

Part 1: Imam Khomeini's Code of Ethics

Imam Khomeini's Code of Ethics

In the heart of Imam Khomeini's [1] way of thinking, ethics has a [special] place, and in fact, all areas of knowledge revolve around this pivot. According to his view, by citing a *hadith* (Prophetic tradition) from the Messenger of God (s) ([2]), all kinds of knowledge can be placed in three general categories. It is because the human being possesses three existential presences and three types of world: one, external and sensory; another, the allegorical world; the third, the intellectual one.

Social science, juristic precepts and transactions are examples of the first category while rational sciences are instances of the third type. Yet, what is related and complementary to the second type is called *ethics*. If man wants to go beyond logic and the law of instincts, then he needs ethics in its broad sense. Ethics in this context cannot be confined to merely a number of ethical rules; instead, it is in fact a knowledge which searches for the deepest recesses of man's existence, and which cures him.

This ethics is, indeed, a sort of theoretical and practical anthropology. It is awareness of fixed principles and their application. It is owing to this that this knowledge can be considered as the noblest one and the *raison d'être* of the prophets (s) ([3]) summons.

The Messenger of God's (s) sayings were a manifestation of such kind of ethics which he made known as the purpose of his mission. In this sense, man can be needless of many types of knowledge; yet, he cannot consider himself needless of ethics since this knowledge is the capital asset of felicities in both worlds:

The purpose and result of the summons of the Seal of the Prophets (s) is the perfection of morality. In the noble traditions, both that are brief and those which are elaborate, moral excellences have been given more importance than anything else after doctrinal teachings [*ma'arif*]... And their importance is

greater than what we are capable of explaining adequately, but that which we know for certain is that the asset of the everlasting life of the hereafter and the capital asset of the life of that abode is the acquisition of noble dispositions and the possession of moral excellences.

The paradise which is given to man for the sake of moral excellence is the paradise of Attributes, incomparable to the physical paradise of Act.[4]

Ethics, with this peculiar status, has always had Imām Khomeinī's attention. From the very beginning when he was a regular teacher up to the time when he was in the midst of the political arena, led the people's uprising, and established the Islamic Republic, he always paid particular attention to morality, and viewed almost all socio-political issues from the moral perspective. His recommendations and political messages to the officials and the people speak for this, and these [recommendations] can be treated, apart from the occasion of their issuance, as profound moral lessons from which we can learn.

However, from his point of view morality cannot be restricted to some recommendations and decrees. Rather, it is anchored in profound philosophical, theosophical and anthropological principles and precepts. His view on morality is a philosophical one. It is in this sense that he keenly scrutinizes moral vices and virtues, discusses them wisely, and enumerates the benefits and harms of this and that item. In fact, he has a remarkably profound belief in religious morality and uncovers vices and virtues from the heart of the narrations [*ahādīth*] from the Infallibles [*ma'sūmīn*][5] ('a); nevertheless, he does not content himself with the tradition of quoting, but perfectly utilizes intellect in analyzing these narrations [*ahādīth*] and in elucidating moral concepts.

This mode of striking a balance between the intellect [*ʿaql*] and narration [*naql*], which has been acceptable to the great Shā'ah scholars, is very manifest and conspicuous in the moral discourses of the Imām. Anyone who assiduously scrutinizes the ethical and gnostic works of the Imām can deduce his system of ethics.

The truth of the matter is that he has based his code of ethics and mystical-moral understandings on theoretical principles, which he does not specify so much. In the same manner that he juxtaposes the fragments of a riddle with one another, so also the researcher must carefully find these principles and place them together. In doing so, he could present the Imām's code of ethics, which is rooted in a long-standing tradition and founded on the great gnostic and ethical heritage of the Muslim mystics and teachers of ethics.

The writer of these lines has tried his best to accomplish this task to the best of his ability. Thus, by pondering on the ethical writings of the Imām, particularly the *Sharh-e Chehel Hadīth* [Exposition of Forty *Hadīths*],[6] which is replete with philosophical, ethical and psychological intricacies and subtleties, he has attempted to infer and expound on the principles that he considers as being the underpinning of the Imām's system of ethics.

The outcome of this study is the presentation and explanation of the Imām's eight fundamental tenets and the results that emanate from them. Undoubtedly, the comprehensiveness of such kinds of studies cannot be claimed and the first person who perceives its flaws is the researcher himself. The reason for this is that if, after a few days, he reads what he has written, he feels there is something to be added and omitted from it. This, in itself, indicates that such handiworks of man are, like him, is an unfinished matter and an open question.

What must be said is that these tenets and principles are theoretical teachings on the basis of which the system of practical ethics takes form, and so one can talk about practical ethics. These discussions are mainly theoretical in form. The framework of practical discourses and the manner of ethical behaviour must be dealt with elsewhere. The teachings which will be discussed in this section and can be considered as the bedrock of the Imām's code of ethics are as follows:

1. Indescribability of the human being;
2. Man in the state of nature;
3. Man as the arena of conflict between good and evil;
4. Regulation of instincts;
5. This world and the hereafter;
6. The philosophy behind suffering;
7. Knowledge as a mental aid, or burden; and
8. Behaviour as emanating from ethical principles.

Indescribability of the Human Being

The terrestrial world in which we live is a world full of existing activities and innumerable potentialities yet to appear. In the parlance of philosophy, this world's phenomena possess two facets of 'present' (*being*) and 'potential' (*becoming*). If we take into account a date stone, it is a fruit stone with all its peculiarities, having a particular weight, volume and colour. But it is not merely a fruit stone. Rather, given all the necessary conditions, it can become a big date-palm, which in turn can produce thousands of other dates, date stones and date-palms. This feature can be witnessed in all phenomena of this world, whether living or non-living things. The gap between what is considered as the present state of a phenomenon and what it can become being always wide.

This movement of the phenomena from *what they are* toward *what they can be* (from *being* to *becoming*) and the realization of the potentialities, like removing an old garment and wearing a new one, or like

wearing clothes over other clothes, which in the parlance of philosophy is called 'putting off' and 'putting on' [*khal' va labs*] or successive donning [*labs pas az labs*], respectively, has no ending at all. The appropriate divine wisdom is that every phenomenon should attain its own possible state of perfection and to reach whatever is reachable.

The human being, too, is not an exception to this transcendental and immutable law, and like other phenomena, is subject to change and transformation. He sets foot in this world with the greatest potentialities and talents and with the least activity, and in the beginning when he is born; he is more hapless compared to many of the other creatures. Yet, during the short or long span of his life he always tests himself, shows his capabilities in the sphere of good and evil, and moulds and shapes himself. He then abandons his previous form, obliterates himself, and adopts another form. He is like a portraitist who often draws an object, erases it, and then draws another one.

This possibility of change exists in all stages of life. Although the changeability of man in the initial part of his life and his formative years are strong, this transformation becomes more difficult with advancing age; however, the principle of such a possibility does not disappear. Therefore, the possibility of changing oneself exists for everybody until the end of his life.

In other words, there is no certain conclusion and end of every person's life story and his destiny cannot be considered as being predetermined. Here, we proceed to another issue and that is, the indescribability of man.

Every phenomenon, in our analytical view, possesses two facets: one is its 'being' ("is") and the other, its 'manner' ("what is"). For instance, an apple as a concrete reality has subsistence and along with this subsistence, the essence of its nature can be included and expressed in its description.

Therefore, all terrestrial things possess subsistence and disposition, which in philosophical jargon are called 'existence' and 'essence'. Now, let us see what the nature of man is. The existence of various explanations on the essence and nature of man only indicates the divergence of views on this issue. For example, after stating the manner of man's creation, God, the Most Sublime, praised and named Himself as the most Excellent Creator.[7]

Yet, at the time of giving account to the trust, which the heavens and the mountains trembled for taking responsibility but which man shouldered, God introduces him as iniquitous and imprudent.[8]

If we pursue this trend, we will encounter other descriptions and explanations. As a result, we can say that man has various explanations, or is essentially indescribable. Man is all of these; but at the same time he is beyond all descriptions. In a sense, man is the only terrestrial creature that has neither definite essence nor a specific limit, and he has such potentialities and capabilities that one's nature cannot be foretold before their realization.

According to the existentialists, all beings possess a definite nature that could be made known to them in

advance. However, a human being is the only creature whose existence takes priority over his nature, or he 'builds' his own nature. John Paul Sartre,[9] the most famous expounder and exponent of existentialism, opines on this matter thus:

Man's conception of himself is not only what he has in his mind; it is also what he wants of himself. It is the concept (of himself) that he exhibits after its manifestation in the world of existence. It is that which he seeks from himself after moving toward existence. Man is nothing but what he makes of himself. This is the foremost principle of existentialism. [10]

This point is part of the incontrovertible principles of Islamic philosophy and gnosticism which has been asserted differently, the most prominent formula of this viewpoint being thus stated by Shaykh Ishrāq—Shahāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī:[11] "The self and the creatures superior to it are mere beings." [12]

The Imām articulates this principle in this way:

Man cannot be confined to one of the worlds—the higher and the lower worlds. For, the people as well as the people of Yathrib [13] has no position and from the descension point of view have *hay'at* [14] rank which can manifest their God's power, and from ascension point of view they have a high horizon and the station of annihilation at the Threshold of Unity. Thus, the chief of the Illuminationist [*Ishrāqī*] School [15] says that vocal self has no nature and it has the station of unity and union of all the truths of the world of creation and affair. [16]

Understanding and comprehending these explanations requires familiarity with Islamic gnosticism.

Nonetheless, the end result of this discussion is that the essence of man is not determined and fixed; he can traverse all the spheres of existence.

As such, any attempt to present a specific and absolute explanation of man is an exercise in futility. It is only after the realization of all the potentialities and aptitudes of man that we can offer a perfect explanation of him. From these indisputable principles of philosophy, the Imām arrives at the following three ethical inferences:

1. The possibility of nurture and training in all conditions;
2. Coexistence of fear and hope; and
3. Suspension of judgment.

The possibility of nurture and training in all conditions

A teacher asked his student: “Who has created you?” Contrary to the expectation of the teacher, the student answered: “My creation has not yet finished.”[17]

Ethics and education holds meaning only if we admit that the ‘creation’ of man is not yet completed and that man has still a long way to go so as to consider his creation as having been completed. What is meant by ‘creation’ is not only the appearance of that earthly and ephemeral body since it is indubitable to many that such an aspect of ‘creation’ is not the termination of human perfections; it is only part of the things that should take place for man.

Thus, the ‘creation’ of man has not yet ended, and this is the starting point of any philosophy of education and system of morality. We can only talk of ethics and education when we accept that man is a changeable, imperfect and incomplete creature.

Once we deny this principle or have an iota of doubt about it, then we can no longer talk about ethics, and thereby closing the way to any sort of omission and reform concerning man’s existence. Anyone who believes that human nature is wicked and that there is no possibility for it to change, or who likens man to a bitter tree the irrigation of which with sweet and honeyed water is worthless, will not be able to derive benefit from ethics and is traversing this path to no avail. This approach which is against nature can be well seen in the following couplets of Firdawsؒ (Ferdowsؒ):[18]

درختی که تلخ است وی را سرشت
گرش برنشانی به باغ بهشت

ور از جوی خُلدش به هنگام آب
به بیخ، انگبین ریزی و شهد ناب

سر انجام گوهر به بار آورد؟
همان میوه تلخ بار آورد

*A tree which by nature bears bitter fruit,
Even if it is located in the garden of paradise,
If in the paradise when watering it instead of water
You pour grape juice and pure milk,
At the time of fruit-bearing, will it produce sweet fruit?
Nay, it will bear the same bitter fruit.*

Our literature (i.e. Persian literature) is replete with such allusions and metaphors, all referring to one point which is the negation of the fundamental and undeniable essence of man's changeability and indescribability. At times, the manifestations of this qualm on the essence of changeability are disclosed in proverbs such as, "What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh" or "a walnut on a dome".

And sometimes while admitting the essence of changeability, the time constraint serves as a pretext in negating it. For instance, it can be asserted that so long as the twig is wet (i.e. small and weak), its curve can still be straightened. In like manner, so long as a human being has not yet fully grown up and is still flexible, he can be moulded, but when he passes a particular age, he becomes like dry wood and no amount of nurture will work in his case.

Occasionally, this type of understanding in the sayings such as, "Our time has already passed" signifies the same approach wherein the speaker, in stating it, passes up any possibility of reform and shuts the door to any sort of growth and progress. If man is changeable and unpredictable so long as he is alive, it then follows that he can choose a path whenever he wants or he can change his past ways and set out in a new direction.

In our religious culture, repentance [*tawbah*] essentially implies the same thing. That is, man turns back from the path he has taken and rebels against himself. The Imām has time and again emphasized on this fact, and asserts that one can always speak of nurture and reform. Therefore, as long as man remains in this world, which is the source of the tree of primal matter with its substantial, formal, and accidental changes and transformations, he can deliver himself from all levels of deficiency, wretchedness, polytheism [*shirk*], and hypocrisy and attain the higher levels of perfection and spiritual felicity.[19]

This teaching is anchored on the same definite philosophical principle of man's changeability. More importantly, if we doubt this principle, it follows that all the missions of the prophets (‘a) and the revelation of all heavenly books would be fruitless since they only make sense if we accept the fact that man is transformable. Taking this reality into account, the Imām states:

All habits [*malikāt*] and psychic dispositions are capable of change. As long as the soul remains in this world of change and transition, it is subject to time and renewal; and as long as it is associated with matter [*hayāt*] and potentiality [*quwwah*], the human being can change all his dispositions and transform them into their opposites. This claim is affirmed, besides metaphysical proof [*burhān*], by experience, as well as by the summons of the prophets (‘a) and the true religions to noble dispositions and their restraining people from the opposite qualities.[20]

From the Imām's vantage point, doubt on the possibility of nurture springs from the satanic insinuations [*waswīs*; sing. *waswasah*] and guiles of the carnal self [*an-nafs al-ammārāh*]. These two are the

brigands along the path of human perfection who, by bringing excuses such as, “Our time has already passed,” deter man from reforming the self:

Do not think that psychic, moral, and spiritual vices are not curable; this is an erroneous notion that has been inspired in you by Satan and your carnal self that want to keep you from treading the path of the Hereafter and to frustrate your efforts at rectifying your self. As long as man exists in this realm of transition and change, it is possible for him to transform all his attributes and moral characteristics.[21]

Of course, this is not to say that reforming the self and cultivating psychic perfections are always easy. We cannot deny the fact that the degrees of educability in various ages are different, and that the human being, in the initial stage of his life, is more educable and shows more flexibility. The Commander of the Faithful [amīr al-mu'minīn] ‘Alī (‘a) points out this reality, thus: “The young heart is like an unsown land which accepts whatever you plant in it.”[22]

The more a person advances in age, the less is he able to control his annoying habits and increasingly becomes a prisoner of his own unbecoming behaviour because with every day that passes, his disagreeable attributes become more deeply rooted while his power diminishes.

Mawlānā[23] has a story which conveys this reality. There was a person who planted a bramble along a public way. The thorny shrub took root, grew and became a nuisance to the wayfarers, so much so that they complained to the ruler. The ruler summoned him and asked him to uproot the bramble. The person promised to do so but kept on procrastinating. In this manner, as the days passed by, the plant became stronger while the person became weaker and older:

خارکُن در پیری و برکاستن خارکُن در قوّت و برکاستن

خارکُن هر روز زار و خشکتر خارکُن هر روز و هر دم سبز و تر

او جوانتر می شود، تو پیرتر زودباش و روزگار خود مبر

The thornbrush (is) in (process of gaining) strength and (in) ascent;

Its digger (is) in (process of) aging and decline.

