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay of black mud altered. So, when I have made him and have breathed unto him of My spirit, do ye fall down, prostrating yourselves unto him.”***<sup>[94]</sup>

This fact is repeated in the different verses of the Qur'an. The reality must be emphasized that the human being has a twofold personality: heavenly and earthly. This creature has its origin in the earth and his hands are extended toward heaven. While glancing at this transitory world, his eyes are fixed on that everlasting world. This creature is the connecting link between animal and angel. It is this point that distinguishes him from the two, and raises the question—is he superior to the two, equal to, or inferior to them?

One of the companions of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) asked him as to who is superior, man or angel. The infallible Imam (‘a) replied that the Commander of the Faithful Imam ‘Ali (‘a) had the following answer to the same query:

God created the angels from reason without carnal desire and He created human beings from the combination of these two. Therefore, whoever uses his reason above his desire is superior to the angels

and whoever uses his desire above his reason is inferior to the four-footed ones.[95]

While pointing to this *hadīth* Jalīl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī [ar-Rūmī], a great gnostic and expounder of the subtleties of human existence, recites thus:

در حدیث آمد که یزدان مجید	خلق عالم را سه گونه آفرید
یک گُرْمرا جمله عقل و علم و خود	آن فرشه است، او نداند جز سجود
نیست اندر عنصرش حرص و هوا	نور مطلق، زنده از عشق خدا
یک گروه دیگر از دانش تهی	همچو حیوان از علف برفریهی
او نبیند جز که اصطبل و علف	از شقاوت غافل است و از شرف
این سوم هست آنمیزاد و بیشتر	نیم او ز فرشته و نیمش خر

*It is related in the hadīth that the Majestic God  
Created the creatures of the world (in) three kinds.  
One class (He made) entirely reason and knowledge and munificence;  
That is the angel: he knoweth naught but prostration in worship.  
In his original nature is no concupiscence and sensuality:  
He is absolute light, (he is) living through (his) love of God.  
Another class is devoid of knowledge,  
Like the animals (which lives) in fatness from (eating) fodder.  
It sees nothing but stable and fodder:  
It is heedless of (future) misery and glory (felicity).  
The third (class) is Adam's descendant and Man:  
Half of him is of the angel and half of him is ass.[96]*

This is the state of human existence. His worldly aspect directs him to the world while his celestial side spurs him to quest and growth.

جان گشاید سوی بالا، بالها  
در زده تن در زمین چنگالها

*The spirit unfolds its wings (to) fly) upwards;*  
*The body has stuck its claws in the earth.* [97]

Of course, it is stated in the Prophetic narrations that God created man out of His own mold.

خلق ما بر صورت خود کرد حق      وصف ما از وصف او گیرد سبق

*God created us in His image:*  
*Our qualities are instructed by* [98] *(are modeled upon) His qualities.* [99]

But this is only one side of the coin. It does not mean that man, as such, is superior to the angels and the representative of God. Rather, it points to the fact that man can, and should, make apparent and nurture his divine aspect, and make himself his Lord's worthy viceroy.

As such, man has a dual personality and each part of him drives him to its pertinent direction. As a result, an inner conflict arises in man, dichotomizing his being. There is a story about Majnūn, which illustrates well this state of humanity. One day Majnūn decided to pay a visit to Laylā who used to live with her tribe in a distant place. So, he went after a she-camel that he possessed and mounted it. The she-camel had just given birth to an offspring and so was not willing to leave the place. However, it had no choice but to take Majnūn.

But whenever Majnūn used to fall asleep due to fatigue, the halter that was in his hand naturally used to slacken and the she-camel, realizing that its master had fallen asleep, would swiftly change its direction and head hurriedly toward its foal. After a short while, Majnūn would wake up and realize that the she-camel had changed course. So, he would correct his course and, gripping the halter tightly, lead the camel toward Laylā. But after some time, Majnūn would lapse into sleep once again and the camel, with its young mind, would change its direction, so on and so forth. After going to and fro like this many times, Majnūn consequently realized that they have not even covered a half day's distance and that his actual problem was the rider heading toward his beloved and the animal ridden heading in another direction; he would not be able to reach Laylā so long as this situation was such and the two conflicting aims persisted. Mawlānā relates the story in the following words:

میل مجنون پیش آن لیلی روان      میل ناقه پس، پی کره دلوان

یگدم ار مجنونز خود غافلیدی      ناقه گرییدی و واپس آمدی

عشق و سودا، چون که پر بونش بدن      می نبودش چاره از بیخود شدن

آنکه باشد او مراقب، عقل بود  
عقل را سودی لیلی در ریود

لیگ ناقه، بس مراقب بود و چُست  
چون بدیدی اومهار خویش سست

فهم کردی زو، که غافل گشت و دنگ  
رو سپس کردی به کره بی درنگ

چون به خود باز آمدی، دیدی ز جا  
کوس پس رفته است بس فرسنگها

در سه روزه ره، بدین احوالها  
منم جنون در ترند سالها

*Majn's desire is speeding to the presence of that (beloved) Layl;*

*The she-camel's desire is running back after her foal.*

*If Majn forgot himself for one moment,*

*The she-camel would turn and go back.*

*Since his body was full of love and passion,*

*He had no recourse but to become beside himself.*

*That which is regardful was (ever) reason:*

*Passion for Layl carried (his) reason away.*

*But the she-camel was very regardful and alert:*

*Whenever she saw her toggle slack*

*She would at once perceive that he had become heedless and dazed,*

*And would turn her back to the foal without delay.*

*When he came to himself again, he would see on the spot [100]*

*That she had gone back many leagues.*

*In these conditions Majn remained going to and fro*

*For years on a three days' journey. [101]*

Yes, this is the condition of man, possessing existential dichotomy. As a result, man is always experiencing the greatest war he can ever imagine. All the great wars in history in reality are echoes of this same inner war. The wildest animals have never been observed to kill and tear up other animals except when they have to eat and cater for their subsistence needs.

No animal ever enjoys killing just for the sake of it or for amusement. However, man is not like this. Rather, at times he sinks so low that if he gets tired of slaying others, he teaches other human beings to

rip up and butcher one another in front of him. There was a time in the Roman Empire when physically powerful slaves were given training in warfare.

Then, as gladiators they were brought to the middle of the imperial coliseum and were watched while fighting each other, and then the victorious slaves had to slay those who were overwhelmed. Such is the situation of man who constantly invents new methods for killing his fellow beings. It is enough to recall that during the World War II that lasted for six years, fifty million people lost their lives, though advanced electronically-controlled weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles were not yet invented.

The root of all these crimes is that same animalistic instinct of man, by recognizing which the angels had beforehand protested to or questioned God about the selection of man for the vicegerency [*khilafah*]. However, this is not the whole truth. Throughout human history, we have been witnesses to the unprecedented endeavors of some people for the salvation of their fellow beings. Gandhi who was a law graduate, materially well-off, and belonging to the elitist Brahmin caste, had discarded his material comfort, and for the sake of freeing and saving the nation of India from the clutches of colonial rule, he gave up everything he possessed, and lost his life for the sake of equality among the Hindu castes and for guaranteeing the rights of the caste known as the 'untouchables'. Nelson Mandela, Albert Schweitzer,[102] Mother Teresa, and hundred others—all created immortal epics. In our own religious culture, the movement and uprising of Imam Husayn ('a) notwithstanding the absence of the least hope for military victory, is a vivid manifestation of that divine quality that is moulded in the natural constitution of man. Imam Khomein, in his own characteristic style, portrays human nature as follows:

Let it be known that man is a marvel possessing two lives and two worlds within one existence. That is, apparent life or the outward world, which is this worldly existence, and is associated with his body, and the other is 'inner life', the inward world, associated with the hidden, invisible, higher other world, his soul in short, which belongs to the realms of the invisible and celestial world, and consists of several levels and grades... For each one of them is specified host of guardians.

The host related with the divine and intellectual powers attracts him toward the sublime, heavenly spheres, and summons him to the acts of virtue and goodness. The other host of guardians is the ignoble and satanic, which attracts man toward the baser realms of darkness and shame, and invites him to the acts of villainy and destruction. There is always a state of conflict and strife between these two forces, and human existence serves as the battleground of these two bands.[103]

The late Farḡdīn Mashḡrḡ [104] relates this status of man, thus:

هست پنهان در نهادِ هر بشر

گفت دانایی که: گرگی خیره سر

روز و شب، مابین این انسان و گرگ

لا جرم جاری است پیکاری سترگ

گرگهاشان رهنما و رهبرند

مردمان گر یکدیگر را میدرند

گرگها فرمانروایی میکنند

اینکه انسان هست این سان دردمند

گرگهاشان آشنایان همنند

و آن ستمکاران که با هم محرمند

با گه باید گفت این حال عجیب؟

گرگها همراه و انسانها غریب

*A wise man said: 'A stubborn wolf  
Is hidden inside every man.  
Inevitably, there is a great conflict and war  
That takes place day and night between the man and the wolf.  
Men are at logger head with each other  
And these wolves lead and direct them.  
For, this man is ill and ill-fated;  
As such, the wolves rule over them.  
Those tyrants are together;  
Thus, their wolves are friends to one another.  
The wolves are together while men are far from one another.  
To whom should we share this amazing condition?'* [105]

From this principle, ample and valuable teachings can be derived, the most important of which are as follows:

1. Right to choose and select;
2. Necessity of self-cognition; and
3. Combat with the self as the major *jihad* [struggle].

## Right to choose and select

Once we acknowledge that mankind is indescribable (first principle), that man is a combination of the spirit of God and putrid clay (second principle), that the human being is an arena of conflict between these two instincts, then we can proceed to the principle that man is always in the process of choosing

and selecting.

Man is not a neutral spectator of his inner war; rather, he is like a commander who, by the choice he makes, acts to the benefit of one of the sides in the war. Man does not only enjoy the right to choose, but is also obliged to choose. In other words, he is compelled to choose, and in the jargon of existentialists, he is condemned to be free. Every movement of us is a form of choosing.