The thornbrush every day and every moment is green and fresh;

Its digger is every day more sickly and withered.

It is growing younger, you older:

Be quick and do not waste your time![24]

With respect to his habits and characteristics, the human being is like that thorn pricker. Thus, as time passes by, uprooting those habits becomes more difficult. According to the Imām, as long as man exists in this realm of transition and change, it is possible for him to transform all his attributes and moral characteristics. However strong his habits may be, as long as he is living in this world he can quit them. The only thing is that the effort required to throw them off varies with the degree of their strength and intensity. A bad habit in the early phase of its formation, of course, requires only a little self-discipline and effort to eradicate it.

It is like uprooting a young plant that has not run its roots deeply into the ground. But when a quality becomes firmly rooted in one's nature, becoming a part of one's spiritual makeup, it is not easily uprooted, but requires much effort, like the tree that becomes old in age, having sent down its roots deep into the earth; it cannot be easily extirpated. The more you delay the decision to eradicate the iniquities of the heart, the more time and effort it will require.[25]

Hence, one must guard against any misunderstanding about this, and must realize that the possibility of transformation for man is always there and that the difficulty of doing anything does not mean that it is impossible. On the other hand, it is this danger or insinuation [*waswasah*] that we accept unconditionally as the entire principle of changeability and deem it an excuse for procrastinating and not reforming ourselves. We are oblivious of the fact that it is itself one of the insinuations of Satan which dissuades man from acting on time, encourages him to ruin his precious opportunities, and promises him the chance of many tomorrows. So, man must always be wary and not give himself the promise of the never-to-come tomorrow:

هینمگو: فردا که فرداها گذشت تا بکلی نگذرد ایام کشت

*Beware! Do not say 'Tomorrow'—for (many) tomorrows have passed
Let not the days of sowing pass away altogether.*[26]

This imaginary tomorrow has no reality and it is the greatest snare laid by the brigand Satan to trap the new seeker of the way. Thus, the Imām draws attention to this issue and warns us, thus:

If the tree of sinfulness growing in the orchard of the human heart reaches maturity and fruition, its roots becoming strong, the results are calamitous, one of which is to turn away man totally from repentance. Even if once in a while it comes to his mind, he keeps on postponing it from day to day and from one month to another... Don't imagine that man can perform *tawbah* [repentance] after the strengthening of the roots of sinfulness or meet its conditions. Therefore, the springtime for *tawbah* is the time of youth

when the sins are fewer, the inner darkness of the heart incomplete, the conditions of *tawbah* easier, and their fulfilment less difficult... Even if it be admitted that man can succeed in performing *tawbah* in old age, there is no certainty of reaching old age and of not meeting one's death in youth in the condition of habitual disobedience.[27]

In a nutshell, from the Imām's viewpoint the possibility of moral refinement always exists and is present as long as man is alive. Although this possibility of reform diminishes gradually, it never ceases to exist. Thus, the insinuations of Satan, which at times consider reform as impossible and at the other times promise plenty of opportunities for this to be done, must be eschewed, and time (one has) must be used to full advantage.

Coexistence of fear and hope

If there are thousands of possibilities and potential ways for the human being and the realization of every possibility and traversing of every path yields specific results for him, in that case, man would be full of hope and self-confidence in relation to his future, because he can choose a path and select anew whenever he wants to do so. On the other hand, this sense of freedom entails a responsibility for him and he does not know what ensuing consequences these choices and selections would have, and what his action would lead to. This circumstance makes him abhorrent of the future and dreadful of freedom.

It is this very point which makes many people heartily abhorrent of freedom; they are always waiting for somebody else to chart their destiny. Erich Fromm[28] labels this psychic propensity as 'escape from freedom' and discusses its psychological causes. With regard to this issue, one of the contemporary Arab thinkers named Muhammad at-Tālibī says, "If I had found a flawless person, I would have followed him and relieved myself of thinking; but the flawless person does not exist." [29]

Although all claim freedom and seek it, in reality they run away from it. It is because to be free means acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of one's choice, and there are only a few who have attained awareness to such an extent.

The inevitable outcome of the logic of change in the terrestrial world is that nobody is able to express a definite opinion about his own future. The Glorious Qur'an unequivocally stresses this point and states: *"No soul knoweth what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knoweth in what land it will die. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware."* [30]

Absolute knowledge and awareness of all things including the future which is yet to happen belongs to God and to Him alone. As such, to live without the certainty of the future is a reality that must be accepted; nevertheless, this state of affairs gives hope to some while making others fearful. A group regards the uncertain future as their achievement and the product of their deeds, and they move forward

with high spirits and enthusiasm.

On the other hand, this sense of hope makes them inebriated and overflowing with selfishness to which they succumb after some time and roll in the pit of destruction. People become anxious and dejected by such a state of affairs; they entrust themselves to the storm of events and behave like a log which is a captive of the stormy waves of the sea of existence.

Both fear and hope are necessary in the life of man and are regarded as essential for his felicity. If fear and hope did not exist in the life of man, he would quickly claim divinity and forget his being mortal. And if it were not for hope, nobody would take a single step nor do anything even to the extent that “not a single mother would breastfeed her baby.”[31] In all spheres of man’s actions, hope—manifest and hidden—exists and without it, life would be void and meaningless.

Thus, the Glorious Qur’an, on one hand, cautions us against becoming proud of ourselves, feeling secure from God’s scheme and the deceptions of the world, regarding these as symptoms of the losers and the wretched. It states: ***“Are they then secure from Allah’s scheme? None deemeth himself secure from Allah’s scheme save folk that perish.”***[32]

On the other hand, God Almighty warns man against despair and depression, which are the roots of unbelief [*kufr*] and summons him to hope, stating: ***“And despair not of the Spirit of Allah. Lo! None despaireth of the Spirit of Allah save disbelieving folk.”***[33]

Anyhow, these two attributes are essential for living properly. But in what proportion should each of them be in man’s existence? How much of each is essential for him? This issue has been discussed in the books of ethics under the heading, “Fear and Hope” [*khawf wa rajāʾ*]. By citing Qur’anic passages and Prophetic narrations, scholars of ethics are of the opinion that these two attributes must be in equal proportion in a human being so as to urge him to move, as well as to dissuade him from pride, self-conceit [*ʿujb*] and selfishness.

It has been recorded in the Prophetic narrations that fear and hope are two lights glowing in the heart of a believer and neither of which is more intense than the other.[34] It is only in such a case that man seeks the path of moderation in life, while refraining from going to extremes and from overindulgence or negligence. For this reason, Imām ‘Alī (‘a) states: “The best course is (to have) an equiponderance of fear and hope.”[35]

Hope and fear should be so pervasive in man as to induce him to perform every worthy and meaningful deed, however serious it is, and keep him away from every contemptible act, however trivial and small it is. It is with this in mind that the sage Luqmān used to say to his child:

“Have such a fear of God, the Sublime and Exalted, that were you to come to Him with the virtues of the two worlds [*thaqalayn*] He would still chastise you, and put such a hope in God that were you to come to Him with the sins of the two worlds He would still have compassion for you.”[36]

Accordingly, another consequence of the principle of man's indescribability is his coexistence with fear and hope, in such a way that these two attributes are equiponderant in him. Imām Khomein[ؑ] has devoted a whole *hadīth* chapter in *Forty Hadīth* to this issue of fear and hope, and has examined the station of these attributes from the aspect of gnosticism. According to his view, the cause of fear and anxiety of a believer is that since he evaluates the relation between himself—one that is utterly in want—and God Almighty—Who is Absolute Self-Sufficiency—and sees one side as total deficiency and shortcoming and the other side as All-Beauty and Splendour, and as he fails to acknowledge and respect the right of God as He deserves, he experiences dread and apprehension. His hope also stems from the fact that he discerns that God, the Most Sublime, has bestowed everything upon him without the least claim, and given him the promise of excessive forgiveness and clemency. In short, he is hopeful of the perpetual mercy of God.

Hence, man should always be moving back and forth between these two views: neither should he ever close his eyes to his defects and shortcomings in fulfilling the duties of creaturehood [*‘ubūdīyyah*], nor should he ever take his eyes off the expansive and all-encompassing mercy, love and compassion of God Almighty.[37]

But, why must these two attributes be equiponderant without either one of them prevailing over the other? The Imām's mystical reply is thus:

The gist of the matter is that the self is in a state of utter imperfection and shortcoming, and God at the height of greatness, glory, all-embracing mercifulness and grace, and the devotee is always in a median state of fear and hope between these two views. And since the Divine attributes of glory and perfection cast their light simultaneously on the wayfarer's heart, none of the two, fear or hope, exceeds the other.[38]

Suspension of judgment

In view of the fact that the human being has no specific nature and builds his own self, and also, that nobody has seen the future, no one can pass a definite judgment regarding himself. As a matter of fact, since no one knows what his end would be, how his life story would turn out and come to a close, he is neither able to have a correct picture nor express a proper opinion of himself.

Of course, anyone who earnestly engages in self-meditation and desists from offering lame excuses for himself will be able to perceive his existing condition and present a relatively precise account of himself. The Glorious Qur'an, therefore, states: ***“Oh, but man is a telling witness against himself.”***[39]

But our remarks concern the judgment that is final, conclusive and all-embracing. At any given moment, nobody can accurately predict his future state as well as the consequences of his deeds, and as a result, give a verdict concerning it.

Those who are negligent of this fact, by relying on their past and present deeds, pruned themselves of their wickedness and considered their future as guaranteed. The Glorious Qur'an rejects this sort of thinking and God, the Most Exalted, concerning such people, states: ***"Hast thou not seen those who praise themselves for purity? Nay, Allah purifieth whom He will, and they will not be wronged even the hair upon a date-stone."***[40]

Similarly, God purges these imaginations—that every individual only through reliance on himself and his act that he can take control of the future—and says: ***"Had it not been for the grace of Allah and His mercy unto you, not one of you would ever have grown pure. But Allah causeth whom He will to grow. And Allah is Hearer, Knower."***[41]

History is replete with the accounts of those who thought themselves to be pure and ultimately prosperous but ended up in a ruined state. Likewise, there were many who regarded themselves as ruined but turned out to be prosperous in the end. Bal'am son of Bā'ūr was one of the ascetics from among the Children of Israel [Ban' Isrā'il] whose supplications were always granted.[42] Yet, he utilized this spiritual excellence against the Prophet of God, Hadrat[43] Mūsā (Moses) (a) and, as a result, destroyed himself. The Glorious Qur'an has made an example of the story of his life for mankind:

بلعیاور را خلق جهان سغبه شدمانند عیسای زمان

سجده ناوردند کس را خون او صحت رنجور بود افسون او

پنجه زد با موسی از کبر و کمال آنچنان شد که شنیدستی تو حال

صد هزار ابلیس و یلعم در جهان همچنین بوده است پیدا و نهان

این دو را مشهور گردانید الله تا که باشد این دو بر باقی گواه

*To Bal'am son of Bā'ūr the people of the world became subject,
(For he was) like unto the Jesus of the time.
They bowed (worshipfully) to none but him:
His spell was (giving) health to the sick.*

*From pride and (conceit of) perfection he grappled with Moses:
His plight became such as thou hast heard.
Even so there have been in the world, manifest or hidden,
A hundred thousand like Iblīs and Bal'am.
God cause these twain to be notorious,
That these twain might be witness against the rest.*[44]

On the other hand, Fadl ibn 'Ayyūb[45] was a bandit and chief of robbers; yet, by hearing an *ayah* [verse] of the Glorious Qur'an, he was so transformed such that he became one of the celebrated mystics. The story [concerning him] runs as follows:

One night a caravan was passing. One of those in the caravan was reciting this verse, ***'Has not the time arrived for the Believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in their remembrance of Allah?'***[46] As it was like an arrow shot at a virtuous heart, he said, 'It came! And its time has already passed'.[47]

As such, no one can definitely ascertain his own future; this condition itself entails fear and hope, these being the guides of the faithful. It is the same fear and hope that restrain him from egotism or a feeling of abjectness. Now, if someone is not able to judge himself categorically, can he correctly assess others and pass judgment concerning them? Naturally, the answer is negative. If we do not know our own future, the more oblivious we are of the future of others. One of the secrets behind this is that all of those emphasized in our Prophetic narrations—that it is better to mind one's own business and to restrain from judging others—is this very point.

The truth of the matter is that we cannot express an opinion about the fate of anyone, whether Muslim or polytheist [*mushrik*]. Judgment in this respect is a divine act and appropriate to God; not terrestrial creatures. As long as a person is alive his account is an open book and nobody can judge him. This principle knows no exception. Of course, taking into account his manifest actions and views, one can assess his present state of affairs; but by relying on the past nobody can ever venture a definite opinion about the future of others.

Therefore, though the past could have far-reaching influences on one's future, the former can never prevail over, or dominate the latter. A human being can chart his own future differently, change it and lead himself in another direction. In the words of William James,[48] "Among all the creatures on the face of the earth, only is a human being able to change his moulds; only is he the architect of his own destiny." [49]

Such extensive tendencies of man and his uncertain destiny prevent him from being narrow-minded and from making hasty judgments while affording him the possibility of finding the deeper layers of reality.

Similarly, it liberates him from any kind of restriction and predestination, and gives him the opportunity to repent. It is from this aspect that passing judgment even on disbelievers, and considering them to be damned is deemed wrong so long as they are alive and their ‘book of deeds’ is open. Considering the profundity of this point, the Imām has quoted thus from his mentor:

Our great master, the accomplished gnostic [‘arif], Shāhībūd[50]—may my soul be his ransom—used to say, ‘Do not look down on even a *kāfir* [non-believer] in your heart. It is possible that the divine light of his inner nature may lead him to faith and your rebuke and disdain may lead you toward a wretched life in the Hereafter. Of course to practice *al-amr bi’l-ma’rūf wan-nahy ‘an al-munkar* [enjoining right conduct and forbidding bad behaviour] is something different from the inner feeling of contempt.’ He would even say, ‘Never curse the unbelievers regarding whom it is not known that they will leave the world in the state of unbelief. If they leave the world as rightly-guided servants of God, their spiritual rectitude may prove to be an obstruction in the way of your own spiritual advancement.’[51]

The Imām cautions us against hasty judgments—which are sometimes noticed among some religious people—as well as assaults on, and accusations against, the spiritual wayfarers [*sālik*] and mystics. He warns of the danger of such acts, and considers them to result from incapacity:

If we hear any of the truths from the mouth of a passionate ‘arif or a heart-broken wayfarer, or a theosopher [*hakīm-e muta’allih*], immediately we make him the target of all kinds of curses and insults, calling him an apostate and a profligate, refraining not from any kind of slander and backbiting in regard to him, because our ears cannot bear to hear his words and self-love prevents us from realizing our own inadequacies. Alas, we bequeath a book as *waqf*, binding its user with the condition that he should curse, hundred times a day, the late Mullā Muhsin Fayd (Kāshānī)! [52] We call Sadr al-Muta’allih (Mullā Sadr), [53] who is the foremost of the adherents of *tawhīd*, a heretic [*zindiq*] and do not stop at any insult in regard to him. [54]

Yes, the most optimistic analysis regarding such assertions and indictments shows inadequacy and ignorance. The outcome of possessing such a mentality is that man always remains in complex ignorance and increases his burden. Instead of an accurate understanding of the law of creation and the confession of one’s own unawareness, it covers his ignorance with the cloak of piety. This is while one of the signs of piety is to be cautious about these things and not to pass judgment on others:

Our shaykh, an accomplished ‘arif that he was (i.e. Shāhībūd), may my soul be his ransom, used to say: ‘Never call down curses [*la’*] on anybody, though he be a *kāfir* concerning whom you do not know how he made the transit from this world to the next, and unless an infallible *wa/* informs you concerning his condition after death. For it is possible that he may have attained faith before the time of death. Hence let your curse be of a general character.’ Here is one who has such a sacred spirit that he would not permit anyone who has died an apparent unbeliever to be insulted, for the probability that he might

have acquired faith at the time of death, and there are the like of us![55]

Surely, if we consider this point with its implications as the guide of our deeds in life, how many virtues would we acquire and how many abominations and defects would we rid ourselves of.

Man in the State of Nature

One of the questions that preoccupy the thinkers' mind is this: In essence, what is man—angelic or devilish? Assuming that there had been no powerful institution to administer and control human beings, in such a case what would have been the people's behaviour toward one another? Would they have mutually respected and observed their rights, or would they, like wolves, have fallen on and torn one another apart?

Any sort of answer to this question necessitates the existence of a specific political and educational system. If we say that the human being is intrinsically wicked, in that case we will inevitably need to perpetually control individuals. If we declare that man is innately angelic, it follows that we have to remove all restrictions and limitations, and set him free.

In this context, in order to comprehend the Imam's viewpoint well, we cannot help but embark on the subject by touching on the views of other thinkers as well, and to study their historical circumstances. Hence, we will deal initially on the viewpoint of Thomas Hobbes[56] on this issue as well as his famous statement, "Man is the wolf of other man." Subsequently, we will explore the view of Jean-Jacques Rousseau,[57] and then examine the Imam's point of view. As such, we will approach the discussion from the following three (3) angles:

- Hobbes' view;
- Rousseau's view; and
- Imam Khomeini's view.

Hobbes' view

Thomas Hobbes was one the greatest English political thinkers. He was a skeptic philosopher. As he failed to present exact and fixed foundations for ethics, he resorted to cynicism and accepted relativism

in ethics. With the denial of the exact foundations of ethics, he had no alternative but to present a principle for it in society.

It is owing to this that he arrived at the conclusion that for the appearance of morality in society, we are in need of a centralized and resolute authority that would maintain and promote public morality. In the political realm, he was anti-democracy and a partisan of absolute monarchy. He believed that only in the presence of a centralized authority could the morals of society be preserved. His beliefs were greatly influenced by the events of those days in England as well as the civil wars there.

One of the key concepts of Hobbes is the expression, 'man in the state of nature'. What is meant by 'the state of nature' is a hypothetical state wherein there is no political institution and administrative organization existing in the society, the people being left to their own business and to do whatever they like.

Since the instinct of love and defence of one's self is very strong in everybody, the people would be at each other's throats and would destroy one another: "In the state of nature in which everybody is his own master, one is at odds with the others concerning the nomenclature of things, and it is these differences that give rise to disputes and conflicts." [58]

Life in such a society is very difficult, laborious and perilous; in the words of Hobbes it is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." [59] According to Hobbes, in no way is this kind of living to one's benefit and advantage. Therefore, members of society themselves come to the conclusion that they have to choose a person or persons and give them enough and complete prerogatives to maintain security and so prevent individuals from assailing one another. 'Civil society', 'commonwealth', '*civitas*' and 'country' are all born of this.

According to Hobbes' view, civil society is the opposite of the state of nature, the latter being nothing but life in the jungle and even worse, for it is possible for the animals to have rules and regulations for themselves and to respect one another's domain; yet human beings in the state of nature are not like that.

Such an approach to human beings draws Hobbes toward absolute monarchical rule, totally centralized authority and the creation of powerful and commanding supervisory organizations, drags him totally away from populism, and makes him conclude, thus: "It is, therefore, clear that so long as there is no government over the people to compel them to obey, they will exist in a state, which they have named 'a state of war', this war pitting every individual against another." [60]

Hobbes' views on ethics, human beings and politics are highly controversial. Many are those who have repudiated or endorsed them, have uncovered their inner contradictions and shown his contradictory statements one by one. In the words of Richard Tock: Even during his life time Hobbes was reputed to have conflicting thoughts. He was regarded as a stubborn debater and an irascible dogmatist; yet, he would vigorously assail any kind of dogmatism. He was strongly against the notion of the authority of the

Church as was, for example, exerted over the universities; yet, he wanted his philosophical works to be adopted as textbooks in them. While extolling and commending liberalism, he used to support absolute rule that exercises complete authority over intellectual activities.[61]

The most important criticism levelled against his pessimistic view on man is that if human beings, as what he says, are so bloodthirsty, how did they arrive at the conclusion that they themselves should create an establishment that would prevent them from transgressing against others? Hobbes replies that they had come to this conclusion through their sound reasoning. In that case, it is the same sound reasoning, which is superior to their instincts and directs them toward a life devoid of want and hostility; this, however, is not meant to be a critique of Hobbes' outlook.

Rather, we are after articulating this perspective on man. It was an outlook that deeply influenced later thinkers who showed each of these influences in one way or another. The interesting point on the works of Hobbes is that he gave the title, *Leviathan*, to his most important political writing; what he meant by Leviathan was the same centralized ruling authority. Leviathan means a legendary sea-monster that devours everything. It is this oddity and irony that the government's position can possibly annihilate its citizens and, at the same time, its existence is necessary.

Anyhow, Hobbes' standpoint on the human being has its roots in the older tradition of Judeo-Christian faith. In fact, according to both the Old and the New Testaments, man is sinful and innately impure. It is this legacy that reaches Hobbes and which he theorizes, and on the basis of which he lays the foundation of his ideal political system. According to the Book of Genesis,[62] Adam and Eve ignored the commandment of God not to go near the forbidden tree, and due to the temptation of the serpent, they ate the fruit of the tree. As a consequence, they earned the wrath of God; they were expelled from heaven and were sent down to the accursed world.[63]

The sin that was committed by Adam and Eve, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, did not embroil only them; rather, this sin passes down from generation to generation of humankind, and is deemed as being part of man's nature. Accordingly, man is inherently sinful and, by nature, evil. This sinfulness is not only restricted to human beings for "even the heavens are not pure." [64] According to the ancient Psalms of David, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." [65]

Paul, the greatest official exponent of the Christian Church and the promoter of Christianity, in his epistle to the Roman Christians thus claims,

"What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands, no one who seeks God'." [66]

Elsewhere, he concludes that “the whole world is a prisoner of sin.”[67]

At any rate, sin is among the rudimentary concepts in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The human being is said to be inherently imprisoned in its clutches; he will be born with it and it has a place in his natural disposition [*fitrah*]. Only through faith is it possible for him to absolve himself. Such an approach to the nature of mankind, regarding sin to be at one with man's nature, provided fertile ground for the emergence of pessimistic and anti-democratic notions of persons such as Hobbes. As a result, we come up against a theory that reckons man as wolf unto another, regards him as innately evil, and believes that there must always be an authority to control him by forcible means.

Rousseau's view

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) view is diametrically in opposition to that of Hobbes. His thoughts had a positive influence on the Great Revolution of France. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on which his famous statement has left its imprint, owes him too much. In the beginning of his celebrated book, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau writes, “Man is born free; but he lives everywhere in slavery.”[68] Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights thus also states: “All human beings are born free and equal in...rights.”[69]

In contrast to Hobbes' view and the traditional notion of the Church based on the sinful nature of man, Rousseau believed that man in the state of nature is decent, well-mannered, free-minded, and peace-loving, and that it is the society which corrupts him. In his opinion the debasement of man commences when he joins the civil society and relinquishes his own freedom. A human being left to himself would never resort to attacking others and waging war against anybody:

Man is by nature amiable and timid; he runs away from the least danger. He acquires a pugnacious temperament by virtue of habits and experience. Pride, interest, prejudgments, vengeance, and all yearnings that can draw man to welcome the risk of death do not exist in nature. It is only when man enters human society that the thought of assaulting others enters his mind. After becoming a citizen he changes into a soldier. Therefore, man, by nature, has no inclination to wage war against his fellow human beings.[70]

So long as man lives in the lap of nature and is not a captive of society, he is in harmony and intimacy with all the constituent parts of nature. His needs are limited and can easily be met. Neither is there any sign of avarice and covetousness, nor envy and the killing of one another:

We see him eat his fill under the oak, drink water from the first spring that is within reach and quenches his thirst. He spreads out his bedding under the same tree that provided him with food. In this manner; all his needs are satisfied. The earth is absorbed in its natural productive processes, and a substantial part of it is covered with vast expanses of forest.[71]

It is regrettable that this state of affairs does not last long. It is not clear why man abandons this comfort and serenity, and decides to establish a human society. This act is tantamount to forfeiting one's own natural freedom and destroying one's own pure nature and natural disposition; for "it is the society that corrupts and defiles human beings... the more human beings gather together, to the same extent will they be further corrupted." [72]

The source of human wars and conflicts is the desire to own, which in turn is an offshoot of society. It is this longing for possession that drives human beings to kill one another, and causes so much bloodshed:

The first person who erected a wall around a plot of land and said, 'This is mine,' thinking the people to be so naïve as to believe him, was the actual founder of civil society. If someone had pulled out the wooden stakes around the above-mentioned land... and had shouted to his fellowmen, 'Do not listen to this swindler; land belongs to everybody,' the world might have possibly been safe from crimes, wars, homicide, rancour, vengeance, and suffering.[73]

In short, Rousseau's views which are mainly found in *The Social Contract* and *Discourse on the origin of the lack of equality*, gave rise to different and conflicting reactions and his naturalist understanding became highly controversial. One of the fiercest oppositions was expressed by Voltaire,[74] another one of the enlightened philosophers. Rousseau, who had much attachment to him, sent him in 1755, a copy of the book, *Discourse*, on the origin of the lack of equality. While expressing gratitude to him, Voltaire replied, thus:

I have received the book that you have written against the human race, and wish to thank you for it. Such intelligence had never been applied to fool us people. By reading your book, people would like to walk on their two hands and two feet. But for me, since I abandoned such a habit sixty years ago, I feel, with all regret, that to begin it again is beyond me. To search for the savage people of Canada is also not possible. The ailments with which I am afflicted have put me in need of European surgeons. Moreover, there is a war going on in those regions, and copying our actions has also made the savages corrupt like ourselves.[75]

As such, contrary to Hobbes, Rousseau puts emphasis on the pure nature of man and regards the civil society as its demolisher. In view of the fact that there is no possibility of perpetuating the state of nature and, in effect, such a state has never existed, being more hypothetical than real, Rousseau's solution is the acceptance of civil society provided that it is based on the social contract and guarantees individual

liberties. Yet, in practice, Rousseau's idea stems from either the negation of government and attacking society or results in a self-centered government. It is this point that thinkers have seriously dealt with but is beyond the ambit of our discussion.

However, what is interesting for us here is his outlook on the nature of man. He holds it immune from any kind of blemishes and has reckoned even training and education as corrupting this wholesome natural disposition [*fitrah*]. In the book, *Emile*,^[76] he suggests that we should completely leave the child to himself to grow in whatever way he likes as in the case of wild pennyroyal, and be one with nature.

If Hobbes used to view the nature of man so pessimistically and regarded the existence of a powerful government to be indispensable for deterring human beings from aggression against one another, Rousseau stands on the proposition that in reality it is the society and government that tarnish the clear nature of man, the best state of man being that very state of nature.

Imam Khomein's view

These two traditions and perspectives have both advocates and antagonists. They have been put to the test time and again and have shown their shortcomings. Doubtlessly, each of these two outlooks possesses a part of the truth.

If human beings are left to themselves and no law or moral principle controls them, certainly egoism would sway them to compete with and, finally, obliterate one another.

Apparently, the cynical outlook of Hobbes is more in consonance with reality than the positive view of Rousseau. In Islamic anthropology, strong threads [of the reality] can be seen from Hobbes vantage point.

According to Qur'anic narration, since God announced to the angels His intention of creating man and appointing him as His vicegerent on earth, they asked all together in protest: ***"Wilt Thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee?"***^[77]

In this objection of the angels, they indicated two points: one, this human creature would be a blood-shedding being; the other, they (the angels) were more deserving than man to be the vice-regents of God. What is important for us is the first point. The angels, for certain reasons, used to point to the shedding of blood and cruelties of this creature, perceiving the big and disastrous wars written on his face.

Interestingly enough, God neither rebuffed their views, nor said to them that man will not be murderous. Instead, in various instances, including this one, He put the stamp of approval, and described man as

iniquitous and imprudent.[78] God answered them with only a single sentence: ***“Surely I know that which ye know not.”***[79]

This general statement conveyed to the angels the fact that God also knows the other side of the coin of man’s existence while they see only his murderous aspect. In such a way, He told them that though man is murderous and cruel, there is a more important feature in him that justifies his creation and appointment as God’s representative on earth. In this manner, murder and bloodshed have been moulded in the existence of man and he has an inborn inclination to transgress his bounds and perpetrate tyranny.[80]

Of course, this point should be mentioned that this trait has no relation whatsoever to the Christian notion of Original Sin. According to the Glorious Qur’an, both Adam and Eve, too, were recalcitrant and disobeyed God’s commandment; as a consequence, they were expelled from paradise and sent down to earth.

Nevertheless, after realizing their error, they repented and God, in turn, accepted their repentance, and the spiritual taint of that recalcitrance was wiped out. God, the Most High, states that Adam was beguiled by Satan: ***“And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so went astray. Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him, and guided him.”***[81]

Thus, this point has no bearing at all on the Christian belief on the original sin of man. Such is the nature of man, egoist and self-centered.

This is the truth of the matter. Man possesses a predatory and destructive makeup. This is what Freud[82] called, ‘instinct of annihilation’ and considers it one of the two fundamental instincts of man. It is the same instinct that has been the cause of the ruinous and widespread wars throughout human history, has spawned great tragedies, and been responsible for father killing son, and son killing father. Of course, this instinct is vital in the life of man. If human beings were not egoistic, they would not have been able to contend with other animals and natural disasters, and would have been exterminated.

From this perspective, man is not different from predatory animals and is subject to the law of ‘kill or be killed’. He destroys others in order to provide for himself, and gives priority to himself over others. The Imam describes this aspect of man in the following terms:

It is evident that at the time of his birth, after passing through certain stages, man is no better than a weak animal and has no distinction over other animals, except for his potentiality of becoming a human being. That is, his humanness is potential, not present. Therefore, man is an animal in actuality in the initial stages of his life in this world. No power but the law of animal nature, which governs through the faculties of Desire [*shahwah*] and Anger [*ghadab*], rules over him.[83]

Historical observations and reflections of thinkers corroborate and uphold this view and perspective; yet,

this is not the end of the story. Man is murderous; yet, his pursuit is not only bloodshed. He is an animal; yet, he does not remain within the bounds of being animal [*hayawāniyyah*]. It is true that since the moment of his entering the world of existence, man is subject to the logic of animal life and in the words of the Imām:

Though it is not directly relevant to our topic, it is essential to know that the human soul is by nature and instinct inclined to believe not only in the principle of *tawhīd* [monotheism], but to follow all truthful doctrines also. Yet, since the moment of birth and stepping into this universe, man starts growing and developing along with his natural urges and animal desires.[84]

In spite of this, man can let his other aspect prevail over this aspect. This other aspect of man is evident to God though hidden and concealed to the angels. This aspect of man's existence is the very *fitrah* [natural disposition], which has been given remarkable emphasis in our religious texts. The key solution to this concern is the *fitrah*, which have recently been given much attention by Islamic thinkers such as the late 'Allamah Tabatabā'i[85] and Mutahharī,[86] and on the basis of which they have proved and established a great deal of knowledge and learning.