Even if one day we decide not to choose anymore, we have, with this decision, actually undertaken the act of choosing. That is, we have chosen not to choose or, in other words we have decided not to choose. Never for a moment can we ever imagine that we have refrained from choosing. Of course, the scope of this choosing is our conscious and voluntary actions and behaviour; not our genetic and environmental attributes.

For instance, we have not chosen our father, mother, race, or colour beforehand. Nevertheless, in our social behaviour and relations we are always in the state of choosing and selecting. It is through these assorted choices and selections that we build, demolish and rebuild ourselves.

We examine ourselves. We acquire a new description and account of ourselves. We again reject this description and adopt another one. In doing so, we construct and 'recreate' ourselves. For, "If indeed existence takes precedence over essence, then humanity is responsible for its own existence." [106] So long as man is alive this choice exists. So long as man is in the terrestrial plane of existence, this successive self-building and self-demolition is inevitable:

و آنچه همه بتها را در پیش تو بگدازم      صورتگر نقاشم، هر لحظه بتی سازم

چون نقش تو را بینم، در آتشش اندازم      صد نقش بانگیزم، با روح درآمیزم

یا آنچه کنی ویران هر خانه که می سازم      تو ساقی خماری، یا دشمن هشیاری

چون بوی تو دارد جان، جان را، هله بنوازم      جان ریخته شد بر تو، آمیخته شد با تو

با مهر تو همرنگم، با عشق تو هنبازم      هر خون که ز من روید، با خاک تو مگوید:

یا خانه درآ، جانا، یا خانه بپردازم      در خانه آب و گل بی توست خراب این دل

*As a portraitist every moment I make a beautiful idol  
But in the end I destroy all of them under your feet.  
I make hundreds of pictures and portraits and mix them with soul  
But as I see your picture and portrait, I will put all of them on fire.  
You are an intoxicated cupbearer, or a wary enemy,  
Or that you destroy every house I build.  
My soul is filled and mixed with you;  
As this soul has your fragrance, I revere and adore it.  
Every blood that flows in me says to your dust:  
'I'm synchronous and share with your love and affection.  
Without you this heart in this house of water and flower[107] is broken.  
O heart! Either go out of this physical house, or build it.[108]*

This power to choose is embedded within us, and we are inevitably responsible for ourselves and our choices. In this connection, God, the Most Sublime, says: ***“Lo! We have created man from a drop of thickened fluid to test him; so We make him hearing, knowing. Lo! We have shown him the way whether he be grateful or disbelieving.”***[109]

Elsewhere, while pointing out to the inattentiveness of man with respect to all the things endowed on him, God Almighty states: ***“Did We not assign unto him two eyes and a tongue and two lips, and guided him to the parting of the mountain ways?”***[110]

Accordingly, from the very beginning man is faced with a variety of choices at his disposal. But with respect to these choices, he is neither blind nor compelled to act blindly; rather, he has two eyes that see, two ears that hear, a cogent intellect, and remarkable power to enable him to choose. In this struggle and conflict, man is neither helpless nor unaided; in case he himself wants and chooses, he will be assisted by God. According to the Messenger of God (s), the heart of every human being possesses two chambers: one is the angel's domain while the other is under the sway of Satan. God renders help and support to the faithful through this angel.[111]

From here we proceed to the next point, which is a prerequisite of choice and indispensable for it; that is, freedom.

Man can only choose if he is free. To be free is latent in the meaning of choice. Once we have the right to choose to be free, we can pick and choose whatever we like. This freedom is not political, social or cultural; rather, it is above all these, and they all emanate from it. This freedom is the natural freedom. Here we do not wish to embark on an extensive and fruitless discussion of freedom, nor of compulsion, predestination and free-will. It is a debate that has engaged philosophers for centuries and millennia.

If we reflect on ourselves we easily observe this state of freedom in us, basically without which, there is no point in talking about education and ethics. The Glorious Qur'an also highlights this innate and



intuitive state of ours and on the basis of which it conveys its commendation and praise, or rebuke and chastisement to us. If man were not free, there would have been no need for the sending of prophets and revelation of divine scriptures. Hence, man is free to embrace the faith or deny it.

Even so, there are some people who regard this freedom to be an impediment to deviation and perversion, and by accepting it, have to shoulder their responsibility. They are averse to this assumption of accountability. They try to cast doubt on this principle of freedom and consider themselves compelled, helpless and vulnerable.

When the Messenger of God (s) was appointed to shoulder the mission of messengership [*risālah*], a group of the polytheists who considered the acceptance of the faith as taking responsibility for, and exercising control over their own carnal desires, claimed: “If God did not want it, we and our forefathers would not have become polytheists and since we have become so, it implies that God has approved it and it is God’s will.” As a result, they became fatalists, and would say that they did not have the right to select and were, perforce, polytheists. In reality, they were juxtaposing the power and will of God vis-à-vis their own power. They would claim that if they were truly free, it implied that God was powerless, and since God had power over everything, it meant that their unbelief and denial of the faith also stemmed from the will of God in the midst of which they had no option. Anticipating this type of argument and reasoning, God told His messenger: **“They who are idolaters will say: Had Allah willed, we had not ascribed (unto Him) partners neither had our fathers.”** [112]

God presents this attitude as an excuse for not responding to the prophet’s call and for disavowing them. In another place, He considers the same reasoning as the rationale for their freedom. Knowing that His messenger (s) was painstakingly trying and endeavoring to make the idolaters finally submissive and subservient to Islam, God Almighty restrained him from these endeavors and said to him: *“If Allah willed, He could have brought them all together to the guidance.”* [113] Therefore, the crux of the matter is not whether God has power or not; the point is that God wants to test human beings. For this reason, He says: **“Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are).”** [114]

As such, God desires everybody to embrace the faith. But He wants this acceptance of the faith to be done freely and without any compulsion. Otherwise, it would not have been difficult for Him to have created all with identical mental and emotional makeup so that they would be Muslims and faithful *en masse*.

Renunciation of freedom, then, is in fact the result of mere sophistry and caprice, not attention to esoteric and exoteric realities. The reason is that anyone who is keen on doing something feels a sort of freedom in relation to doing it, whereas if he is not inclined to do something, it gives him a feeling of fatalism. Most of us witness this circumstance in our daily lives. Anybody who is engaged in economic ventures and activities feels himself free and believes in the right to choose, while he or she who is only confined within the four corners of the house experiences a sense of determinism and believes that:

ما آبروی فقر و قناعت نمی بریم      با پادشه بگو که روزی مقدر است

*We talk not of poverty and contentment;  
Tell to the king that fortune is predetermined.*

The fact is that for our sustenance to be predetermined does not mean abandoning economic activities. Mawlānā describes this propensity and morale as follows:

درهر آن کای که میل استتبدان      قدرت خود را همی بینی عیان

و ندر آن کاری که میل نیست و خواست      خویش را جبری کنی، کین از خداست

*In every act for which you have inclination,  
You are clearly conscious of your power (to perform it),  
But in every act for which you have no inclination and desire,  
In regard to that (act) you have become a necessitarian, saying,  
'This is from God. [115]*

An illustrating story of these fatalists is that of a man who entered a certain garden without permission, approached a tree, and began picking its fruits. When the owner of the garden reproached him for doing so, he claimed predetermination and said that he was an involuntary servant of God, i.e. without control over anything, and he was picking the fruits of a tree belonging to God. The owner of the garden tied him with a rope and beat him on his back and sides with a piece of wood, and when the man objected to him for doing so, he answered:

گفت: از چوب خدا این بنده اش      می زند بر پشت دیگر بنده خوش

"چوب حق، و پشت و پهلو آن او      من غلام و آلت فرمان او

"گفت: توبه کردم از جبرای عیار      اختیار است، اختیار است، اختیار

*He answered, 'With God's cudgel this servant of His  
Is soundly beating the back of another servant.*

*'Tis God's cudgel, and the back and sides belong to Him:*

*I am (only) the slave and instrument of His command.*

*He (the thief) said, 'O cunning knave, I make a recantation of Necessitarianism:*

*There is free-will, there is free-will, (there is) free-will!' [116]*

## Necessity of self-cognition

As the state within man is in reality an arena of conflict between irreconcilably competing forces, everyone should be well acquainted with this battleground, opposing camps, and the types of weapons used in this conflict. Perhaps one could lead a prosperous life even without a knowledge of mathematics. Maybe one could be felicitous in life even without being familiar with the natural history of the world and geology.

Possibly one could enjoy a blissful life even without familiarity with the history of one's forebears or geography of the time. But no one could take a step toward perfection and bliss without knowing one's self.

Therefore, this is the knowledge from which no one could consider himself not to need. More than two thousand years ago, it was written on the door of the Delphi temple in Athens: "Know thyself." It seems that this saying will never fade and in no way relinquish its virtue and significance. All the efforts of Socrates were made to apply this maxim in his own case. As such, everybody throughout history has acknowledged his philosophy. Whether man regards himself as the center of the universe—as those in the past did believed—or as a speck of atom in the Milky Way—as people believe nowadays—he cannot escape from self-cognition. In no way can one ignore this cognizance. If man succeeds in drawing everything under his command but is ignorant of himself and unaware of the agitation within him, then he is still subjugated by his self and a prisoner of the forces within him.

Real freedom is not attained through dominance over nature but through recognition of one's self. But alas! Man drifts away from the path, and as he obtained knowledge of nature as well as mastery over it, he imagines it as the very path to happiness. While the enemy is inside the house, he goes to fight the windmills and so deceive himself in the manner of Don Quixote.[117]

The intention is not to show the knowledge of nature to be unimportant; rather, the point is that if this nature which has been subjugated is placed at the disposal of man who does not yet know himself, not only does it not guarantee his felicity but even provides powerful means for the destruction and massacre of human beings as it has been hitherto. As technology advances, moral decadence and degeneration have also increased. Anyone who is not cognizant of himself but is after the understanding

of nature loses the essence of his life's period, and falling to the level of creatures subjugated by their instincts. This kind of person, according to Mawlānā, is:

صد هزاران فصل داند از علوم      جان خود رامی نداند آن ظلوم

داند او خاصیت هر جوهری      در بیان جوهر خود چون خری

!که: "همی دانم یجوز و لایجوز"      خود ندانی تو یجوزی یا عجز

این روا و آن ناروا، دانی و لیک      توروا یاناروایی؟ بین تو نیک

قیمت هر کاله می دانکه چیست      قیمت خود را نادانی احمقی است

سعدها و نحسها دانسه ای      ننگری سعدی تو یاناشسته ای

جان جمله علمها این است این      که بدانی من کی ام در یوم دی

آن اصول دین بدانستی تو، لیک      بنگر اندر اصل خود، گر هست نیک

*He knows a hundred thousand superfluous matters[118] connected with  
The (various) sciences, (but) that unjust man does not know his own soul.  
He knows the special properties of every substance,  
(But) in elucidating his own substance(essence) he is(as ignorant) as an ass,  
Saying, 'I know (what is) permissible and impermissible'[119] Thou knowest not  
Whether thou thyself art permissible or (unpermissible as) an old woman.[120]  
Thou knowest this licit (thing) and that illicit (thing),  
But art thou licit or illicit? Consider well!  
Thou knowest what is the value of every article of merchandise;  
(If) thou knowest what is the value of thyself, 'tis folly.  
Thou hast become acquainted with the fortunate and inauspicious stars;  
Thou dost not look to see whether thou art fortunate or unwasted  
(spiritually foul and ill-favoured).*

*This, this, is the soul of all the sciences—*

*That thou shouldst know who thou shall be on the Day of Judgment.*

*Thou art acquainted with the fundamentals [us] of the Religion,*

*But look upon thine own fundamental [asl] and see whether it is good. [121]*

Well, the true essence of wisdom and foundation of true knowledge is self-cognition. This view on man and the true station of self-cognition in the West starts with Socrates and reaches its zenith in the philosophy of existentialism.[122] Søren Kierkegaard,[123] a Christian orator and thinker of Denmark, is regarded as the father and precursor of existentialism.

Although this idea is traced from the thoughts of such personalities as Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Apectitus, St. Augustine, and Pascal, it is through Kierkegaard that it has been presented systematically. In his short but productive life he produced valuable works, which proved very useful to those that came after him. Even though his contemporaries had not given much importance to his sayings, his thought is being increasingly recognized nowadays. The core of his thought, revolving around the human being, can be mentioned in the following five statements:

1. *Be yourself.* That is, behave in such a manner that your outer and inner self is in unison, and eschew any sort of pretension.
2. *Mind yourself.* That is, mind only your own business. Of course, it does not mean that one should be indifferent toward the affairs of others. Rather, the point is that everyone should be concerned first and foremost about himself. If everybody does so, naturally the society could have a brighter future.
3. *Know yourself.* That is, strive to have a correct picture of yourself which should be identical with reality as much as possible.
4. *Know your ideal condition.* That is, after acquiring an actual image of yourself, strive to identify the ideal image of yourself.
5. *Always move from your present to your ideal condition.* That is, after recognizing your real self and obtaining the correct picture of your ideal condition, set out on a perpetual journey and move toward your ideal station.[124] In the language of Mawlānā,

همچو مستسقی کز آبش سیر نیست      بر هر آنچه یافتی باقی میست

*By God, do not tarry in anything (any spiritual position) that thou hast gained,  
(But crave more) like one suffering from dropsy who is never sated with water.[125]*

Therefore, the core of existentialism, which is one of the most influential contemporary schools of philosophy, is nothing but self-cognition. In this case, “if the fundamental principle of existentialism, in short, is the primacy of knowledge of the soul over knowledge of the world, it appears that it can be said by implication that the proponent of this school, aside from not being an infidel, is [actually] concerned with the spirit of all knowledge and learning.”[126]

Such a judgment is natural since all religions have invited man to self-cognition and “the slogan of primacy of knowledge of the soul over knowledge of the world is a slogan, which stems from the heart of the teachings of Abrahamic faiths, and has abundant manifestations particularly in Islam.”[127]

The truth is that in our religious thought, self-cognition has been recognized as the spirit of all knowledge and learning (i.e., the most profitable of all kinds of knowledge). Imām ‘Alī (‘a) says: “Knowledge of the self is the most beneficial of all knowledge.”[128] Viewing self-cognition as the objective and apogee of knowledge, he (‘a) also says: “The highest degree of knowledge is that man would know his own self.”[129] Elsewhere he (‘a) says: “Whosoever has attained self-cognition has achieved greater victory.”[130]

All these emphases point to the significance and necessity of self-cognition in the discipline of Islamic anthropology. If knowledge of the self is equivalent to knowledge of God,[131] it follows that oblivion of the self means oblivion of God. So, if there is someone who does not know himself and claims to have knowledge of God, then according to Imām ‘Alī (‘a), there is room for distrust and amazement.[132]

It is only through self-cognition that man is able to understand the purpose of creation, know his place in this system, and realize that the aim of imparting to us all these graces and endowments is something else, superior to and higher than what is visible. This world is a stage of action and its aim is a higher and more sublime sphere of existence. This lower and animal existence is not an end in itself.[133]

If man does not know himself and has no knowledge of the subtleties of his soul, he will then be afflicted with a multitude of destructive moral maladies such as hypocrisy, selfishness, pride, and polytheism. The first step in moral conduct [*sulḥ-e akhlīq*] is self-cognition. The aim of reckoning [*muhāsibah*], heeding [*murqibah*] and other ethical precepts is this self-cognition and nothing else. To cite an example, whoever does not know himself and is unaware of the real subtleties of his own self, experiences narrow-mindedness, and this in turn, provides the ground for pride to develop in him and “being a person with a narrow mentality, as soon as he beholds any merit in himself he imagines that he has position and status. He thinks he has acquired a high station.”[134]

It can thus be deduced that it is not pride unless it is based on ignorance and feeble-mindedness. Those whose ignorance is more and whose rational faculties are more defective, are more proud of themselves; and those whose knowledge is greater, whose souls are more capacious, and whose breasts are spacious—they are humbler and more modest.[135]

It is through this approach that Imām Khomein<sup>ؑ</sup>, may his soul be sanctified, gives preference to reforming the self over reforming others and reckons the interior as more important than the exterior. In this perspective, the essence is the interior and not the external conditions. If man be free from all external entanglements but has a feeling of inner bondage, he is then not truly free. If man possesses the whole world but internally feels indigence, he is still destitute.

گفت چشم تنگ دنیا دوست را      یا قناعت پر کند یا خاک گور

*He said that the covetous eye of the worldly man is either satisfied  
Through contentment, or will be filled with the earth of the grave.*[136]

Basically, everything originates internally. So, while quoting a *hadīth* which expresses, “The freeman is free in all circumstances,”[137] the Imām says:

Let it be known to you that contentment comes from the heart and the absence of neediness is a spiritual state, unrelated to external matters that lie outside the human self. I have myself seen certain persons among rich and wealthy classes who say things which no honorable poor man would say.[138]

This point is not restricted to wealth alone. All other conditions are like that. For this reason, the Imām invites all, particularly the theology students, to begin with and reform themselves, saying that: The first thing that the learned in religious sciences and the seekers of this perilous road must take into consideration is self-reform during the period of studies, counting it as far as possible to be the foremost of their duties, for this is harder and more obligatory than all the duties and obligations dictated by *shar‘ah* and reason.[139]

Non-recognition of the self springs from blindness of the heart and inner loss of sight, which is considered as the origin of all adversities. Hence, “one must be very fearful of this inner blindness of vision which is the main source of all kinds of darkness and wretchedness. The blindness of the heart is the source of all misfortunes.”[140]

Thus, self-cognition is the fountainhead of all human perfection while self-ignorance is the root of all deprivation and humiliation of man. So, knowledge of the self is superior to knowledge of the world, and appears to be even more important than many religious sciences. As such, this knowledge should be accorded its own separate place and be developed and expanded. One should not be unduly confined to collecting and amassing terms of little use; rather, one should think of understanding one’s real self and the intricacies and subtleties of the soul.

## Combat with the self as the major *jihad* {struggle}

The explication of the major *jihad* [struggle] and combat with the self can be traced from an event which has been narrated from the Messenger of God (s). The story runs as follows: The Messenger of God (s) dispatched a contingent of the army from among the Muslims to a battlefield.

Upon their successful return, he (s) said to them: “Blessed are those who have performed the minor *jihad* and have yet to perform the major *jihad*.” They asked, “O Messenger of God, what is the major *jihad*?” He (s) replied: “The *jihad* of the self (combat with the self).”[141]

In this manner, combat with the self and the major *jihad* [struggle] entered our moral culture and attained an eminent status in our religious literature. But, what is meant by this ‘combat with the self’?

We can only talk about combat with the self when the preceding principles have been well understood and accepted. Once we acknowledge that man has dual personalities and between which a constant war is taking place, we can then have a proper understanding of combat with the self. What is meant by ‘self’ [*nafs*] here is not the philosophical sense of the term. Rather, it means the world of carnal instincts and desires. The totality of all existential needs, motives, and sexual impulses is called ‘self’ [*nafs*].

As such, what is meant by combat with the self is the struggle against these instincts; though this understanding is somewhat premature and fails to convey the exact import of the *hadith*. The objective of combat with the self, in a nutshell, is to place all carnal powers, desires and instincts under the dictates of reason and use them for serving God and perfecting the self.

It is from this aspect that Imam Khomein<sup>ؑ</sup> describes it as follows: “Thus the *jihad* of the self... implies overpowering one’s own powers and faculties, and placing them under God’s command, and purging the domain of our body of satanic elements and their forces.”[142]

Combat with the self, in the Imam’s code of ethics has such an esteemed position that he commences his book, *Sharh-e Chehel Hadith* [Exposition of Forty *Hadiths*] with it and the first *hadith* he expounds is this very *hadith* of ‘combat with the self’, considering it loftier than attaining martyrdom in the way of God: “Thus, the *jihad* of the self is the *jihad* of greater importance. This *jihad* is superior to being killed in the way of God...”[143]

The reason behind the importance of combat with the self in relation to the conventional *jihad* is obvious.