Fitrah means natural disposition and origination. In reply to the question concerning the noble *āyah* [verse], which states: "*The nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man,*"[87] Imām as-Sādiq ('a) stated that it meant that God created all the people with a monotheistic instinct.[88]

According to the Imām, *fitrah* does not exclusively mean *tawhīd* [monotheism], as "it includes all the true teachings which God Almighty has ingrained in the nature of His slaves"[89] and these have been moulded in their being and personality.

The Imām elaborates on the role and place of *fitrah* in the human instinct, as well as some of its manifestations, in the exposition of the eleventh *hadīth* in his *Sharh-e Chehel Hadīth*. The most important principle of man's *fitrah* is his being monotheist; second, belief in the hereafter; and third, acceptance of the principle of prophethood [*nubuwwah*]. Another decree on man's *fitrah* is:

The natural inclination to seek perfection [that] is so universal [in] that if all the eras of human existence are probed and each of human individuals, no matter to what group or nation he may belong, is questioned, a love of perfection will be found to be part of his nature and his heart will be found to be pulled toward it.[90]

It is possible that owing to the influence of some circumstances or type of upbringing, individuals may have diverse opinions on the meaning and connotation of perfection. In essence, however, nobody holds a dissenting view. Everyone is looking for something which he thinks is better [and] similar is the case of men of science and craft and that of the entire human species. Whatever the activity and field of their concern, their eagerness grows with achievement and is directed toward the higher degrees of perfection. The more they progress and advance, the more their eagerness grows for the higher degrees of perfection; its fire is never extinguished and becomes more intense every day.[91]

It is the same inclination to perfection and excellence that drives forward the caravan of human civilization and learning, and turned the early humans, who were afraid of the fierce and dreadful animals, into masters and rulers of the planets. It is the same penchant for perfection that eclipses man's murderous nature and makes him determined to overcome his defects and display the excellences in him. It is the same essence of *fitrah* that renders possible the founding of communities and civil society. It is the very quintessence that brings to the fore the murderous man's merit to be the Vicegerent of God and the epitome of divine attributes.

Had it not been for this essence, no social contract—whether in the world of imagination or in that of reality—would have been concluded; human beings would never be willing to give up some of his interests and tolerate others. So, Hobbes in saying that man is the wolf of another man and Rousseau in opining that man is, by nature, pure and peace-loving, are both right. Each of them has seen one facet of man's being. But if man were only wolf, the establishment of a civil society would not have been possible. On the other hand, if he were only angelic and peaceful in nature, do all these crimes and murders then make sense?

Hence, man is both this and that, but at the same time, is [purely] neither this nor that. In this context, the view of the Imām is both realistic and optimistic. He propounds that when man is born, he possesses abundant potentialities for deriving excellences as well as instincts for his security and survival. In fact, since the time he sets foot on earth, man is in need of attributes that could keep him away from dangers.

In this aspect, he is not significantly different from the other animals. Self-love, the need for food and drink, and the need to ward off danger and to reproduce are all attributes common to human beings and other animals. But, man does not remain in that stage as he possesses the capability to go beyond it and attain spiritual perfections while the other animals are devoid of that potentiality and only revolve in the vicious cycle of their instincts.

In view of this, this monotheistic and perfection-seeking disposition is the demarcation line between human being and animal. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily mean that as he enjoys a truth-seeking disposition man is no longer in need of training and education, and that every human being actually possesses all excellences. Man is *de facto* no less than an animal. It is only through self-edification that he can elevate himself from that position, leave behind him the degrees of existential perfection, and finally reach a station that is beyond imagination.

In short, from the viewpoint of Imām Khomein[ؑ], man in the state of nature is a ruthless and self-centered creature possessing strong egoism, and in the words of the Imām, an adherent of the logic and “law of animal nature.”[92]

However, his monotheistic and perfection-seeking disposition—provided that it constitutes the basis for growth and development—compels him to overcome his self and his animalistic logic, and to tread the

path of perfection, and go beyond the stages of Divine Proximity, becoming the vicegerent of God and all-encompassing embodiment of His Attributes. But, this proximity to the Divine Presence is commensurate to the exit from the door of selfishness and self-worship as “the gnostic journey toward God and the spiritual migration does not take place without leaving the dark house of the self and the disappearance of its traces.”[93]

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.”[94]

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 Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) asked him as to who is superior, man or angel. The infallible Imām (‘a) replied that the Commander of the Faithful Imām ‘Alī (‘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* Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī [ar-Rūmī], a great gnostic and expounder of the subtleties of human existence, recites thus:

نرحدیث آمد که یزدان مجید	خلق عالم را سه گونه آفرید
یک گُرْم را 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 بفریبهی
او نبیند جز که اصطبل و علف	از شقاوت غافل است و از شرف
این سوم هست آخمیزاد و پیشر	نیم او زافرشته 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.

*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 کرده روان

یگدم ار مجنونز خود غافلیدی ناقه گرییدی و واپس آمدی

عشق و سودا، چون که پر بونشیدن می نبودش چاره از بیخودشدن

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

لیگ ناقه، پس مراقب بود و چُست چون بیدید او مهار خویش سست

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

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

در سه روزه ره، بدین احوالها مندم چون در ترد 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 [*khilāfah*]. 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 Imām 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. Imām 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 Farāhdīn Mashūrī [104] relates this status of man, thus:

لا جرم جاری است پیکاری سترگ روز و شب، مابین این انسان و گرگ

مردمان گر یکدیگر را می‌درند گرگ‌هاشان ره‌نما و ره‌برند

اینکه انسان هست این سان دردمند گرگ‌ها فرمانروایی می‌کنند

و آن ستمکاران که با هم محرمند گرگ‌هاشان آشنایان همد

گرگ‌ها همراه و انسان‌ها غریب با گه باید گفت این حال عجیب؟

*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 بگذازم صورتگر نقاشم، هر لحظه بتی سازم

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

یا آنکه 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

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

در خانه آب و گل بی توسست خراب این دل یا خانه درآ، جانان، یا خانه بپردازم

*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 [*ris'alah*], 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: [۱۱۵] از چوب خدا این بنده اش می زند بر پشت دیگر بنده خوش

"چوب حق، و پشت و پهلوان او من غلام و آلت فرمان او

"گفت: "توبه کردم از جبرای عیار اختیاراست، اختیاراست، 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 را می 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 یا ناروایی؟ بین تو نیک

قیمت هر کالهی دانکه چیست قیمت خود را نادانی احمقی است

سعدها و ندسها دانسته ای ننگری سعدی تو یا ناشسته ای

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

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 [usq] 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,

*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 [*sulūk-e akhlāqī*] 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^(r), 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[®] 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:

ای شهان! کشتیم ما خصم برون ماند خصمی زو بتدر اندرون

کشتن این، کار عقل و هوش نیست شیر باطن، سُخره خرگوش نیست

دوزخ است این نفس و دوزخ اژدهاست کو به دریاها نگرید کم و کاست

هفت دریا را درآشامد، هنوز کم نگرید سوزش آن خلق سوز

سنگها و کافران سنگ دل اندرآیند اندر او زار و خجل

*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 *jihād* 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 Imām 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:

مرغ باغ ملکوتیم نیم از عالم خاک چند روزی قفسی ساخته اند از بدنم

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 گنج محنت آبادست

ترا ز کنگره عرش میزنند صفیر 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 Tāhir[153] point to this view:

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

بیسازم خنجرى نیشش ز فولاد زنم 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 بندى از دل برگشایی

بگفت آنجا پر پرویان 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 *khāneqāh* [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:

تا اختیارکردی از آن این فریق را؟

گفتم: میان عالم و عابد چه فرق بود

وین‌جهد می‌کند گره‌اند غریق را

گفت: آن گلیم خویش بدر می‌برد 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 [*jihād 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 [*jihād fī sabīlillāh*]." [157] Likewise, in interpreting on the noble *āyah* [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, 'Ṣim, 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[ؑ] 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 Khomeini 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 bī'l-ma'rūf wa'n-nahy 'an al-munkar* [to enjoin good conduct and forbid indecency], the implementation of *hudūd* [punishment prescribed by the Islamic penal law], *ta'zīrāt* [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 *jihād* with the enemies of the *Dīn* [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 *hukamā'* [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 Mawlānā on the Prophet's noble *hadīth*, "*Lā rahbaniyyah fī'l-Islām*" [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:

عَرَقِ مردی آن گهی پیدا شود که مسافر همراه 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 Q^رn.[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 دُر 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^rz^z Muhammad ‘A^l Sh^hh^hb^hd^h, 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-ye Sa'ādāt* [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 Narī, Ibrāhīm Idham, Dāwūd Tā'ī, Fadl 'Ayyūd, Sulaymān Khawwās, Yūsuf Isbāt, Hadhāfah Mar'ash, 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] Fadl 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 smoothened 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 Imām ‘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[®] 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 بُدن نه قماش و نقره و میزان و زن

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

آب در کشتی، هلاک کشتی است آب اندر زیر کشتی پستی 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]

The Philosophy behind Suffering

One of the issues engaging the mind of man since the distant past is the existence of suffering, which is apparently pointless and futile. The presence of evil and suffering in our world is undeniable. Everyone has encountered and experienced them in their various forms in his life. Life without anguish or pain, and happiness without grief exist only in the imagination. But the reality is a mixture of the two (happiness and loneliness).

Concerning suffering there are mainly two fundamental questions. The first is, what is the origin of suffering and from where does it emerge? The other is whether agony and pain are concordant with the justice and mercy of God.

All the religious people of the world should answer these two questions. If God is the Lone Creator of the world and the Manifestation of goodness, then where have all these miseries come from? Can the God of Goodness be the agent of misery and just as He creates, can also destroy? Acknowledgment of the

fact that the One God is the sole origin of all creations—even those events that are seemingly evil—was enigmatic for many. Thus, most of them would follow the path of polytheism and, like the Manuians,[228] believed in at least two deities. As narrated by Paulo Cuello, the great soothsayer who believed in various gods, when he heard the claim of Prophet Ilyās (‘a) that God is One, he asked in mockery: “Do you want to say that according to your belief, the same God that sends the storm also makes the wheat grow even though these two things are poles apart?”[229]

The other point is that in the teachings of all religions, God has been described as the Absolute Power, Absolute Authority, Most Gracious, and Most Merciful. These attributes are apparently discordant with the existence of miseries.

Various philosophical and ethical answers to these queries have already been given. After much experience and meditation, [Siddhartha Gautama] Buddha arrived at the Four Noble Truths, the first of which is the existence of suffering in the world and its inevitability.[230] Then he, who did not believe in monotheism [*tawhīd*] in its Abrahamic sense, presented a most detailed analysis of the phenomenon of suffering and recommended certain ways on how to be completely released from it.[231]

But, though the first question seems more philosophical, it is the second question that has occupied the minds to a greater extent; and that is the ethical aspect of suffering. Are all these miseries in the world acceptable? Could not the existing world have been better than this? Are all these sufferings compatible with the justice, omniscience, and omnipotence of God? If there is a being other than God who could create another world, could he (the being other than God) have been able to cause a world better than this one to appear? Is the poet’s following assertion valid?

گر بر فلکم دست بُدی چون یزدان برداشتمی من این فلک را ز میان

وز نو فلکی دیگر چنان ساختمی کآزاده به کام دل رسیدی آسان

*If like the Creator I had only dominion over the heaven,
I would have taken away this heaven.
And then a new heaven would I make;
As you can easily have whatever your heart dictates.*

One of the most ancient and famous writings about suffering is the Book of Job in the Old Testament. We have all heard about the story of Prophet Job [Ayyūb] (‘a). The Glorious Qur’an briefly points to the story of his life and states that Job (‘a) fell ill but chose patience, and tasted the pain of suffering until he attained a pleasant end. According to the Qur’an, Job (‘a) experienced such suffering that he raised his hands in supplication and sought God’s assistance. His prayer was granted and regained whatever he

had lost. God mentions Job (‘a) as a patient servant.[232]

The story of Job (‘a) is narrated more elaborately in the Judeo-Christian sources. In the Book of Job in which the different dimensions have been discussed and explained, it is narrated that Job (‘a) was an affluent and influential man, and the fame of his wealth and power was known everywhere:

Job (‘a) had seven sons, three daughters, and possessing seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred cows, five hundred she-donkeys, and innumerable servants. He was being acknowledged as the richest man of the entire district.[233]

Job (‘a) was an upright person and a philanthropist. He used to help the needy and cater to their needs. One day God extolled Job (‘a) before an assembly of angels and said, “Nobody like him can be found on earth. He is an honest and God-fearing man and keeps away from sin.”[234]

Satan who was present in that assembly said in protest, if fearing God was not of benefit to him, he would not have done so. Thou hast kept Job (‘a), his family and possession safe from every predator. Thou hast multiplied his earnings and bestowed abundant wealth on him. Take away his possession from him; then Thou wilt behold that he openly blasphemes Thee.[235]

In this manner, the great trial for Job (‘a) commenced and Satan was granted the permission to do whatever he liked to him except exercising domination over his body and mind. As a consequence, tribulations occurred one after another. All the possessions of Job (‘a) were lost. His children died. He, himself, became afflicted with an ailment and suffered intense physical agony. He was expelled from his community. His friends forgot him and even his wife assailed him. Yet, he patiently endured all these adversities.

In spite of this, three of his friends approached him and rubbed salt into his wounds. They believed that these tribulations served as punishment for the sins of Job (‘a) and he was now paying for his sinful past. They urged Job (‘a) to repent for his sins so that God would forgive him. However, Job (‘a) insisted that he had committed no sin and that these happenings and tribulations had no relation whatsoever to his alleged commission of sins.

This dialogue is one of the most elegant and profound conversations pertaining to human suffering. It presents the diverse views on evil and its origin. In short, those three could not convince Job (‘a) that he was a sinner. God cured him; restored to him his lost properties, endowed him with other children in the place of his deceased ones, and inspired the three to apologize to Job (‘a). In this way, Job (‘a) recovered his lost social standing. Everybody realized that the ordeals are not the result of his sinfulness. Rather, these had been only a trial to prove the unflinching faith of Job (‘a).

This notwithstanding, the question of the need for good men to suffer is still open to debate. This question and many other similar ones have been discussed for hundreds of years. Through an analysis

of the nature and essence of mischief and evil [*sharr*] (as what Plato did) and its benefits (as what St. Augustine did), everyone has tried to address these questions that are just as debatable and can be pondered upon.[236]

The question at this juncture with which we have to deal is this: Is the existence of all these sufferings and evils in the world ethical and compatible with the sublime attributes of God or not? This question can be answered from two perspectives. One is from the perspective of faith and through the acceptance of the principles of religion [*usul/ ad-din*] and submission to them. It is from this perspective that the believer says that the entire universe and all its components are creations of God, one of Whose Attributes is Wisdom. All the actions of the Wise are full of wisdom.