If somebody abandons (conventional) *jihad* he has then committed a grave sin and caused the defeat of others while if somebody pulls out of the combat with the self, he, in fact, is vanquished and has caused his own fall. Military combat is not constant. But combat with the self is an arduous and constant activity. In military combat there are others who can help the person. Yet in the combat with the self it is the very person himself who should render the final blow to the enemy and gain victory. In military combat victory



is sometimes so apparent and conspicuous that it elicits the applause and eulogy of everybody and gives a boost to one's pride. However, in the combat with the self nobody is a witness as to what is taking place inside man and victory does not evoke praise and congratulations from anyone.

The story of a *mujāhid* [combatant] who had been fighting and gaining marvellous victories for years and then, in seclusion, engaged in combat with the self, and the reactions of the self, which Mawlānā has elaborately narrated, is the best example of such differences. In short, these distinctions and many others exemplify the primacy of combat with the self over combat against an adversary—(as combat with the self involves fighting with) an adversary whose killing is not easily possible and who is more powerful than any outer enemy:

ماند خصمی زو بتدر اندرون

ای شهان! کشتیمما خصم برون

شیر باطن ، سُخره خرگوش نیست

کشتن این، کار عقل و هوش نیست

کو به دریاهان گرید کم و کاست

نوزخ است این نفس و نوزخ ازدهاست

کم نگرید سوزش آن خَلق سوز

هفت دریا را در آشامد، هنوز

اندر آیند اندر او زار و خجل

سنگها و کافران سنگ دل

*O kings, we have slain the outward enemy,*

*(But) there remains within (us) a worse enemy than he.*

*To slay this (enemy) is not the work of reason and intelligence:*

*The inward lion is not subdued by the hare.*

*This carnal self [nafs] is Hell, and Hell is a dragon*

*(The fire of) which is not diminished by oceans (of water).*

*It would drink up the Seven Seas, and still*

*The blazing of that consumer of all creatures would not become less.*

*Stones and stony-hearted infidels enter it,*

*Miserable and shame-faced.* [144]

Of course, it should not be assumed that since combat with the self is superior to that against an adversary, one should abandon the latter and engage only the former. Unfortunately, this understanding

had emerged among a group of people and they would replace this one with the other. They were negligent of the fact that combat against an adversary is the preliminary of combat with the self and it is only after triumphing over an outer foe and obtaining the necessary preparedness that one can engage in combat with the self.

Thus, it was only after a contingent of that army had defeated the enemies that the Messenger of God (s) apprised them of the combat with the self, and not prior to (the triumphant return of the contingent). This shows that it is only after the outer *jihad* has been performed that one can talk about combat with the self.

Anyhow, the quintessence of Islamic morality is this combat with the self, which the Imam also emphasizes so much and reckons it as the touchstone of man's prosperity or adversity. He describes the arena of this conflict as follows:

The human soul inhabits another realm and another territory also, which is the world of the hidden and the sphere of the sublime world. In that world, the role of the sensual forces assumes graver dimensions. This is the place, where the struggle and conflict between the divine forces and the fiendish ones is more severe and also more significant. Everything that exists in the external or visible world drifts to this hidden world, and is manifested there. Whichever of the forces whether godly or devilish, is victorious here is essentially triumphant there also... it is possible that, God forbid, due to the defeat of heavenly forces, the self is left vacant for the unholy occupation of the vicious and unworthy satanic legions, and hence causing an eternal loss to the human being that cannot be retrieved.[145]

Nevertheless, this combat with the self sometimes brings about questions and ambiguities, which are the subject of the next discussion.

## Regulation of Instincts

Really, what should be done with our wayward instincts and earthly aspect? Once we accept that man is a blend of the spirit of God and putrid clay, and that this existential contradiction is the cause of the rise and fall of man's spiritual life, how could and should this contradiction be resolved? Since time immemorial this existential contradiction of man has been known to many thinkers and philosophers. Some of the Greek thinkers used to liken man's soul or spirit to a bird, held within the cage of body and shackled to the physical dimension. For instance, in an ode [*ghazal*] they claimed to be that of Mawlānā,[146] it appears thus:

چند روزی قفسی ساخته اند از بدنم

مرغ باغ ملکوتیم نیم از عالم خاک

*I'm a bird of the heavenly garden and not of this material world.*

*But for some moments they have made a cage out of my physical body.[147]*

For that reason, they have considered the body and physical dimension of man as a prison and an impediment to perfection, and life in this physical world as the greatest veil in reaching God. Many a time Hafez Shirazi[148] expresses chagrin and remorse for this earthliness of man and reminds [man] that this [world] is not his [final] abode:

که ای بلند نظر، شاهباز سدره نشین      نشین تو نه این کُنج محنت آبادست

ترا ز کنگره عرش مزینند صغیر      ندانمت که در این دامگه چه افتادست

*O ambitious and great who is in a sublime station!*

*Your abode is not this corner of suffering and affliction.*

*They call on you from heavens;*

*I know not what you are doing in this world of deception.[149]*

Expression of distress for this bondage and adversity can be seen in numerous poems of Iranian poets. In the different religions of India, particularly Jainism,[150] this contradiction between soul and body is more evident. The most important tenets of this sect are anchored on the principle that the growth of the bodily instincts be impeded and the soul nourished as much as possible. This is the way of setting it (soul) free from the body.

So long as the body is strong and desirous of complying with the dictates of its instincts, the soul is feeble and a servant of the body. But once we burn and melt the body through contentment and refrain from obeying its whims and caprices, the soul, which is a 'divine breath', gains strength and becomes powerful and is able to gradually subdue the body.

For the generation of this power many ways have been proposed, the most important of which are as follows: celibacy, withdrawing from activity, seclusion, eating less and less often, and sleeping less and less often. For instance, they narrate that Mahavira,[151] the founder of Jainism, remained single all his life and would pass his days in begging. Other sects springing from Hinduism, such as Buddhism, as well as the system of Yoga more or less recommend the same.[152]

The interpretation of these people on the issue of bodily needs and their relation to spiritual ones are very simplistic. A human being wants whatever he sees; so it is better for him not to see and want anything. The following couplets that are attributed to Bābā Tahir[153] point to this view:

ز دست دیده و دل هر دو فریاد      که هرچه دیده بیند، دل کند یاد

ببسامم خنجرى نیشش ز فولاد      ز نم بر دیده تا دل گردد آزاد

*I complain of both my eyes and heart*

*For everything that the eyes see, the heart would yearn for.*

*I am going to make a dagger with a blade of steel*

*With which to stab my eyes so that my heart will be set free.*

As such, the solution to this issue is that man should pay no heed to his bodily needs, withdraw from the society, be apathetic to the fate of others, close his eyes from viewing the beauties of nature, and deprive himself of all the natural endowments. Sa'd[154] thus narrates his dialogue with one of these kind of people as follows:

بزرگی دیدم اندر کوهساری      قناعت کرده از دنیا به غاری

چرا، گفتم به شهر اندر نیایی؟      که باری بندی از دل برگشایی

بگفت آنچا پیر رویان نغزند      چو گل بسیار شد، پیلان بلغزند

*A great man I saw in highlands*

*Who has contented himself in cave-dwelling?*

*'Why do you not come to the city'—to him I said—*

*'To relax and refresh your heart?'*

*He said that the city is full of glitters*

*Be it known that when dry clay increases, the elephants will make a slip. [155]*

In this manner, asceticism and seclusion, in our culture, are considered synonymous, and *khaneqah* [monastery, convent or house of dervishes] and school is juxtaposed with each other. The difference between the worshipper and ascetic on the one hand, and the scholar on the other hand, is that the former is only after his salvation while the latter is concerned with the salvation of others as well:

بشکست عهدِ صحبتِ اهلِ طریقِ را

صاحبِ بلی‌به مدرسه‌آمد ز خانقاه

تا اختیارکردی از آن این فریقِ را؟

گفتم: میانِ عالمِ عابد چه فرق بود

وین‌جهد می‌کند گه ره‌اند غریقِ را

گفت: آن گلیم‌خویش بدرمی‌برد ز موج

*A certain holy man having quitted the monastery,  
And the society of religious men, became a member of a college.  
I asked what was the difference between being a learned,  
Or a religious man that could induce him to change his society?  
He replied, "The devotee saves his own blanket out of the waves,  
And the learned man endeavors to rescue others from drowning."* [156]

Definitions such as 'self-denial', 'purging of instincts', and 'self-restraint' are based on this view, which arises mainly from Hindu culture and has found its way among some Muslims. Thus, in most cases when talking about combat with the self, some of them suppose it to be equal to self-denial and uprooting of instincts, and this very Hindu notion of self-denial is what is in their mind.

At times, a group of early Muslims had the same perception of combat with the self [*jihad an-nafs*]. One day one of the companions of the Messenger of God (s) named Uthmān ibn Maz'ūn asked his permission for seclusion and solitude. But the Holy Prophet (s) did not consent and said: "God, the Blessed and Exalted, has not ordained that we lead a monastic life. The monasticism of my *ummah* [community of believers] is the struggle in the way of God [*jihad fi sabillillah*]." [157] Likewise, in interpreting on the noble *ayah* [Qur'anic verse], "**Do you want me to inform you of the most destructive of people? It is he whose endeavor is corruption of the worldly life,**" the Holy Prophet (s) said: "It refers to the monks who have confined themselves to the four corners [of the monastery]." [158]

There was also a time when one of the companions of Imām 'Alī ('a) named 'Alī ibn Ziyād Harithī brought a complaint to the Commander of the Faithful ('a) that his brother, 'Īsī, has turned his back from the world (i.e., he has renounced the world) and put on a woollen garment. [159] Imām 'Alī ('a) summoned him. As he came, the Imām ('a) told him:

O' enemy of yourself! Certainly, the evil (Satan) has misguided you. Do you feel no pity for your wife and your children? Do you believe that if you use those things which Allah has made lawful for you, He will dislike you? You are too unimportant for Allah to do so. [160]

Although our ethical and gnostic literature is replete with associating repudiation of the world with combat with the self and equating asceticism with Christian monasticism, the principal tenets of the Messenger of God (s) and the Infallibles in this regard are something else.

Combat with the self does not mean denying the reality of instincts or their suppression. Combat with the self commences with the presumption that all instincts of man are necessary and that, basically, without them spiritual perfection cannot be attained. Combat with the self is not meant to ignore, for instance, the sexual instinct, and to order its repression. Rather, it considers it vital, necessary and essential for growth, and tries to guide it.

Thus, Imām Khomein<sup>ؑ</sup> while expounding it (combat with the self) does not speak about suppression of instincts. It is true that in *jihad* we always aim for victory and that we earnestly aspire to crush our opponent. But we do not all the times yearn for the elimination of the adversary. Rather, it is likely that his existence could be useful to us! We only see to it that we are not overcome by the adversary in this arena, not that we annihilate the enemy, i.e. our self. So, the Imām adopts the term, ‘triumph’ and in no way talks about self-denial. Instead, he emphasizes that “the *jihad* of the self which is the *jihad* of greater importance implies overpowering one’s own powers and faculties, and placing them under God’s command.”[161]

Yes, it is about harnessing and regulating instincts through overpowering them; not through self-denial. Consequently, in the combat with the self, one cannot talk at all about the obliteration of instincts. Rather, the existence and indispensability of all instincts has been assumed. It is through this outlook on the issue of instincts and how to regulate them that we arrive at the following:

- Necessity of instincts for perfection;
- Insatiability of instincts; and
- Social involvement as a requisite of combat with the self.

## [Necessity of instincts for perfection](#)

Curbing the instincts does not mean that their existence is not necessary. Instead, they must be endured. If it is so, there is no need then to preserve them, and the policy of eliminating them is the best one. [Yet,] in the code of ethics of the Imām the existence of all instincts is deemed necessary, and all of them have advantages and uses. In essence, from this aspect, nothing in the universe has been created inordinately and every integral part of the universe has its own particular function. So, the existence of all things—even the apparently worst instincts—is beneficial and necessary. This reasoning has roots in the

Qur'anic view of the universe. God Almighty says: "**We created not the heaven and the earth and all that is between them in play.**" [162]

As far as creation is concerned it is the act of the All-Wise God; it has been created wisely and nothing therein is futile and vain. In the same vein, since all beings are creatures of the One and Only God, they are in a state of harmony and concordance, and all parts are related to one another. If in a certain level of existence disorder is noticeable, through a deeper analysis we would realize its intrinsic order. To cite an example, a child who has seen the kitchen utensils in the cabinet every day and today he notices that all of them are apparently cluttered in different parts of the kitchen, he considers it as the result of his mother's carelessness and confusion.

But once he understands that they are supposed to entertain visitors that night at home, he realizes that this apparent disarray has meaning and order. Such is the creation. If at first glance the same impression is entertained in one's mind, this notion will dissipate after a second and profound scrutiny. That is why the Glorious Qur'an admonishes us, anytime we comprehend diversity and duality in the universe, to take a second and deeper look so as to discover our own misconception. [163]

The corollary of this precept is for us to reckon the universe as orderly and purposeful, and not to think of any phenomenon therein as useless. God Almighty considers it an attribute of the learned and sages that they hold the passing of nights and days and all the phenomena in the universe significance, and say: "**Our Lord! Thou createdst not this in vain. Glory be to Thee!**" [164]

This all-embracing view on the universe also includes man's self and instincts. Since there is nothing useless in the universe, it follows that human instincts are also meaningful and purposeful. If we view instincts from this perspective, we cannot on any account, talk about eliminating and suppressing them. Instead, efforts should be made for them to act in accordance with their particular functions and not drift away from their own specific tasks; this is different from self-denial. This rule is applicable to all instincts.

The existence of even those instincts which have apparently negative functions is also essential and their absence would render man's existence imperfect and deficient. For instance, one of the 'negative' instincts is anger, which is mentioned in the *ahādīth* [Prophetic narrations] as the key to all kinds of destruction and mischief.

Nowadays, numerous books have been written about this affliction, its negative effects, and ways of curing it. There are hardly any who are immune to the side effects of this ominous phenomenon; all of us in different places drunk its hemlock and have poisoned our palates. Many psychologists consider anger as causing high blood pressure, cholesterol, and even untimely death, and say that anger deprives man of the powers of sound reasoning and judgment, making him blind to the realities.

Once such anger and hatred arises in you, the most important part of your mind, which is the center of judgment between right and wrong, fails to function, rendering you incapable of judging the short- and

long-term consequences of your conduct and behaviour. In this condition, our power of judgment completely fails to function and there is no chance of its working. This condition is exactly similar to that of a person when he becomes mad.[165]

We can thus continue to enumerate the destructive effects of anger and to cite the various opinions about it. The Imam himself has allotted a section in the *Sharh-e Chehel Hadith* to this destructive instinct. He discusses it in detail, indicating the way of release from it and the method of regulating it.[166]

Well, now this question arises: Is not anger, with all these destructive effects arising from it, an example of the many instincts that must be uprooted? Is the existence of such an unpleasant instinct essential in man? Keeping in mind the Qur'anic precept that everything in the universe has a purpose and goal, the answer to the above question is positive. Yes, anger is also necessary and if it were not for this instinct, humankind would never have endured and would have become extinct. It is enough to imagine this instinct to disappear overnight from man's existence. In that case, no danger, no matter how serious, will induce him to move, and the necessary energy to face unpleasant situations will be not available to him. We should not forget that the greatest specific function of anger is preparing us to deal with emergency situations and providing us with the power to respond quickly. Most of the writings dealing with anger have also mentioned its specific positive function. Therefore, from this perspective anger is also a vital element for the continuity of man's life. Anger becomes bad only when it strays from its original function.

While conducting an analysis of anger, Imam Khomein<sup>(r)</sup> also delves into all its dimensions and considers it in moderation to be necessary for individual and social life. Pertaining to its benefits, he says:

It should be known that the Power of Anger is one of the biggest favours of God conferred upon His creatures, which enables them to pursue activities constructive to their world and the Hereafter, assure the continuity of the species as well as the safety and survival of the individual and the family. It also plays a great role in the establishment and maintenance of social order and civic life. If this noble faculty were not ingrained in the animal's nature, it would not have been able to defend itself against natural adversities, and would have been subjected to destruction and extinction. And if it were absent in man, then besides these, he would have failed to achieve most of his progress and perfection.

Moreover, even its deficiency and insufficient presence below the moderate level is itself considered a moral weakness and flaw which gives rise to innumerable vices and defects like fear; timidity; weakness; laxity; laziness; greed; lack of restraint, patience and tolerance; lack of constancy and perseverance when needed; love of comfort; torpor; lethargy; submissiveness to oppression and tyranny; submitting to insults and disgraces to which an individual or his family may be subjected; dastardliness; spiritlessness, etc. Describing the qualities of the believers God Almighty says:

﴿أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ﴾



**(The believers) are hard against the unbelievers and merciful among themselves.**[167]

The fulfilment of the duty of *al-amr b<sup>al</sup>-l-ma<sup>ar</sup>f wa'n-nahy 'an al-munkar* [to enjoin good conduct and forbid indecency], the implementation of *hud<sup>ud</sup>* [punishment prescribed by the Islamic penal law], *ta<sup>z</sup>ir<sup>at</sup>* [punishments decreed by a judge], and the carrying out of other policies set forth by religion or guided by reason, would not have been possible without the existence of this noble Power of Anger.

On this basis, those who believe in eradicating the Power of Anger and consider its destruction as an accomplishment and mark of perfection are highly mistaken and in great error, ignorant as they are about the signs of perfection and the bounds of moderation. Poor fellows, they do not know that God Almighty has not created this noble faculty in vain in all the species belonging to the animal kingdom. To the children of Adam ('a) He bestowed this power as the source of securing a good life in this world and the Hereafter, and a vehicle for procuring various blessings and felicities.

The holy *jih<sup>ad</sup>* with the enemies of the *D<sup>in</sup>* [religion]; the struggle for the preservation of mankind's social order; the defense and protection of one's own life, property and honor, as well as the Divine values and laws; and above all the combat with one's inner self, which is the biggest enemy of man, none of these could be possible without the existence of this noble faculty.

It is under the banner of this noble faculty that aggression and encroachments upon rights are repelled, borders and frontiers are protected, and other social and individual offences, noxious practices, and harmful deeds are checked. It is for this very reason that the *hukam<sup>a</sup>* [men of wisdom] have recommended various remedies for treating any deficiency in this Power, and prescribed numerous practical and theoretical remedies for the purpose of its regeneration, like participation in acts of heroism and going to battlefronts on the occasion of war with the enemies of God.[168]

As such, instincts are not only to be endured but also their existence is to be considered a grace for the spiritual and social growth and perfection of man from which benefits are to be sought for the growth and development of human talents. This principle is also true for all instincts. None of the instincts should be suppressed and uprooted; instead, efforts should be made for them to perform their specific functions and not go beyond their limits.

This nourishment and training should be coordinated and concordant; all the instincts and attributes of man should be so harmonious with each other as to constitute a coherent whole. For example, instead of eliminating the sensual instinct it should be modestly moderated. Basically, moral virtues are understandable with the control of instincts, and without these instincts, they (moral virtues) would lose their meaning. Anyone who has no sexual instinct has no business talking about chastity.