Thus, there is wisdom in suffering and evil in it as well. Although we are not able to comprehend the secret behind so many evils, this ignorance of ours does not mean that they lack wisdom. It only shows how ignorant we are, and that our knowledge is not so considerable in relation to the things unknown to us and that we have taken only a cup from the ocean of knowledge.[237]

But this answer does not convince all minds and, accordingly, for some it is a challenging one. Through reflection on the essence of the world, and the phenomenon of suffering and its function, they try to give a more elaborate answer to the question. In reality, they admit the wisdom behind the act of God but seek the hidden wisdom in suffering and its function. As a consequence, it is owing to this kind of view and reflection that the subject of divine justice has been one of the most sensational subjects of scholasticism and philosophy. It is the field for testing the capability of the human mind.

By relying on a tradition which tries to elucidate the issue of evil [*sharr*], Imām Khomein[ؑ], in acknowledging the philosophical principles that consider the existence of evils as inevitable, attempts to show the ethical aspect of evil. His viewpoint will be made clear through a survey of the following points:

- Evil as relative;
- Evil as constructive;
- The hereafter as the place for reward; and
- Suffering as commensurate to one's own understanding

Evil as relative

We human beings view the world from the standpoint of our own interests, evaluating and classifying

everything on the basis of its benefit and detriment to us. We never view the world as bare, exactly as it is and separate from us. This point will be more vivid especially with regard to the phenomena that are interwoven with our fate. To cite an example, we identify some of the plants as 'weed'.

This classification does not convey anything about its nature; it only shows our judgment regarding it. Now, if one would ask us, what is weed, our answer would be that weed is a plant which has no benefit, or grows spontaneously in our garden and orchard. But these answers indicate only one thing and that is the fact that we have named this plant on the basis of its benefits and harm to us. Thus, if assuming that a virtue is discovered in some of these weeds, our classification is immediately changed.

That is why Emerson,[238] an American thinker and poet, asks: "What is 'weed'?" He himself answers: "It is a plant whose benefits have not yet been discovered." In this example we clearly see that the remarks are not about identity, and that it is not obvious what weed is. 'Weed' is a value-laden concept and belongs to the domain of the human mind. Professor Izutsu cites the same example and analyzes it in this manner:

To cite an example, consider the term, 'weed'. Dictionaries have usually defined this term in this way: 'It is a wild plant that grows everywhere.' In other words, it is unwanted and undesirable. However, in the exact real world, that is, in the natural world, nothing exists that is unwanted or undesirable; it only exists in the viewpoint of man who views the endless things of the complex nature, classify them, categorize them, and give them different values on the basis of their purposes.[239]

Thus, our view on the universe is not a neutral one; in most cases we identify and categorize things on the basis of our own interests. Of course, the point here is not individual interests but the interests of mankind as such. That is to say, man considers everything beneficial to him as good and detrimental as bad. Well, with this analysis in mind, let us proceed to the subject of evil [*sharr*] and examine, basically, what evil [*sharr*] is. Whatever description of evil and suffering is presented pertains to man.

That is, it is only in relation to man that evil finds meaning. What we mean by evil—be it natural or ethical—is a phenomenon which, in both cases, bring suffering into our lives in one way or another, or endangers and frighten us. We regard destructive floods as evil since they can cut off our means of communications, ruin our harvests, destroy our houses, and finally, endanger our lives. But aside from the danger the flood brings to us and our interests, it can no longer be deemed 'evil'. Rather it will only be viewed merely as a natural phenomenon. This is also true with respect to dangerous animals.

We think about poisonous reptiles such as venomous snake as dangerous and evil since it is possible that they can kill us with their fangs; however, this same poisonous fang is the most important factor in the protection of the snake's life and the continuity of its species. So, this 'evil' is 'good' for the snake. Of course, it can be asked, "Basically, what is the benefit of this 'evil' to us?" "Its non-existence is better than its existence!"

Although an elaborate reply to this inquiry could be given and proved that they constitute a part of this very same order of nature, and that their presence is necessary, we can, here, give a brief and adequate answer which is that the question itself is rooted in man's self-centeredness. Man views all the creatures within the framework of his interests and then asks what good or necessity does the existence of venomous snakes have. It is enough that the universe be viewed from the perspective of the venomous snakes. Then, this question for the snakes arises: "What is the necessity or benefit for nature of the existence of this two-footed creature (man) who is always in the pursuit of killing snakes and whose existence is entirely evil?" Then, we would observe that our viewpoint in relation to nature is a one-sided and value-laden one.

Once we understand this point well, we will realize that in many cases the things we think 'evil' is only 'evil' as far as we are concerned, and once the outlook is changed we will discern it to be good. In addition to the fact that the outlook of mankind on nature is such, the outlook of each and every individual also has this peculiarity. We have heard the old story of two neighbours. One was a farmer while the other was a potter. The farmer exerted all his efforts for one whole year and cultivated much of the land. The potter also made a lot of earthenware.

Thereafter, the farmer would always pray and ask God for rain to pour down from the sky so that his produce would be abundant. On the other hand, afraid of the rain, the potter, raising his hands up to the sky, asked God for clear skies and bright sunlight. The sun for the former neighbour is 'evil', whereas for the latter, rain is always so. As a result these two have associated good and evil with their own interests and evaluated them with respect to themselves; duly naming them as 'good' or 'evil'.

This is what is meant by subjectiveness or relativeness of evil. If there is no human judgment, no phenomenon can be termed 'evil'. But as soon as human judgment intervenes—the judgment being based as it is on the benefits and interests of man—the issue of evil appears. Thus, nothing is absolutely evil, that is, *per se* and in relation to itself. Instead, it is only when it is evaluated that it is called 'evil' by us. So, evil is that which is discordant with our interests. In this sense, evil will be subjective and relative. On the other hand, since our interests change with a change in circumstances it is possible that what was evil yesterday is good today and vice-versa.

As a result, in this sense evil would also be relative. Let us assume that you have an appointment with one of your bosom friends. However, before you leave your house to visit him, an unexpected guest arrives and hinders this supposed visit. This guest is reckoned as something bad [*sharr*]. But, after making the appointment if something happened that discouraged you from meeting him and you were looking for an excuse to cancel the appointment the guest's arrival, in such a case, would be good for you.

We have heard about the story of an ugly husband whose wife was not showing pleasant gesture to him. One midnight the wife heard the sound of a thief's steps, and fear-stricken, clung to her husband. After realizing that the reason for this extraordinary and unusual love of his wife was nothing but the presence

of the thief, he welcomed him saying, “You are welcome to take whatever you want.”

Thus, evil is relative in both senses. That is, it is evaluated and labeled from the human point of view, and also because of our interests’ being variable, it may happen that yesterday’s evil is today’s good, and yesterday’s good, today’s evil:

پس بد مطلق نباشد در جهان بد به نسبت باشد، این را هم بدان

در زمانه هیچ زهر و قند نیست که یکی را پا، دگر را بند نیست

مر یکی را پا، دگر را پایبند مر یکی را زهر و بر دیگر چو قند

زهرِ مار، آن مار را باشد حیات نسبتش با آدمی باشد ممات

خلقِ آبی را بود دریا چو باغ خلقِ خاکی را بود آن، مرگ و داغ

همچنین برمشمرای مرد کار! نسبت این، از یکی کسی تا هزار

زید اندر حقِ آن شیطان بود در حقِ شخصِ دگر سلطان بود

آن بگوید: زید صدیق سنی است وین بگوید: زید گبرِ کُشتنی است

گر تو خواهی کو تو را باشد شکر پس ورا از چشمِ عُشّاقش نگر

Hence there is no absolute evil in the world:

Evil is relative. Know this (truth) also.

In (the realm of) Time there is no poison or sugar

That is not a foot (support) to one and a fetter (injury) to another —

To one a foot, to another a fetter;

To one a poison and to another (sweet and wholesome) like sugar.

Snake-poison is life to the snake,

(But) it is death in relation to man.

The sea is as a garden to the water-creatures;

To the creatures of earth it is death and a (painful) brand.

Reckon up likewise, O man of experience,

(Instances of) this relativity from a single individual to a thousand.

Zayd, in regard to that (particular) one, may be a devil,

(But) in regard to another person he may be a (beneficent) sultan.

That one will say that Zayd is an exalted siddiq (saint),

And this one will say that Zayd is an infidel who ought to be killed.

If you wish that to you he should be (as) sugar,

Then look on him with the eye of lovers.[240]

Nonetheless, relativity of evil has a more profound philosophical meaning. We have read a lot that this planet earth is the locus of movement and change, which the Imam termed as “the abode of change, transition, and annihilation.”[241]

In this world, nothing is fixed and static; all things are in the process of transformation. Every phenomenon in this world moves toward its own perfection. God created every phenomenon in such a way that it moves on the basis of its own creational [takwīnī] and essential [sirishī] guidance.

Yesterday’s seed is today’s tree; yesterday’s embryo is today’s fetus and today’s fetus is tomorrow’s newborn baby—this cycle continues unabatedly. Yet, this process naturally engenders contradiction and duality. A fetus which wants to become a newborn baby should abandon its fetal state whereupon its metamorphosis would become perfect. In order to become a tree the seed should break out of its peel. So as to have permanent and complete teeth, the child should lose his baby teeth. A youngster, who likes to be independent in his life, should reduce his dependence on his family and accept the responsibility that freedom entails. All these transformations are bound to suffering.

No fetus is born without suffering, and no seed transformed into a fruitful tree. A youth who wants to have a muscular and well-proportioned body should get used to the pain of doing workouts with cold iron bars, and bear the pain of lactic acid accumulation in his muscles. He should also endure extreme muscle fatigue for some time. A butterfly should live inside its cocoon for a period of time to let its beautiful wings grow and prepare it for a new plane. In this sense, no movement and contact is possible without suffering and release from the existing condition. This famous saying of Mullā Sadrī testifies to this truth: “If there were no contradiction, the grace of the Merciful Fountainhead would not be obtained.”[242]

No one can deny this reality. A pupil of yesterday who wants to be a university student of today should accept the pain of being far away and separated from high school friends so as to establish contact with new friends and a new environment. Therefore, not only is every phenomenon involved with its own past

in its path to perfection, but also it sometimes encounters other phenomena that hinder its perfection. It is here that an all-out conflict ensues—an inevitable and blessed battle in which neither adversary is totally defeated. The Imām examines evil from this perspective and says:

[All] the evils, catastrophes, death, disease and destructive events and troublesome creatures and other such things which are in this world of nature and this narrow pit of darkness arise from the interferences and conflicts between existents, not from the aspects pertaining to Being but on account of the deficiency of their ambiance and the narrowness of their abode.[243]

As such, evil in this sense is also relative (subjective). That is, every happening that takes place is evil for some while good for others. A person falling down and breaking his leg is an ‘evil’ event for him. Yet, this same unpleasant happening is good for the bonesetters and orthopaedists since their occupations are connected to these kinds of ‘evil’. However, the Imām goes beyond this point and believes that evil is not only relative but also a non-existing issue. That is, in a more technical description, all the evils [basically] arise from the interferences and conflicts between existents, not from the aspects pertaining to Being but on account of the deficiency of their ambiance and the narrowness of their abode. And these derive from limitations and deficiencies which are totally outside the ambit of the light of creation and are in reality below making [*jā’l*]. The true reality is the Light which is quit of all evil, defect and deficiency. However, these defects and evils and harmful and troublesome things, in respect of their defectiveness and harmfulness, are not essential objects of creation, but they are accidental objects of creation.[244]

The idea that evil is a non-existing affair is among the ancient ideas of philosophy, the exact comprehension of which necessitates an extensive technical preliminary preparation propounding which is not possible in this concise volume. But the core of the issue is that evil is not an exact, existing and specified reality which can be identified. Evil is a relative issue; it means that in relation to us it is considered evil. Evil is dependent on our judgment and since our judgment is interwoven with our variable interests, evil is variable as well and not fixed. Take a look at this earthly world. Perfection requires abandonment of the present condition and acceptance of some failures and frustrations which themselves bring about suffering and evil. As a result, evil is inevitable in the corporeal world. Yet, this evil is relative, not absolute and a requisite for perfection:

این جهان جنگ است چون کل بنگری نره با نره، چو دین با کافری

آن یکی نره همی پرد به چپ و آن دگر سو یمین اندر طلب

...نره ای بالا و آن دیگر نگون جنگِ فعلشان ببین اندر رُکون

جنگِ طبعی، جنگِ فعلی، جنگِ قول در میان جزوها، حربی است هول

این جهان زین جنگِ قایم می بُود در عناصر در نگر تا حل شود

*When you consider, this world is all at strife,
Mote with mote, as religion (is in conflict) with infidelity.
One mote is flying to the left,
And another to the right in search.
One mote (flies) up and another down:
In their inclination (movement) behold actual strife.
The actual strife is the result of the hidden strife:
Know that that discord springs from this discord.
This world is maintained by means of this war:
Consider the elements, in order that it (the difficulty) may be solved.[245]*

Evil as constructive

The foregoing discussion was more a philosophical outlook on the place of evil in the system of the universe where we tried to illuminate the point that basically evil is relative and subjective, not a reality independent from man's perception. But here the discussion is on its function.

The question is: What is the benefit of evil—be it relative or exact and absolute reality—for man? The thrust of the famous Book of Job is this one. Why a pious and upright man such as Job (‘a) should be afflicted with all these adversities and undergo diverse miseries and agonies?

Many have attempted to answer this question. Yet, most of these answers embody one point and that is the constructive role of evil for man. Many of the mystics [*ʿarifān*] and teachers of ethics emphasize this principle that the presence of some of the evils is needed for the nourishment of man's soul and formation of his personality. Man grows and attains perfection only in a conducive environment and with the provision of necessary conditions.

But this favourable environment does not only mean comfort, convenience and unconsciousness; it also means the existence of some unpleasantness and tribulations. A driver who drives along a highway having no acclivity or declivity will easily feel sleepy and it is even possible for him to be exposed to the danger at an accident. However, the one who is driving along an extremely winding highway, and every moment, considers the probability of an unexpected occurrence, is always careful and does not allow

himself to fall sleep.

Thus, the philosophy behind some evils is to keep man always alert and ready to overcome all odds. One of the contemporary Christian preachers names this theory as the divine justice theory of soul nourishment since this theory is indicative of the great scheme of God of assisting human beings in attaining moral and spiritual maturity. According to this theory, to live in a particular environment is necessary for nourishment of the soul. An environment can cause the moral and spiritual maturity of man in which real challenges are real opportunities for the emergence of moral virtues, and real facilities for the appearance of faith in God should be present.[246]

For instance, in the training courses for soldiers, training programs are designed to be rigid and severe so as to put the maximum physical and emotional pressure on them. The aim of such programs is not to annoy or torment others. Rather, it is meant to prepare individuals to confront actual situations and serious challenges. Well, if we encounter such cases which are termed evils, our outlook on them in general will be changed. The goal of a coach who encourages the athletes under his supervision to undergo difficult and rigid practice is the enhancement of their physical ability. The purpose of a professor who gives complicated assignments to his students is to increase their knowledge. The problem that nature poses for us is with the same aim of augmenting our ability.

The same is the view of the Imām on the issue of evil. He devotes one of the *hadīths* in his forty selected *hadīths* on this matter. After narrating a *hadīth* with this purport, he embarks on its exposition: Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) narrates from the Book of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) in which he says:

Of all mankind the prophets undergo the severest of trials, and after them the *awsīyā* [executors of will], and after them the elect to the extent of their nobility. Indeed, the believer undergoes trial in proportion to his good deeds. So, one whose faith is sound and whose deeds are good, his trials are also more severe. That is indeed because God Almighty did not make this world a place for rewarding the believer and punishing the unbeliever. And one, whose faith is feeble and whose (good) deeds are few, faces fewer tribulations. Verily, tribulations hasten toward the believer with greater speed than rainwater toward the earth’s depths.[247]

We should not forget that in Islamic belief, this world is the place for trial. Trial takes place not only through difficulties and tribulations but also through happiness and joys. In the Glorious Qur’an the word, *bāḥ* [calamity and affliction] and its derivatives are used in the sense of testing through happiness as well as testing through suffering and tribulation.

Sometimes, in a bid to distinguish the two forms of *bāḥ*, terms such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are used. For example, in this noble *ḥayah* we read: “And We try you with evil and with good, for ordeal.”[248] Likewise, the terms *hasanāt* [good things] and *sayyi’āt* [bad things] are used. For instance, in this *ḥayah* it is stated: “And We have tried them with good things and evil things that haply they might return.”[249] Hence, the description of *bāḥ* in the language of the Qur’an is far more general and broader than its prevalent

meaning in the Persian language.[250] As a result, some of the trials take place in the form of evil and prepare to face real situations. In this sense, evil is not only not bad, but also prepares the ground for the growth and cognition of man. Thus, they have said:

اندر بالای سخت پدید آید فضل و بزرگی و سالاری

*From severe affliction will come out
Virtue, greatness and merit*

Such evils are broad in scope—extending from a simple fever to the death of spouse or child. A simple ailment such as fever not only activates the entire immune system of the body but also warns us to prepare ourselves to face it, and to make ourselves prepared for the eradication of the purulence from our body.

Hence, this evil is needed for our existence and survival. If we carefully analyze all afflictions and tribulations, we will realize this feature of them. Even the severest bodily pains also have this function, and if one day the alarm system of the body is removed for whatever reason, then calamity, tragedy and mishap will commence. In this context Dr. Paul Brandt embarked on a detailed study and shed light on the vital role of pain.

The outcome of the research has been published in the book entitled, *Pain: The Gift that Nobody Accepts*. After studying patients afflicted with leprosy, who gradually gave up their body members, he arrived at the conclusion that the disease itself does not cause the death of the body tissues. Rather, it is the effect of malfunctioning of the sense [of touch] that the leper ceases to protect his senses and [unconsciously] commits acts harmful to himself. According to Dr. Brandt such patients “are lacking a system that gives alert to the damages done to the tissue.”[251]

The consequence of the lack of system (sense) of pain is that sometimes, such patients run and walk with their skins full of wounds—even open ones—to the extent that the bones are also visible, thus causing constantly increasing deterioration of the tissues ... In some cases, those afflicted with leprosy put their hands on fire, for example to pick something there but do not feel any pain.[252]

Thus, apart from being not bad, pain is rather considered an agent protecting our body and it is the same unpleasant sense that guarantees our life, and in general, compels the human organism to react. This view is also true for other ‘evils’. For example, suppose we fail in the university entrance examination; in this case this ‘evil’ is, in fact, a warning to us that shows us as not being intelligent enough and urges us to strive more. It is the same analysis that explains why all the prophets (‘a) have suffered.

One who wants to lead a nation or community [*ummah*] should have such an extraordinary capacity, that no amount of difficulty could shake his will. God makes His chosen prophets (‘a) suffer, He tests and trains them, causes them to develop, and so prepares them to shoulder the responsibilities of prophethood. As such, suffering cannot be a useless and worthless affair. Instead, the blessings therein should be seen with clear vision and it should be comprehended that in this world “each of its pains and hardships carries within itself some goodness and bounty.”[253]

Apart from this fundamental function of suffering and evil, there are many other functions and utilities some of which have been pointed out by Imām Khomein[ؑ]. One of the functions of suffering is that it makes man attentive to, and concerned with, the hereafter and makes him understand that this world is not his everlasting abode:

Thus, if a man faces adversities, pain and torments in this world and is overtaken therein by waves of calamities and tribulations, he will inevitably come to resent it. His attachment to it will diminish and he will come to distrust it. If he believed in another world, a vast world free of every kind of pain and grief, he will inevitably want to migrate to it, and if he were unable to make the journey physically, he will send his heart out to it.[254]

Hence, most of the tribulations and afflictions are a sign for the believers and a notice about their unpleasant condition and also a reminder of the goal that they should have. Apart from this, some of the tribulations and afflictions make man remember the Fountainhead of the universe and make him harmonious with the remembrance of the Sole Creator:

And another point relating to the severity of the tribulations of the elect among God’s servants is that they are made to remember God on account of these adversities and tribulations and to pray and lament in front of His Sacred Essence. This makes them accustomed to remember Him and keep their thoughts busy with Him.[255]

Moreover, some of spiritual excellences and stations for man will be attained only through patiently tasting and experiencing tribulations and afflictions. Hence, the Imām indicates this point in this manner:

Another point related to the severity of the believer’s tribulations that has been mentioned in traditions is that there are certain stations for the believers which they cannot attain without undergoing suffering, pain and affliction.[256]

Therefore, keeping in view the diverse functions and utilities of tribulation and suffering, it can be deduced that the more the blessings God bestows on His servant, the more is he afflicted with them and it is this conclusion that the Imām describes in this way:

Whenever God Almighty has a greater consideration and love for someone, and when someone is the object of the mercy of His Sacred Essence to a greater extent, He restrains him from this world and its

charms with the waves of calamity and tribulation... And if there weren't any other reason except this one for endurance of severe calamities it would have been sufficient.[257]

At this juncture, two points must be stated. One is the issue of natural sufferings and the other, self-made ones.

Whatever has been stated about suffering and its station is related to natural sufferings and tribulations, which man experiences naturally. God Almighty views these tribulations as a kind of test, attributes them to Himself and points to Himself as the cause. That is why He says, *"We test them."*

Nevertheless, some of the tribulations and sufferings exist as a result of the unscrupulous actions of we human beings and arise from our moral vices. If our social system is designed in such a way as to cause rivalry, and if such rivalry entails suffering, one cannot consider the social system to be constructive. If in the society wealth accumulation and the desire for more is such that it deprives all of tranquillity, it can no longer be considered an opportunity for rectification of the soul and attachment of spiritual perfections. All of these are a result of love of this world, which in turn, is the source of all sins. Most of the sufferings and tribulations are a product of the wrong actions of man and arise from vices such as jealousy, selfishness, and pride.

These tribulations can never be ascribed to God; basically attributing them to God arises from man's irresponsibility. In relation to such tribulations, God Almighty disavows responsibility and holds them to be the result of man's action: *"Whatever of good befalleth thee (O man) it is from Allah, and whatever of ill befalleth thee it is from thyself."*[258] In essence, God is the Absolute Source of goodness and His Essence is all-blessing and all-good and from this Essence there is nothing but goodness. Hence, every evil is the consequence of man's erroneous actions and selfishness. Therefore, God considers the occurrence of corruption, tribulations and mischief as the product of human beings' conduct, and says: ***"Corruption doth appear on land and sea because of (the evil) which men's hands have done."***[259] So, the most important point is that we should distinguish natural sufferings from self-made ones.

The second point is that although suffering has a constructive role in the life of human beings, one cannot 'create' suffering by using this as an excuse, and use it for one's growth. It is true that tribulation is an element in man's growth. Yet, the ground for the occurrence of tribulation should not be prepared in advance. For instance, taking an examination and failing in it can be the ground for our growth. But it does not mean that we refrain from any form of preparation and only take the examination.

The outcome of taking various examinations without preparing for them is failure after failure. These failures cannot be considered as a prelude to success; they also pave the ground for further failures. That is why psychologists point to the destructive effects of such failures in this manner: "If a person repetitively experiences failure, he will reach a stage where he can no longer endure experiencing more failures and thus, behavioural derangements appear in him." [260]

The point is that in case some adversity occurs, we welcome it warmly and consider it as an opportunity for our growth; not that we chase after misery before it strikes us. As such, our various *hadiths* have discouraged us from hoping for tribulations and from laying the grounds for it. We have been taught to always pray to God for health and well-being, and to refrain from looking for trouble and tribulation. For example, it has been narrated from Imam ar-Ridha [261] (‘a) that Prophet Joseph [Yusuf] (‘a) complained to God:

‘Why did I deserve to be imprisoned?’ God revealed to him: ‘It is you who chose it when you said: ‘O my Lord, the prison is dearer to me than that unto which they invite me.’[262] Why did you not say, ‘Prosperity is dearer to me than that unto which they invite me’?[263]

Therefore, the fundamental teaching of the Infallibles (‘a) in this context is that we should be always seeking welfare and prosperity. However, when we face tribulations, we should not be afraid, take it as a good omen and utilize it as an opportunity for our perfection.

The hereafter as the place for reward

If the prophets (‘a) and saints [awliya] faced abundant tribulations as was stated, the tribulations cannot be reckoned as compensation for one’s sins in this world. As was indicated in the aforecited *hadith*, God has assigned the world neither as the reward of the believer nor compensation for the disbeliever.

Hence, there is no connection between the sins of man and worldly tribulations. It is narrated in the Book of Job that [his] sympathizers persistently attempted to prove to Job (‘a) that his tribulations and sufferings were the result of his past sins. But he would strongly reject this notion, viewing no connection between the two, and deeming himself sinless. “Job (‘a) knew that the world is more complex than the simplified theory that [his] sympathizers portray.”[264]

This theory that misery is the consequence of man’s sins and punishment for his deeds, though very prevalent, has numerous shortcomings and is not compatible with the indisputable principles of religious belief. Though it is often said, “If you vex the people, circumstances will also vex you; circumstances makes no mistake in punishing the people,” this sort of understanding elicits abundant unanswerable questions, which is the subject of books on divine justice.

If we accept that the world is the testing place and that as long as man is alive he has the chance to look back on his past deeds, and at any moment, is able to turn away from the path he has taken, the issue of this world as the place for retribution for sins can no longer be put forward. Let us assume that a teacher wants to give an examination to his pupils and he gives 90 minutes for them to write their answers. Now, every student has the right to make use of the total 90 minutes.

It is even possible for one to give wrong answers to all the questions; but in the last minutes, once he

realizes his mistakes, he could change them. If the teacher also found out that somebody has given wrong answers to all the questions, so long as his test paper has not been submitted, the teacher cannot deprive him of the chance of changing his answers and give him a grade then and there. It is the definite right of the students to make use of this chance in whatever way they like, and interference on the part of the teacher is counted as a violation of this right. Likewise, the world is exactly the place of examination of man.

The lifespan of everyone is the period in which one should come out of life's examination with dignity and pride. Hence, throughout life everyone has this opportunity and right to give his answers to the questions of life. In the description of Imām Khomein[ؑ], "This world, due to its defective, feeble and weak nature, is neither the abode of the reward of God Almighty nor the place of chastisement and punishment."^[265]

It is such since this world is the world of duty and not of reward. "This world is the abode of duty and the farm of the Hereafter. It is a place of trade and earning whereas the Hereafter is the abode of reward and punishment, of bounty and damnation."^[266]

In the language of the Master of the Pious [Imām 'Alī] (‘a), "Today is the day of preparation (training the horses) while tomorrow is the day of race."^[267]

Divine justice necessitates that one can make use of all his opportunities and it is only after that is his account examined. Hence, neither can those that have met with misfortunes be regarded as sinful, nor the prosperous as sinless. In essence, the cause and effect relationship between these two is not in this world. In the same manner, it is not so that anyone who commits a sin will immediately suffer for it. Such an expectation is contrary to reality and repugnant to divine justice. Thus, those who expect that God Almighty would immediately get hold of one who commits some sin or indecency in this world or perpetrates some injustice or aggression against someone, and cut his hand off and expunge him from the realm of existence, are unaware that their expectation is contrary to this world's order and opposed to God's wont and *sunnah*.

Here is the place of trial and the zone of the separation of the wretched from the felicitous and the sinful from the obedient. Here is the realm of the manifestation of deeds, not the abode of the emergence of the results of personal deeds and qualities.^[268]

Therefore, tribulation in this world is not retribution for the deeds of human beings, and no connection should be established between the two. Nonetheless, at times Divine Grace warrants that by motivating the sinner, he can be prevented from indulging in sins; and God does so. However, this matter has no link to retribution for sins. Let us assume that in the previous example, after the teacher found out that one of the students had given wrong answers to most of the questions, she passes snide remarks or looks at the student sternly, making him immediately realize and correct all his mistakes. In this case, the teacher has not punished him but actually done him a great favour.

Some of the punishments of God are like this and anyone subjected to them should be grateful to God for being kind to him. So, "If occasionally God Almighty troubles an oppressor, it may be said that it is because of the Almighty's mercy for that oppressor (for it stops him from sinning further)."[269] As such, from the viewpoint of Imam Khomein^(r) evil is a relative and non-existing phenomenon, not a real and exact affair. In addition to this, it is necessary for man's perfection and an indication of God's grace to His servant, and there is no connection between sinfulness and tribulation in this world. So, evil is also a disguised grace of God for His servants and is among the necessary grounds for man's spiritual perfection. In his poetical lines Mawlānā^(r) likens the soul of believer to an animal named *ushghur*, a kind of porcupine, which becomes stronger and its resolve firmer with increasing tribulation and suffering:

هست حیوانی که نامش اُشغُر است او به زخم چوب زفت و لَمُتُر است

تا که چوبش مزنی، به میشود او ز زخم چوب، فربه میشود

نفس مؤمن اشغری آمد یقین کو به زخم رنج زفت است و سمین

زین سبب بر انبیا رنج و شکست از همه خلق جهان افزون تر است

تا ز جانها جانشان شد زفت تر که ندیدند آن بلا قوم دگر

There is an animal whose name is ushghur (porcupine):

It is (made) stout and big by blows of the stick.[270]

The more you cudgel it, the more it thrives:

It grows fat on blows of the stick.

Assuredly the true believer's soul is porcupine,

For it is (made) stout and fat by the blows of tribulation.