How could one who does not possess at all the power of anger talk about meekness and forbearance? The understanding of Mawl<sup>an</sup> on the Prophet's noble *had<sup>ith</sup>*, "*L<sup>a</sup> rahb<sup>aniyyah</sup> f<sup>i</sup>l-Is<sup>lam</sup>*" [There is no monasticism in Islam][169] succinctly illustrates the essence of this viewpoint:

چون عدو نبُود، جهاد آمد محال      شهوت نبود، نباشد امتثال

صبر نبود چون نباشد میل تو      خصم چون نبود، چه حاجت خیل تو؟

هین! مکن خود را خصی، رُهبان مشو      زانکه عفت، هست شهوت را گرو

بیهوا، نهی از هوا ممکن نبود      غازیای بر مُردگان نتوان نمود

*When there is no enemy, armed struggle is inconceivable;  
(If thou hast no lust, there can be no obedience (to the divine command).  
There can be no self-restraint when thou hast no desire;  
When there is no adversary, what need for thy strength?  
Hark, do not castrate thyself, do not become a monk;  
For chastity is in pawn to (depends on the existence of) lust.  
Without (the existence of) sensuality 'tis impossible to forbid sensuality:  
Heroism cannot be displayed against the dead.[170]*

The most important distinction between Islamic ethics and those of Christianity and Buddhism is rooted in this issue. It is this approach that places Islamic ethics in the category of 'worldliness' and separates it from world-denunciation approaches. Yes, the existence of every instinct—however negative it may seem—serves as the basis for the appearance of positive and valuable attributes of man. It is in times of adversity and hardship that man's power of patience and constancy is put under test and man is able to recognize his essence well:

عرقِ مردی آن گهی پیدا شود      که مسافرِ همره اعدا شود

*The root (innate quality) of manhood (only) becomes apparent at the time  
When the traveler meets his enemies on the road.[171]*

Furthermore, it is only in the presence of negative instincts that positive attributes basically find their meaning and that we can talk about nourishment and training. Thus, Mawlānā used to admonish those who were bent on uprooting their sexual instinct, telling them not to do so, for in the absence of this instinct, chastity has no meaning and value. That is why they have said that the one who can never get angry at all is an imperfect man, but the one who does not want to get angry is a wise person. The first type (of person) is fundamentally lacking an instinct while the second has the instinct to get angry, but

has controlled it.

It is possible that *wahm* [the power of imagination and invention], *ghadab* [the power of passion and anger], and *shahwah* [the power of lust or sensuality], also possess divine aspect, and may bring about felicity and good luck to man, if these powers are subjected to the dictates of reason and good sense and the teachings of prophets of God ('a).[172]

## Insatiability of instincts

But the fact cannot be denied that once these instincts are released and set free, they would never stop anywhere, and, like hell give the cry of, "*Can there be more to come?*"[173]

That is, these instincts can never be satiated and no matter how man endeavors to satisfy them and to meet his instinctive needs, he becomes thirstier just as the one who drinks the salty water of the sea. This is the secret behind the tragic condition of humanity. Anyone who is a captive of the instinct of greed and avarice remains in a state of indigence and insatiability even if becomes a **Qāriṣ**. [174]

The cure for avarice and covetousness does not lie in acquiring all the things that we desire. For this 'all' is of an indefinite and unspecific level, and everyone has his or her own limitations. Up to now we have yet to see a rich man who is satisfied with his financial condition. [Instead,] he always experiences a sense of inner restlessness and is not satisfied with his own extant status: "Right below the layer of comfort a kind of mental uneasiness exists which leads to hopelessness, unnecessary encounters, the need for alcohol and drugs and, in the worst case, to the committing of suicide." [175]

The limits to the acquisition of wealth and the attempts to satisfy the instinct of avarice cannot be determined at all. Once man reaches whatever optimal point that had been anticipated, he considers another optimal point for himself. So if man wants to obtain mental satisfaction through greed and covetousness, he is treading the wrong path which leads him nowhere, because one of the interesting features of greed is that no matter how much the covert motivation of greed to attempt attaining mental satisfaction is, the satirical point is that after you obtain the sought-after and desired thing, you will still remain unsatisfied. [176]

The true antidote of greed is not more greed; rather, it is satisfaction for what has been given, contentment and self-respect:

کوزه چشم حریصان پر نشد      تا صدف قانع نشد، پر در نشد

*The pitcher, the eye of the covetous, never becomes full:*

*The oyster-shell is not filled with pearls until it is contented.*[177]

One day a man came to Imām ‘Alī (‘a) and said that whatever he sought and obtained did not satisfy him and that he yearned for more of it, adding that he was annoyed by this situation. He asked the Imām (‘a) to teach him something that would be beneficial to him. The Imām (‘a) said:

If that which suffices you makes you not in need (self-sufficient), the smallest of which is making you not in need, and if you look for more than that which suffices you, all the things in the world cannot make you self-sufficient.[178]

Yes, such is the nature of this instinct. The more its root is satisfied, the stronger it becomes, so much so that even if it has two valleys of gold and silver, it will crave for the third valley (of gold and silver). Nothing can please and satisfy the world-loving eyes of man except contentment or the soil of the grave.

This point is true not only for covetousness; such is also the case with the sexual instinct—which does not know what satisfaction is. Freud erroneously thought that through meeting the sexual needs this instinct can be soothed and calmed down. The point is that the more this instinct is quenched, the thirstier it becomes:

The power of sensuality and lust acts in man in such a way that if he is given one woman, he is attracted to other women. If he is given an empire, he will hanker after some other empire. Man always desires for what he does not possess. In spite of this vanity of imagination and futility of human desire, the kiln of sensuality is always hot and its heat ever increasing, and our desires are never cooled down.[179]

A glance at the lives of kings and sultans who kept thousands of women in their harems but still longed for other women bears witness to this fact and “anyone who has any doubt is advised to examine his own self and other human beings belonging to the classes of poor, rich and powerful; he will then agree with me.”[180]

This rule is applicable to all instincts and none of them can be excluded from it. No one can be found who can say, “I have fulfilled all my desires.” Even Hosang Vazīr[181] who used to claim, “I engulfed the whole world and did everything,” was also looking for deliverance and respite until his death so as to conduct again all the affairs.” In no way are these instincts satiated, and herein lies the danger. For, the bounds of every instinct should be identified, its proper specific function obtained and employed within these limits. This does not imply elimination, while at the same time, this instinct should not be released altogether:

None of the prophets of God (‘a) ever tried to eradicate the powers of passion, sensuality or imagination completely. None of the messengers of God have ever demanded to completely kill sensuality and desire or to extinguish the fire of passion or anger and ignore the inventions of imagination. But they have rather advocated for controlling and bridling them and making them function under the command of reason and Divine Laws. For each one of these powers struggles to dominate others and win its goal, whatever mischief, chaos, and confusion may be stirred up.[182]

In this case, this question can once again be posed: Since these instincts are insatiable, is it not better for us to uproot them and thus free ourselves from their bonds? The answer to this question is negative. For, aside from all these benefits that derive from their existence, we should never forget the point that basically the humanness of man is the preservation of these instincts. The best medicine has also side effects and as of the moment no medicine without side effects has ever been known. Is there anyone who, due to the fact that these medicines have side effects, refrains from taking them in case of necessity?

Water which is the source of life can make a person sick if an excess of it enters the body. Fire, the discovery of which led to a quantum transformation in the life of man would burn us if we went very near it. The sun, with all its procreative and bountiful aspects, would destroy the earth if it comes a little nearer. As such, due to these issues, the essence of instincts cannot be uprooted; instead, they should be regulated. Now, another question arises and that is: Why have these instincts been created so as to be insatiable, and why is there no instinct with predetermined limit and threshold of satisfaction?

The answer is this: One of the innate qualities of man is that he is always aspiring for perfection and is not satisfied with anything. It is this relentless search that has transformed him from a cave-dwelling savage to an outer space-roving astronaut. If humankind were always to be content with its existing condition, no sort of change would ever occur in its life, and like that of honeybee, would not have been different from what it was thousands of years ago. It is this *fitrah* [natural disposition of man] that urges him to discover the secrets of the universe and not to be content with all that he possesses:

It is obvious that man is always allured by something, which he does not own. This is the human nature as conceived by various great Islamic thinkers and holy men, especially one should refer to a great master of divinity, M<sup>rs</sup> Muhammad ‘A<sup>l</sup> Sh<sup>h</sup>b<sup>d</sup>, may my soul be ransomed for him.[183]

So, finally, all these instincts are deeply embedded on man’s essence of seeking and devotion to perfection which, in itself, is a blessing up to this point. The problem arises when it happens that we forget the rationality behind these instincts and their creation, and imagine that we have to comply totally with their dictates, spending day and night in the acquisition of wealth and beauty-worship. It is here that we go astray from the Path, forgetting the True Object of Worship and Absolute Perfection while imagining riches, power, or sensuality as our gods and devotionally eulogizing them.[184]

It is enough that we realize our mistakes, knowing that these are not our real masters. They are servants who, if properly trained and nourished, will always be our helpers. [On the other hand,] once they are abandoned and released for some time, they will claim divinity and make us their slaves. Accordingly, instincts should neither be killed nor released. Rather, they should be guided and regulated so that you could enjoy their benefits and remain secure from their menaces.

## Social participation as a requisite of combat with the self

Just as some people would imagine that combat with the self implied self-denial and uprooting of instincts, some others have supposed that the requisites of combat with the self are withdrawing from the society, seclusion, and confinement in a corner. This tenet of running away from the people in order to attain security is indeed against the teachings of our religion and against values, and has gradually assumed an aspect of 'value' for itself, being reckoned as a manifestation of 'perfection'.

One of the most important books on mystics [ʿirifīn] and Sufis ever written is the *Tadhkirat' ul-Awliyā'* [185] in which the author has given an account of the lives of more than ninety famous mystics. This book is replete with stories of the Sufis' isolation and retreat from society. In this book it has been reported that they [the people around him] said to Hasan al-Basrī [186]—one of the notable mystics: "There is a man who for a period of twenty years has not attended a congregational prayer, has no social intercourse with anyone, and has [always] been sitting in a corner." [187] Hasan approached him and asked him the reason for his conduct. On hearing the reply, he said to him: "Be as you are as you are better than me." [188]

Again, concerning the description of *tasawwuf* [Sufism] Sahl at-Tustarī (201–273 AH), a great Sufi, is reported to have said: "Sufism is meager eating, having tranquility with God, the Sublime and Exalted, and keeping aloof from people." [189] Again, in an account on the life of Dāwūd at-Tā'ī [190] it is reported: "He was constantly disillusioned with the people," [191] "keeping aloof from them [people]," [192] and would say: "Run away from the people just as they flee from the fierce lion." [193]

In his *Kāmyā-yē Saʿdat* [The Alchemy of Happiness] Al-Ghazzālī, [194] likewise, devotes a separate chapter to the etiquette of seclusion and says:

The school of thought [*madhhab*] of Sufyān Nārī, Ibrāhīm Idham, Dāwūd Tā'ī, Fadl 'Ayyūd, Sulaymān Khawwās, Yūsuf Isbāt, Hadhāfah Mar'ashī, Bashār Hāfī, and many other God-fearing and great men (*r*) [195] is that seclusion and solitude is more virtuous than mingling with others. [196]

Then it quotes sayings from them such as follows: Rabī' ibn Khuthaym and Ibrāhīm Najafī, may Allah be pleased with them, have said: "pursue knowledge and keep away from people." [197] Fadlī said: "I

would receive a great favour from one who did not mind me or greet me, and when I fell ill, would not visit me.”[198] In short, after discussing such quotations on the virtues of seclusion, Al-Ghazzālī has named six of its benefits, discussing each one of them in detail.

For example, the third benefit of seclusion in his view is this: “No city or town...is free of hostility and sedition and anyone who secluded would be free from sedition. Once he associates with the people, he would fall into sedition, destroy his religion and be in danger.”[199] The fourth benefit of seclusion in the view of Al-Ghazzālī is deliverance from the mischief of the people, while the fifth one is that the people will not pin their hopes on him. The sixth [and last] benefit is “being rid of meeting dear ones, the stupid, and those whom it is naturally abominable to meet.”[200]

In a nutshell, seclusion means turning away from responsibility, non-acceptance of the reality of life, and shirking any form of endeavor to change the status quo in favour of the desired condition. Seclusion from this perspective is nothing but the worthlessness of man in as much as one cannot hope for any good from him. Apparently, this kind of outlook has arisen at some stage in the mystical lives of many. After passing through different stages of mystic knowledge and gnosis, our mystics resorted to nothing other than seclusion. They considered the best way to live was to go into seclusion; that is, somewhat a premeditated kind of suicide and seemingly legitimate.[201]

This approach, regardless of the intention it is based, is squarely in opposition to the teachings of the Infallibles (‘a) and the rudimentary precepts of the Qur’an. We have read a lot that monasticism and seclusion have no place in Islam and those who practice these are considered the most destructive of people. In the parlance of religion, the best of men is he who is beneficial to others and has a stronger and more profound sense of responsibility with respect to those around him and the society at large. Enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong, which is one of the fundamental Islamic obligations, is only comprehensible with the acceptance of collectivity and living therein, as well as accountability.[202]

Essentially, from the view of the Messenger of God (s), Muslim is he who is concerned with other Muslims and shares joys and sorrows. Hence, the Holy Prophet (s) said: “He who has passed the night without concern for the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim.”[203]

Being a Muslim is not only restricted to individual acts of worship and devotion; it transcends these and embraces all levels of social life. From this perspective, being a Muslim means acceptance of responsibility and having an active presence in society:

Well, the Prophet (s) has advised us to be diligent about the affairs of Muslims. Does diligence over the affairs of Muslims lie only in saying how many *rak‘ah* [cycle] the prayer is; what the doubt between so-and-so is? Is this supposed to be showing concern for the affairs of Muslims? It is an issue that does not speak of the affairs of Muslims. Affairs of Muslims refer to their political affairs, their social affairs, and

their predicaments. Whoever does not give concern to these is not a Muslim [*falaysa bi-muslim*], according to the [above-quoted] *hadīth*. [204]

The distinction between human beings and animals is this sense of responsibility. Once we ignore it, we tend to promote seclusion and isolation [to prevail in the society]. It is enough to imagine that all the people want to enjoy the benefits of seclusion and to choose isolation and retreat. The endurance of such a society and to live therein is nearly impossible. The social order will soon be in shambles and everyone will retreat to the caves and jungles.

So, the point should be known that in our religious teachings seclusion has never met with approval. When one of the companions of the Messenger of God (s) asked for his approval for seclusion, the Holy Prophet (s) discouraged him from doing so and said: “Once you do not mingle with the people, how you will then perform the enjoinder of what is good and the forbiddance of what is wrong?” [205]

That is, social life and responsibility to others are a duty of all Muslims while seclusion means trampling upon this duty.

Even in our religious sources it has been narrated that the supplications of one who withdraws from social and economic activity and sits in a corner relying on God, will not be granted. One day Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) enquired about one of his companions named ‘Umar ibn Muslim. They said, “He has abandoned trade and has turned to [only] worship.” He (‘a) said: “Woe to him! Does he know not that the prayers of one who abandoned all endeavor will not be granted?” Then he narrates the story of those in the time of the Messenger of God (s) who, under the pretext of trust in and reliance on God [*tawakkul*], withdrew from active life and went into retreat. He (‘a) says that the Holy Prophet (s) told them: “The supplication of whoever does so will not be granted. So, exert effort.” [206]

Undoubtedly, the tenet of seclusion and asceticism is in contradiction to many of the religious teachings. In his discourses on ethics the Imām has also put great emphasis on man as a social being, and does not at all name seclusion as a value. Rather, he believes that combat with the self is only possible through a responsible presence and activity in the society; not through withdrawal and isolation. He believes that the only gift of sitting secluded in a corner is wretchedness and misery. Preservation and advancement of human values lies in sustained efforts; not seclusion:

If you want to be a human being, you have to strive hard. Preserving your human values requires effort. It is not possible for one’s human values to be preserved while sitting at home. One who sits in seclusion at home will suffer setbacks. However, he does not realize that he is no longer a human being. [207]

From the Imām’s perspective, isolation and withdrawal from responsibility is in no way concordant with Islam and its teachings. It is an alien phenomenon which has brought malaise to the Islamic society, so much so that this anti-value has found an esteemed place among Muslims, and if one lives in isolation—that is futility—he enjoys greater respect, esteem and worth:



Seclusion was not extant in Islam at all; it has never been so. This seclusion, I wonder what—retreat, withdrawal, and basically, aloofness—have all been present in non-Muslim religious groups and have been introduced among the Muslims; reaching the stage of saying that “Mr. so-and-so is a very good person; he does not care at all about what may happen (regarding something)!” Apathy itself became part of eulogy![208]

This inversion of values would, at times, lead to those who were alert and conscious pretending to be indifference and using others as their plaything: “Well, this causes even the one who distinguishes between each and everything would show himself as undiscerning.”[209]

Only presence in society can polish his coarseness of personality and crudity, just as gravel is smoothed by rolling and tossing innumerable times in a river’s course, a human being is moulded and refined only in the midst of society and in the context of the challenges of life, thus causing the essence of his self to manifest itself.

## [This World and the Hereafter](#)

For many people, this world and the hereafter are cheese and chalk apart, and (to them) worldliness means turning away from the hereafter, while seeking the hereafter denotes hostility to the world.

Whenever the subject of the hereafter and that of keeping it in mind comes up, it seems that one should withdraw from the world, abandon and flee from it. Most of our Sufis and mystics have given currency to this dictum and claimed that the hereafter can be attained by trampling on this world, as this world is a world of matter while the hereafter is a world of meaning, and these two are irreconcilable.

All this vilification of the world, its vainness and the disgrace to which it has been subjected in our literature has its roots in this understanding of the world. Perhaps this world and the hereafter are inimical to one another and will never be reconciled. Someone with this notion of the world had vilified it and whose statement Imām ‘Alī (‘a) heard. Contrary to his expectation, the Imām (‘a) did not confirm his view. Rather, he (‘a) said to him:

O’ you who abuse the world, O’ you who have been deceived by its deceit and cheated by its wrongs. Do you accuse it or it should accuse you? When did it bewilder you or deceive you? Certainly, this world is a house of truth for him who appreciates it; a place of safety for him who understands it; a house of riches for him who collects provision from it (for the next world); and a house of instructions for him who draws instruction from it. It is a place of worship for the lovers of Allah; the place of praying for the angels of Allah; the place where the revelation of Allah descends; and the marketing place for those devoted to Allah.”[210]

From the viewpoint of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) there is nothing wrong with the world and it is not blameworthy. By the way, what is meant by the ‘world’? If we look upon the world as one of the levels of existence and one of God’s creations, then it cannot be reproached. If by the world we mean that place of origin and nourishment of humankind, then again it cannot be blamed. If by the world we mean that ground and bastion of human development, in this case, too, it cannot be deemed futile.

From whatever perspective we view the world, it seems as though the world is far from being blameworthy, and reproaching it is tantamount to reproaching God. Notwithstanding this, the world has been referred to in a blameful and rebuking manner in many of the Qur’anic verses and narrations (of the Prophet). It cannot be denied that the basis of many among those who have been hostile to the world has been some Qur’anic verses and sayings of the Infallibles (‘a) and our religious leaders. For instance, concerning the world, God Almighty says: **“Know that the life of this world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children.”**[211]

This assertion that the world is nothing but a plaything and futility has been repeated in numerous verses.[212]

Imām ‘Alī (‘a), too, who used to express praise for the world, addressed the world thus: “O’ world, O’ world! Get away from me. Do you present yourself to me? Or are you eager for me? You may not get that opportunity to impress [and deceive] me.”[213]

In the former statement the Imām (‘a) was saying that the world is not a deceiver whereas in the latter he (‘a) wants the world to deceive others [i.e., to deceive those who wanted to be deceived and not to deceive him]. Now, how could this ambiguity be resolved? This vagueness will be made clear through an examination of the following three points:

- This world as the place of cultivation for the hereafter
- Which is the blameworthy world?
- This world and the hereafter as complementary to one another

## [This world as the place of cultivation for the hereafter](#)

From a philosophical and general viewpoint, this world and the hereafter are located in a single continuum—a continuum in whose one end is the world and in the other end is the hereafter. As far as

existence is concerned it is not possible to put a gap between the two. The world is the lowest level of the universe and the descending stage of existence.