For this reason the tribulation and abasement (laid) upon the prophets

Is greater than (that laid upon) all the (other) creatures in the world,

So that their souls became stouter than (all other) souls;

For no other class of people suffered that affliction.[271]

Thereafter, he likens man to an untanned hide that the tanners treat and make useful by the use of bitter and acrid agents. Then, he urges us to accept such sufferings which are meant for our own perfection:

پوست از دارو بلاکش میشود چون ادیم طایفی خوش میشود

ورنه تلخ و تیز مالیدی در او گنده گشتی، ناخوش و ناپاک بو

آدمی را پوستِ نامدبوغ دان از رطوبتها شده زشت و گران

تلخ و تیز و مالشِ بسیار ده تا شود پاک و لطیف و با فِره

ور نمی تانی، رضا ده ای عیار گر خدا رنجت دهد بباختیار

که بالای دوست تطهیر شماسست علم او بالای تدبیر شماسست

*The hide is afflicted by the medicine (tan-liquor),
(But) it becomes sweet like تان‌آب if leather;
And if he (the tanner) did not rub the bitter and acrid (liquor) into it,
It would become fetid, unpleasant, and foul-smelling.
Know that Man is an untanned hide,
Made noisome and gross by humors.
Give (him)[272] bitter and acrid (discipline) and much rubbing (tribulation),
That he may become pure and lovely and exceedingly strong;
But if you cannot (mortify yourself), be content, O cunning one,
If God give you tribulation without choice (on your part).
For affliction (sent) by the Friend is (the means of) your being purified:
His knowledge is above your contrivance. [273]*

Suffering as commensurate to one's own understanding

The fact cannot be denied that the more our awareness of ourselves and the things around us increases, the more we discern the gloomy aspects of life. This matter pains us. In a research study on prosperity, which a number of American and European universities had conducted, the conclusion was reached that there is a direct relationship between suffering and awareness, and if man's awareness exceeds a specific level, it can even prevent his happiness in life. Mawlānā describes this truth in this fashion:

هر که او بیدارتر، پردردتر هر که او آگاهتر، رخ زردتر

*The more wakeful anyone is, the more full of suffering he is;
The more aware (of God) he is, the paler he is in countenance.*[274]

But, this suffering does not belong to the daily suffering and that which, at times, ensues from foolishness making man's soul dejected and sad. This suffering neither arises from moral vices nor selfishness and pride. Some of the sufferings are files of the soul and obstruct man's soul from soaring to greater heights—like the pain of having no material luxuries and means of comfort; like the pain experienced when our neighbor or friend is financially well-off while we are not. Such sufferings and the illusion arising there from trample on the soul of man:

جان همه روز از لگدکوب خیال وز زیان و سود و از خوف زوال

نی صفا می ماندش نی لطف و فر نی به سوی آسمان راه سفر

*All day long, from the buffets of phantasy
And from (thoughts of) loss and gain and from fear of decline,
There remains to it (the soul)
Neither joy nor grace and glory nor way of journeying to Heaven.*[275]

No, such pains have no relation to man's intellect and discernment; in fact, it is a sign of a lack of intelligence. However, there are sufferings born of sagacity and an indication of man's wisdom. If we search through the whole of history we will realize this truth and see that the sages and people's leaders always used to suffer. Their suffering was expressive of their extraordinary innate capacity.

They possessed such a greatness of soul that they held the suffering of all as their own and were concerned not only with their own affairs. In a speech, Imam 'Alī (a) refers to the attack of Mu'awiyah's army,[276] and says: "They used to attack the women of the *Ahl adh-Dhimmah*[277] and confiscate their ornaments, and these women had nothing to do but to plead for mercy." Then he (a) reckoned this tragedy to be so serious that if a person dies on hearing this news, it is not only regarded by him (a) as natural but even praiseworthy. "If any Muslim dies of grief after all this he is not to be blamed but rather there is justification for him before me." [278] Yes, such suffering is an indication of man's lofty soul. Thus, John Stuart Mill,[279] a philosopher who was a proponent of the ethical school of utilitarianism[280] and, at times, whose ideas were poorly interpreted, unambiguously posits that human sufferings are superior to animal joys, and says: "To be an unhappy human being is better than to be a cheerful pig. It is better for me to be a despondent Socrates than a joyful stupid." [281]

Sometimes, the Most Noble Messenger (s) would also suffer because of the condition of his *umma* [community] and would strive for its welfare so much so that he would be on the verge of danger. His noble soul could not accept that those people live in ignorance and corruption. Owing to this, he was acting beyond his duty. So, God Almighty discouraged him from exerting excessive pressure on himself, and said: ***“We have not revealed unto thee (Muhammad) this Qur’an that thou shouldst be distressed.”***[282]

Likewise, He dissuaded him from arduous effort for the salvation of disbelievers, and said: ***“So let not thy soul expire in sighings for them.”***[283]

Then, God also thus describes His Most Noble Messenger (s) and while addressing the people He says: ***“There hath come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, unto whom aught that ye are overburdened is grievous.”***[284]

In spite of all these, he (s) had suffered so much that he said: “No prophet was persecuted as I was.”[285] This suffering is rooted in man’s altruism and endeavor for the deliverance of others, and it is only in name that it has commonality with self-made and superficial sufferings. Hence, it has been emphasized in the noble *hadīth* that whoever is narrow-minded and of poor intellect, his hardship and suffering then will also be less. It is due to the fact that such a person only suffers with regard to water, bread and shelter and if these three are provided, it will make no difference for him what the fate of others may be and will view himself as an isolated and solitary island.

Therefore, suffering is a symbol of altruism and a profound sense of humaneness, having direct relationship with the intellect and wisdom. Imām Khomein[ؑ] analyzes this kind of suffering in this manner:

The persons of weak intellects and feeble sensibility are secure from spiritual tribulations and intellectual suffering in proportion to their intellectual weakness and the feebleness of their sensibility. On the contrary, those with more complete intellects and acuter sensibility have to undergo spiritual tribulations more intensely in proportion to the perfectness and acuteness of their intellect and sensibility... for whoever perceives the greatness and glory of the Lord to a greater extent and knows the sacred station of God Almighty more than others, he suffers more and is tormented to a greater extent by the sins of the creatures and their offences against the Lord’s sanctity. Also, one who has a greater love and compassion for the creatures of God is tormented to a greater extent by their crooked and wretched condition and ways.[286]

It should not remain unsaid that this type of suffering does not mean grief and sorrow. Man is aware of the truths of the universe to such an extent that he views God as Beautiful and His creations as manifestations of beauty and splendor.

He regards this system as excellent and believes, “Every thing is good in its own place.” As such, everything is joy, happiness and rejoicing. On the other hand, since other human beings have not

recognized their reality, take no step in the matter, and search for the way from the misled ones on the verge of 'drowning', they suffer and become sorrow-stricken. Hence, on the one hand there is joy and happiness, and grief and sorrow on the other. These two levels should not be erroneously interchanged. Owing to this, it is stated in the *hadīths* that the believer always has a smile on his face, and hides his sorrow beneath his bosom.[287]

Therefore, what is meant by sagacious suffering is profound discernment of the tragic condition of some people, and not personal despondence and daily sorrows.[288]

Is Knowledge a Mental Aid, or Burden?

In Book Two of the noble *Mathnawī*, Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Mawlawī [Balkhī ar-Rūmī] has a short and elegant story. An ignorant desert Arab has a sack full of grain and he wants it to load on top of his camel. But instead of dividing it into two, he takes another sack full of sand so as to balance the weight of the sack full of grain and load the two on both sides of the camel. Along the way, a sage man becomes his co-traveler and talks with him. As he finds out that one half of the load is sand and it only causes trouble, he suggests to the Arab to empty the sack full of sand and to fill in its stead half of the grain so that the purpose [of having a balanced load over the camel] is also met and at the same time the camel's load would become lighter.

Being glad of the wise solution and after executing the suggestion, the Arab asked the sage about his wealth and riches as he assumes that having this cogent mind he is supposed to possess everything. However, the sage sorrowfully answers that he possesses nothing in this world:

گفت: "وا نیست یا وجهالعرب در همه مُلکم وجوه و قوت شب

پا برهنه تن برهنه مدوم هر که نانی مدهد، آنجا روم

"مر مرا زین حکمت و فضل و هنر نیست حاصل جز خیال و دردسر

*"By God," he replied, "O chief of the Arabs, in my whole property
There is not the means of (buying) food for the night.
I run about with bare feet and naked body.*

*If any one will give me a loaf of bread—thither I go.
From this wisdom and learning and excellence (of mind)
I have nothing but phantasy and headache.*"[289]

Astonished and disappointed by the futility of such knowledge, the Arab prefers his form of ignorance to such ominous wisdom and he asks the sage to part ways with him so that his misfortune would not descend upon him:

دور بر آن حکمت شومت ز من نطق تو شوم است بر اهل زَمَن

یا تو آن سو رو، من این سو مبدوم ورتو راه پیش، من واپس روم

یک جوالم گندم و دیگر ز ریگ به بود زین حيله های مرده ریگ

احمقیم بس مبارک احمقباست که دلم با برگ و جانم متقی است

*Take far away from me that unlucky wisdom of yours:
Your speech is unlucky for (all) the people of the time.
Either you go in that direction, or I will run in this direction;
Or if your way be forwards, I will go back.
One sack of wheat and the other of sand
Is better for me than these vain contrivings.
My foolishness is a very blessed foolishness, for my heart is well-furnished
(With spiritual graces) and my soul is devout.*[290]

Then out of this story Mawlānā arrives at this conclusion:

فکر، آن باشد که بگشاید رهی راه، آن باشد که پیش آید شَهِی

*The right thought is that which opens a way:
The (right) way is that on which a (spiritual) king advances.*[291]

From the viewpoint of Mawlānā, it is not the discussion on the root of knowledge and the necessity of knowing; neither does he mean bestowing superiority to ignorance over wisdom. Instead, his point is that man should benefit from his knowledge and this knowledge should transform his life.

Such knowledge stands on top in self-cognition; not knowledge of the horizontal and outer phenomena. Anyone who, without paying attention to this truth, is in pursuit of profusely acquiring knowledge and lets diverse and secondary information fill his memory to the brim is, in fact, overburdening himself and placing insurmountable hurdles in his way. Those who are like him know so many things about everything. But, this knowledge has no influence on their fate and if all this learning can be taken away from them, they will still pursue their past life. Concerning such type of people, Mawlānā says:

صد هزاران فصل داند از علوم جان خود را می نداند آن ظلوم

داند او خاصیت هر جوهری در بیان جوهر خود چون خری

*He knows a hundred thousand superfluous matters[292] 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.[293]*

The approach to the issue of knowledge of one of the two prominent branches of Western contemporary philosophy, i.e. existentialism, is the same. Kierkegaard, the precursor of existentialism, divides truth into exoteric and esoteric, or exact and imaginary. Exoteric truths are those accomplishments of science while esoteric truths are rooted in the soul of man. These esoteric truths, that he has named as 'existential truths,' are interwoven with the destiny of man and determine the trend of his life.

Every kind of knowledge should be exploited and utilized while keeping in view its role in determining and nurturing man's existential truths. As such, according to Kierkegaard, all kinds of knowledge are not equal in rank and worth. Rather, they are classified according to their functions with respect to man. The kinds of knowledge are considered more valuable that give answers to the 'whys' questions instead of the 'whats'. [294]

In conclusion, knowledge for the sake of knowledge is not that important. Rather, it is due to its guiding role that it is praiseworthy. Now, we will deal with Imām Khomein's views on issues concerning knowledge by examining them under the following headings:

- The place of knowledge;
- The instrumental role of knowledge;

- The branches of knowledge and realms of human existence; and
- Ignorance as a pretext in neglecting knowledge.

The place of knowledge

Having roots in our religious tradition in which seeking knowledge is deemed equal to military campaign and the ink of the scholars is even viewed as holier than the blood of the martyrs, Imām Khomein (r) thinks within this framework. According to him,

- Knowledge makes a man;
- The universe itself is a large university;
- Knowledge is a requisite for prosperity;
- Knowledge and expertise is a criterion of superiority;
- Knowledge means continuous learning.

1. Knowledge makes a man

Concerning the caliphate (his appointment as God's vicegerent on earth) of Adam ('a) we read that God taught him the names of things. Then He tested the angels with respect to these names (in which they failed to give answer). Thus, He proved to them that the reason behind Adam's ('a) superiority is these very names.[295]

When man was also separated from other animals and brought them under his dominance, he utilized the weapon of knowledge and established an enduring civilization. If we efface knowledge from the life of man we will confront our peer creatures as well as other levels (species) of creatures, and not more than that. "It is the pen, knowledge and speech that can build man, and not machine guns and other destructive powers. Machine guns as well as other implements of war came into existence under the aegis of knowledge." [296]

2. The universe itself is a large university

If we accept that the tradition of tests and trials are prevalent everywhere, and that man has no respite for even a moment from not being tested, and if we accept that every test entails lessons and teaching, we will then accept the conclusion that the whole world is, for us, essentially the place of learning and accumulation of knowledge. As such, *madrasahs* [schools] and *maktabs* [old-fashioned primary schools] are not the only specific places with particular lessons. Rather, all places are schools and everything is a lesson.

The teacher and student are not surrounded by teachers of the universities and high schools or the rest of places, and the student too is not surrounded by those who go to the university. The universe is a university while the prophets, *awliyā'* and those trained by them are the teachers and the rest of mankind are students, and they ought to be students.[297]

3. Knowledge as a requisite for prosperity

Knowing the way from the well depends on vision (being able to see) and seeing, in turn, is the result of knowledge. So, knowledge is regarded as the light of man in guaranteeing his prosperity and the ground for his advancement and excellence. "It is through knowledge that man can secure his prosperity in this world and the next. It is through teaching that man can train and educate the youth in such a way that they are able to safeguard their own interests in this world and the hereafter." [298]

4. Knowledge and expertise as a criterion of superiority

By raising an amazing question which, at the same time, contains its own answer, the Glorious Qur'an, shows us the criterion of superiority and prominence: "***Are those who know equal with those who know not?***" [299]

Hence, apart from considering knowledge as particularly valuable, Islam also regards it as the standard of superiority. "Islam strives to that extent for the experts and specialists. In both common laws and religious laws it has given preference to the (one who is) more expert; it has given preference to the more expert opinion." [300]

5. Knowledge as continuous learning

Knowledge will acquire its fundamental function when it is pursued throughout one's life; not like medicine which is used only in times of sickness. Knowledge is like food that is always needed by the living organism. Therefore it should be planned in such a way as to be present throughout man's existence.

Up to the last moment of his life man is in need of knowledge, learning and training. No man could be independent from (not in need of) knowledge or be independent from learning and training. What some individuals imagine that our time for learning lessons has already passed is not correct. Learning a lesson has no specific time. As what has been stated in the *hadīth* that [seeking] knowledge is from cradle up to the grave, if a man in the agony of death can learn a single word, it is better for him than to die as ignorant of it.[301]

The instrumental role of knowledge

Notwithstanding all these emphases of ours on knowledge and seeking knowledge, the principle that knowledge itself is not the aim should not be forgotten. Rather, it has [merely] an instrumental role and it is valuable and desirable to the extent that it performs its role. If one day this role is forgotten and knowledge itself became the goal, then the fall of man will commence. Knowledge is valuable to the extent that, just like a vehicle or animal for riding, it can transport us to our destination. Now, if these mount or means of transportation malfunction— however ostensibly ornamented it may be —it cannot be of use to us.

The Imām's approach in this context is an existential one. It is from this aspect that knowledge ought to be an instrument for man's dominance and prosperity, and not that it becomes a goal itself and a hindrance for the realization of other goals. This existential approach to knowledge is regarded as an integral part of his moral thought. From his perspective, all sciences should lead to a certain destination and deliver man from this narrow pass of the world.