The world is that place in which all talents are not yet set in motion and in which every phenomenon can endlessly manifest its potentialities. The world is that abode in which thousands and thousands of unfulfilled possibilities could materialize. The world is that learning sanctuary wherein one can still pursue knowledge and improve oneself. It is this world that is considered as “the lowest level of existence and the abode of change, transition, and annihilation.”[214]

In this sense, this world means there is still opportunity for everyone to polish the essence of his existence and to give it the appropriate form he likes. As such, the world has no blemish. Although it appears imperfect comparison to the hereafter, in term of its function and duty, which is providing the grounds for the advancement of everybody, it is absolutely without any defect:

Although worldly existence is a lower and defective realm of being, since it is a nursery for the training of lofty souls and a school for acquiring higher spiritual stations, it is a field for cultivating the Hereafter. In this sense it is the most sublime of the realms of being and the most profitable of worlds for the lovers of God and the wayfarers of the path of the Hereafter.[215]

Therefore, if there were no such realm for the manifestation of human ability and ingenuities, no one could have been able to tread the path of perfection and be freed from his own faults and deficiencies, and this itself is the greatest defect:

And were it not for this terrestrial realm of matter, the domain of physical and spiritual substantial transformation and change, ... not a single imperfect soul would have attained its promised state of perfection nor would it have been able to reach the realm of permanence and stability, nor the embodiments of imperfection would have been able to enter the Kingdom of God.[216]

The statements uttered by Imam ‘Alī (‘a) to the blamer of the world is a testimony to this truth. Whenever referring to this aspect of the world the Glorious Qur’an also describes the world as the overture of the hereafter and its prelude, and avers it is in this world that man builds his own hereafter. Deliverance in this world leads to deliverance in that world while blindness in this abode is equivalent to blindness in that one: **“Whoso blind here will be blind in the Hereafter, and yet further from the road.”**[217]

The statement, “The world is the farm of the hereafter,” which the Holy Prophet (s) is reported to have said, expresses this point. So, the world is not only irreproachable but also praiseworthy. The world provides the best opportunity for us to construct whatever we like from our existence and to achieve our perfection. The world not only has no place for complaint and grievance, but is also worthy of appreciation and laudation.

Besides this, not only is the world good, but also loving it is even ethical and acceptable. The essence of man takes form in this very water and soil, and the world is not only deemed as the cradle and bedrock of his advancement but also plays the role of his mother. Thus, anyone who expresses love to his mother is not reproachable. On the contrary, unkindness to one's mother is unethical. It is for this reason that Imam 'Alī (‘a) says: “People are the progeny of the world and no one can be blamed for loving the mother.”[218]

Yes, blameworthy is the one who does not love his mother—that too, the mother who endows his child with all the means of comfort and growth, and provides him with all the potentialities for perfection. So, loving this world is rooted in man's innate constitution. “Let it be known that man is the child of this physical world, nature being his mother, and he the offspring of water and dust. The love for this world is implanted in his heart since the early time of his development and growth.”[219] Therefore, the world is not reproachable, and loving it is natural and even ethical.

## Which is the blameworthy world?

The world is commendable and praiseworthy so long as it paves the way for the advancement of man and leads to his perfection. However, if it is supposed to prevent his advancement and obstruct his way to perfection, then it is no longer praiseworthy. In the same manner, love of the mother is acceptable so long as it causes the growth of the child. Yet, if this love is to arrest the independence of man and to make him always dependent on her, it can then no longer be considered a positive emotion. Instead, it is a malady.

If our outlook on the world is that of one who wants to go a long way and reach his destination, we can then take all the things we need from this house (world) and commence our journey fully equipped. But once we take this world as our goal, we will then forget the journey, destination and movement, and will not be able to advance and attain perfection. Therefore, what makes the world valuable is the ‘utilitarian outlook’ on it, and what makes it worthy of rebuke is the ‘destinational outlook’.

The difference between the one who seeks the world and that who seeks the hereafter is not that the worldly one acquires benefits from this world while the other avoids it. The fundamental distinction lies in the type of outlook of these two. The wise and clear-sighted one is he who sees the world as a good instrument to reach the hereafter while the stupid one is he who thinks of the world as his objective:

Certainly this world is the end of the sight of the (mentally) blind who see nothing beyond it. The sight of a looker (who looks with the eye of his mind) pierces through and realizes that the (real) house is beyond this world. The looker therefore wants to get out of it while the blind wants to get into it. The

looker collects provision from it (for the next world) while the blind collects provision for this very world.[220]

Therefore, what is meant by the blameworthy world is not this physical planet with all its beauties and endowments, because, reproaching them is tantamount to reproaching the beautiful creations of God. Rather, what is meant by the blameworthy world is forgetting one's own goal, having absolute attachment to it, and evading one's own human and divine responsibilities:

Therefore, this world, being as it is the manifestation of and witness to His Beauty and Majesty, is not at all condemnable in this sense. That which is condemnable is the world of man himself in the sense of his absorption in the world of carnal nature and his attachment and love for it. That world is the source of all vices and all inward and outward sins.[221]

From this perspective, the cause of all these sins and offences is love of this world. Imām as-Sādiq is reported to have said: "Love of the world is the root of all sins." [222]

In as much as the love of this world causes total attachment to it and makes one forget his or her objective; it gradually immerses the person in various sins and offences. The first sin and offence arising from the love of the world is that man thinks of this ephemeral and temporal world as everlasting, but whenever the veil of his notion is torn, one becomes fearful and dreadful of death. As a result, it would even make him furious of God. The other sin that spawns from love of this world is the weakening of man's will. What makes man a man is his willpower and if, due to love of the world, this will is to weaken, then nothing would be left of his humanity. The third sin issuing from love of this world is that man is never satiated by it and in order to get more enjoyment from it he is prone to defile himself with any sort of sin and gradually drowns in all these sins.

Imām Khomein<sup>®</sup> describes some of the evils of loving this world in this manner:

Among the evil effects of the love of the world and attachment to it is that it makes man afraid of death... Another great evil caused by the love of the world is that... it weakens his power of resolution and debilitates the will... Since he mistakenly believes the world and worldly fascinations to be the desired ultimate goal his greed grows day by day and his desire for them multiplies. His need for the world increases and poverty and deprivation becomes his fate.[223]

Consequently, he is like a thirsty person who drinks water from the sea and becomes thirstier.

## **This world and the hereafter as complementary to one another**

Man has to go on a great journey—from the earth to the heavens. Initially, he emerges from a particle that cannot be seen with the naked eye; however, at the end of the voyage he steps into a world,

annihilating the worlds within his being.

This odyssey, from creation [*khalq*] to Truth [*haqq*] is a spiritual one, the provisions of which are the aspiration and faith of man. If man knows the starting point of his journey and appreciates it to just that extent, he has then taken this world to be the preliminary step to the hereafter and the place of its cultivation. In such an event, if this preliminary step is lost sight of, the hereafter and the purpose of the journey would be meaningless. In the absence of this world, the hereafter will no longer be so. It is only with the admission of this contrariety that journey and movement acquire meaning. Nevertheless, the journey from this world to the hereafter is not a spatial journey. Rather, it is an inner, behavioural and spiritual one.

From the viewpoint of the Qur'an, the world is the external manifestation and outer layer of the hereafter while the hereafter is the esoteric form and inner layer of this world. Yet, most of the people do not realize this truth and ***“they know only some appearance of the life of the world, and are heedless of the Hereafter.”***[224]

The reason for this negligence and complacency is that they have not yet realized the fact that the heaven and the earth and all the things therein have been created in truth and that every phenomenon has its own specific function. If only this corporeal man thinks deeply about the essence of the world and realizes its true condition, he will then benefit from it without taking it as his goal and being captivated by and attached to, it. Constructing the hereafter is bound to that in constructing this world. Anyone who did not invest in this world would be a loser in that world. Exertion of effort and endeavor in this world is valuable since it is the hereafter that guarantees [the well-being of] man. It is with this outlook that this maxim can be understood: “Whoever does not have sustenance has no hereafter, too.”[225]

This view is a broad perspective on the world and the hereafter, which gives meaning to any type of economic venture and social participation without which he would be confined to the whirlpool of daily routine. That which has been reported that the Messenger of God (s) viewed the Christian and Jewish beliefs as having one eye (one dimensional) while describing Islam as having two eyes (two dimensional) is a testimony to this truth. The Jewish creed drowns man to such an extent in the activities of this world as to keep him from thinking about the hereafter.

Christianity, too, instils such apprehension in its adherents with regard to the other world that they forget this one. But it is only the religion of Islam which reckons the provision of sustenance for the wife and child as a form of spiritual undertaking and struggle [*jihad*] in the way of God, and considers work as a form of worship.

From this perspective, not only is economic activity praiseworthy and laudable while, on the other hand, abandoning economic pursuits and withdrawal from, and non participation in, the different spheres of life is viewed as casting out of the ambit of religion. ‘Worldliness’ is only objectionable when it makes man forgetful of God and his destination, and not when it would be his companion and aid in this journey and

for reaching the destination:

چیست دنیا؟ از خدا غافل بدن      نه قماش و نقره و میزان و زن

مال را کز بهر دین باشی حمل      نعم مال صالح خواندش رسول

آب در کشتی، هلاک کشتی است      آب اندر زیر کشتی پشتی است

*What is this world? To be forgetful of God;*

*It is not merchandise and silver and weighing-scales and women.*

*As regards the wealth that you carry for religion's sake, as the Prophet recited,*

*"How good is righteous wealth (for the righteous man)!" [226]*

*Water in the boat is the ruin of the boat,*

*(But) water underneath the boat is a support. [227]*

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