Otherwise, learning them is not only worthless but they themselves also veil the way and are a hindrance to perfection. If ignorance is a dark veil, knowledge can also be a luminous one the removal of which is more difficult, because like a wall seen through its glass cladding which hardly anybody can detect as being a covering and so it misguides [the people] constantly. Hence, he describes this point in

this manner:

If the doctrinal sciences and doctrinal truths are studied for their own sake and if all the related concepts, terms, high-sounding expressions, and embellished juxtapositions of terms be learned for the sake of showing off to feeble minds and for the sake of obtaining worldly status, then they cannot be called *‘ayāt al-muhkamāt*; rather they must be named obscuring veils and hollow fantasies. That is because if one’s purpose in learning the sciences should not be to reach God, the Exalted, and to realize the Names and Attributes and to mould one’s self in accordance with the Divine character [*takhalluq beh akhlāq Allah*], each of such acquisitions of his is a dungeon of hell and a black veil that darkens his heart and blinds his insight.[302]

This issue is not particular to this-worldly or that-worldly sciences. Rather, every knowledge that does not lead to the True Beloved is a [mere] mental burden. Sometimes, even gnosticism [*‘irfān*] and knowledge of monotheism [*tawhīd*], instead of being a guide and leader, can also be the impediment in the way to perfection and bring about eternal destruction and perdition. So, it causes pride and superiority complex in a gnostic [*‘arif*] as a result of which, he remains a captive of terminologies, explanations and descriptions.

The story of the scholar which the Glorious Qur’an indicates points to this truth. That scholar—who has been mentioned in the Islamic sources as Bal‘am al-Bā‘ūr—instead of benefiting from the divine sciences at his disposal and converting them into a springboard to heaven, made use of them as a rope in going down the bottomless pit of adversity. Consequently, he was cursed by God and became like a dog.[303]

The Imām points to the destiny of those who were corrupted by knowledge—even divine knowledge—in this manner:

With this short life and limited knowledge, I have seen certain people among these so-called mystics and other scholars who, I swear by *‘irfan* and knowledge that these terms have not made any mark on their hearts; nay, they have rather left on them an opposite effect...

O amateurish student of concepts who has gone astray of the realities! Deliberate over the matter for a while, and think as to what knowledge you possess of God. What impact has the knowledge of God and His Attributes made on your self? Perhaps the study of music and musical rhythms may be more exact and precise than your knowledge. Astronomy, mechanics, other physical sciences, and mathematics can match your learning as to the precision of their terminology. Yet, in the same way as they are not concerned with the knowledge of God, your knowledge also is a thick curtain consisting of the veils of words, terms, and concepts. They can neither make one ecstatic nor send anyone into a trance.

Rather, in the eyes of the *Shar‘ah*, the physical sciences and mathematics are better than your knowledge, since they produce some result, whereas your knowledge not only gives no good results, but

gives opposite ones. An engineer draws results from his calculations, and a goldsmith is benefited from his craftsmanship; but your knowledge, apart from not gaining any material benefits, has failed to fulfill any transcendental ends as well... knowledge, which darkens the heart and increases it in its blindness, is not knowledge.[304]

In short, knowledge with all the values that it possesses is desirable and ideal so long as it can pave the way for man and lead him toward his True Object of Worship, or at least, His Proximity.

The branches of knowledge and realms of human existence

With his practical and existential approach to sciences the Imām attempts to evaluate and categorize these on the basis of their functions. According to him the practical merit of knowledge determines its own station.

Thus, he makes this criterion the basis of categorization and assessment of sciences, on the basis of which he endeavors to explain the *hadīth* that views sciences as having three branches. It is narrated in the said *hadīth* that the Messenger of God (s) once entered the mosque where there was a group of people surrounding a man. Instead of “Who is that?” “What is that?” inquired the Prophet (s) as a sign of contempt of the person and his deeds. He was told, “He is an ‘*allīmah*, (i.e. a very learned man) and is the most learned of men regarding Arab genealogies, past episodes, the days of the *jāhiliyyah* [Ignorance] and Arabic poetry.” The Prophet (s) said, “That is a knowledge whose ignorance does not harm one nor is its possession of any benefit to one.” Then the Prophet (s) declared, “Verily, knowledge consists of these three: the firm sign [*āyah muhkamah*], the just duty [*farādh ‘ādilah*] and the established *sunnah* [*sunnah qā’imah*]. All else is superfluous.”[305]

The Imām makes this *hadīth* the basis of his categorization of sciences and in the first degree he divides all sciences into three branches: those that are beneficial, those that are detrimental, and those that are worthless.

Thus, all the sciences are divisible into three kinds: first, those sciences, which are beneficial to man in view of the other stages of existence, success wherein is the ultimate purpose of creation... The second kind consists of those which are harmful for man and lead him to neglect his essential duties. This kind consists of the blameworthy sciences and one must refrain from their pursuit... Thirdly, there are those which are neither harmful nor beneficial.[306]

Thence, the Imām again divides into three those sciences that are beneficial: One is the rational and doctrinal sciences; the other is the science of ethics, and the third, the religious sciences.

You should know that the expression ‘firm sign’ [*ṣayyah muhkamah*] implies the rational sciences and the true doctrines and divine teachings. ‘Just duty’ [*farḍdah ‘ḍdilah*] implies the science of ethics and self-purification. ‘Established *sunnah*’ [*sunnah qā’imah*] refers to the science of the exoteric aspect and the bodily conduct (i.e. involving some kind of physical activity).[307]

Here the Imām is actually doing an exegesis. Then, in order to prove it he deals with a gnostical point. It is narrated from the *hadīth* of the Messenger of God (s) that knowledge consists of the ‘firm sign’ [*ṣayyah muhkamah*], the ‘just duty’ [*farḍdah ‘ḍdilah*] and the ‘established *sunnah*’ [*sunnah qā’imah*].

The Imam propounds that what is meant by ‘firm sign’ [*ṣayyah muhkamah*] are the rational sciences and divine teachings by which issues on the origin, resurrection and prophethood are clarified. What is referred to as ‘just duty’ [*farḍdah ‘ḍdilah*] is the knowledge that causes the moderation of temperament and disposition. ‘Established *sunnah*’ [*sunnah qā’imah*] is a body of sciences that organizes the individual and social relations of man, the highest form of which is illustriously manifested in devotional precepts.

In a bid to elucidate this exegesis and comparison, the Imām points out existential realms [*sḥat-hayye wujūdī*] of man. According to him man has three existential realms, and in his words, three worlds [*nash’ah*]: One is the external and sensory world or realm, and in the mystical sense, the domain of *mulk* [corporeality] and *hudūr* [presence]. The other is the *barzakhi* [limbo] and middle world which is known as the domain of *khiyāl* [imagination] and *mithāl* [allegory]. The third is the world of reason and the spiritual, celestial and unseen domain.

You should know that... man, to put it briefly, is confronted with three worlds, stations and phases of life: first, the world of the Hereafter, which is the hidden world [*‘ālam-e ghayb*] of spirituality and the intellect; second, the phase of *barzakh*, which is the world of *khiyāl* lying between the other two worlds; third, the phase of this world, the domain of *mulk* [corporeality] and the world of appearance [*‘ālam-e shahādāt*].[308]

Each of these existential realms is in need of training, nourishment and exaltation. Training of every realm is also in need of knowledge of its own kind. Then, for the training of the realm of reason we are in need of sciences of reasoning and knowledge of certainty. For the training of the realm of allegory of man we are in need of moral and spiritual training. For the training of corporeal and external realm we are in need of social training, which in turn, is attainable through religious sciences.

In this manner, in order for each of this set of knowledge to become significant and desirable, it should be supplemented and complemented by one of these realms. If in the midst of this we come across knowledge that does not train any of our realms of existence and does not fill any of our existential ‘gaps’, we should abandon the same knowledge and go in pursuit of other knowledge. All this emphasis

on the beneficial knowledge in the *hadiths* is indicative of this truth. The Messenger of God (s) would seek refuge in God from futile knowledge. Describing the attributes of the pious, the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) says that they have lent their ears only to beneficial sciences.[309] All of these emphasize a single truth, and that is, knowledge should set light up the ultra-light of man’s way.

The additional point is that although the Imām lays stress on the useful sciences, he does not view them as confined to particular ones. He believes that attempts should be made as much as possible to categorize each kind of knowledge under any one of the three headings. Therefore, everybody with the understanding that he has about himself and his ‘vacuums’, should know which knowledge is more useful to him, take utmost advantage of the opportunities, and avoid wasting his time.

That is because when a sensible person knows that he cannot acquire all the sciences and achieve all the excellences due to shortness of life, scarcity of time and abundance of obstacles and accidents, he would reflect about the sciences and devote himself to the acquisition of those which are more beneficial for him.[310]

Therefore, the wayfarer [*sālik*] in the pursuit of morality should always yearn for knowledge for his perfection and, on no account long for it for himself. He should always be conscious that this knowledge—though the knowledge of monotheism—does not tie his hands and feet and makes him a captive of terminologies; disentanglement from this kind of knowledge is in itself a virtue and perfection, as it often happens that intense attention to terms and preoccupation with words and that which relates to them make one totally oblivious of the heart and its reform. [As a result] one may acquire complete mastery in expounding the meaning and essence of the heart and the terminology of the metaphysicians [*hukamā’*] and the mystics [*‘urafā’*] while one’s heart, we seek refuge in God from it [*na‘ūdhubillāh*], is one that is either inverted or sealed, like someone who knows well the beneficial and harmful properties of medicines and is able to describe them with expertise without himself refraining from poisonous medicines or making use of the beneficial ones. Such a person perishes despite all his knowledge of pharmacology, which is unable to rescue him.[311]

Ignorance as a pretext in neglecting knowledge

Although knowledge can sometimes induce man to boast, prevent him from continuing his way to perfection, and become his mental burden, this exceptional condition should never be taken as a pretext that ignorance, therefore, is better than knowledge. In fact, in the parlance of philosophy knowledge is from the category and kind of existence, and existence, from whatever class and rank it may be, is from the lack of what is better and superior.

Abandonment of knowledge under the pretext that it often becomes a veil of man is like avoidance of

food with the justification that gluttony or malnutrition is a factor in the ailments of man. In the same manner that treating malnutrition or gluttony is not abstention from food or absolute fasting, but lies in proper eating, similarly, in order to avoid the dangers of knowledge, one should not turn one's back on knowledge. Instead, its blemishes should be identified and be avoided. Hence, those who assert that knowledge is the greatest of veils and, on this pretext, trample on the legacy of the prophets (‘a) (that is, knowledge)[312] have adopted a false way.

In this corporeal world which is an arena of conflict of phenomena and every thing is in danger and challenged by other things, knowledge also has its curses that often become man's greatest veil. However, just as we deal with the blemishes of other phenomena, those of knowledge should be dealt with as well and the side effects trimmed off. Therefore, knowledge, to whatever extent it may be, is valuable and, to that same extent, facilitates man's way to perfection, and the sciences—whatever their level, whether they pertain to the *ma‘rif* or something else—are a path for reaching the Garden appropriate to each of them, and the wayfarer of each of the paths of knowledge is a traveler on one of the paths of Paradise.[313]

As such, albeit the Imām strongly emphasizes knowledge that is profitable and discourages loading the memory with unnecessary terminologies, he still stresses the instrumental role of knowledge in this manner:

I, too, do not put much of a store by mere knowledge, and a learning that does not bring faith with it is the greatest of veils. However, one has to approach a veil in order to tear it into shreds. The sciences are seeds of (spiritual) experience.[314]

Therefore, anyone who has essentially entered the greatest veil can go out of it. One cannot bypass this channel. Instead, one should enter through one door and exit through another. Not entering and also stopping inside are both incorrect. As a result, through a practical approach to knowledge and insistence on the fact that all “the sciences are absolutely practical and even the transcendental sciences have, in a way, a practical aspect in them,”[315] the Imām urges us initially to deal with the profitable and ennobling kinds of knowledge consciously, selectively and with consideration to the limited opportunity and facilities that we have.

Then, after benefiting from this profitable instrument and reaching the highest heaven by means of this ladder, we should abandon it and continue on our way. We should not become the captives of the luminous and hidden veils that are born of an attachment to knowledge. We ought not to imagine this instrument as the goal, because pursuing knowledge as the objective itself gives one a blackened heart and makes one remain on the way. Thus, the wayfarer on the path to perfection ought not to desire for anything except God, and not preoccupy himself with any attainment and be deceived by it. He should always bear in mind this ultimate objective, and should not quench his thirst except through meeting the Friend.

*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.[316]*

Behaviour as Emanating from the Principles of Ethics

The aforementioned principles which were elaborately discussed are deemed existential truths in the language of the existentialists. That is, they are not merely facts about the external affairs. Rather, they are profoundly concerned with, and transform, the life and fate of man. In the view of Imām Khomein, in essence all “the sciences are absolutely practical”[317] and their epistemological aspect, or in the parlance of Islamic philosophy, their ‘disclosure’ [*kashfiyyah*] is the prelude to action and no knowledge is absolutely irrelevant to action.

But the principles of ethics go beyond this stage. It is because the essence of ethics is nothing but the process of its continuous creation and recreation. If we remove this aspect, nothing will remain in its stead. Here the objective of the scholar of ethics is not dissemination and presentation of facts and information. Instead he is in pursuit of nurturing individuals and acquainting them with the path to felicity. Hence, in his emphasis on this knowledge, the Imām said:

The science of the states of the heart and that which relates to their health and sickness, reform and corruption, is something which is purely a preliminary step to action and the way of its reform and remedy. Its mere knowledge and understanding is not considered a human perfection. Hence one’s main attention and goal should be the reform and refinement of the heart so that one may attain to ultimate spiritual felicity and to the higher transcendent stations.[318]

Consequently, the difference between ethics and mathematics in this respect is very great. Knowing the mathematical formulas is itself valuable and an indication of perfection. But in the realm of ethics it is not so. Merely knowing the aforesaid principles has no value in itself. These principles become valuable only when they flow in the veins of man as does the blood and penetrate deep into the depths of his

existence.

Thus, the principle that “man is indescribable” should not be seen as a philosophical principle and be placed alongside other philosophical principles. Instead, one should elevate it from the stage of ‘knowledge’ to the level of ‘belief’ and live with it. It is then that this principle would transform the life of man. In a bid to state the difference between knowledge and belief, what is usually cited is an old example whose veracity has not yet been invalidated by time. All of us know that a dead person has no power to move and the corpse that has fallen in a corner can do no harm.

Yet, few people are ready to spend the night alone beside a lifeless body or pay a visit to the cemetery at midnight. Similarly, we have heard a lot of adventurers who would bet on going to the cemetery at night but, in doing so, what emotional disturbances did they not experience?! Well, the difference regarding this issue is between ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’. We *know* that the dead can do no harm but we do not *believe* in it. Since we do not truly and firmly believe in the lifelessness of the dead, we do have doubts about it and suggest to ourselves, “Don’t say he’s going to get up!”

Now if we really believe that the dead has no power to move, we will no longer fear to be with *it*. Gravediggers and those who wash the dead are among those who really believe that the dead are lifeless; thus, they do not fear whether they are beside the dead or spend the night in the cemetery. Imām Khomein[ؑ], in a whole chapter, endeavors to clarify this difference and shows that “knowledge is different from faith.”[319]

While emphasizing that faith is an affair of the heart, he distinguishes it from knowledge and cites the same example of the dead corpse and concludes thus:

You know through your reason that a dead person cannot do any harm and that all the dead in the world do not possess any power of action, even as much power as is possessed by a fly... but since your heart has not accepted it and has not approved of the judgment of the mind, you cannot spend a dark night with a dead body. But if your heart yields to your mind and approves of its judgment, this job will no more be difficult for you. After some effort the heart resigns to the dictates of reason, then no dread of the dead remains in the heart.[320]

The outcome of this distinction is that acceptance of the ethical principles is a form of challenge. Here we are not dealing with the complex principles of philosophy. On the contrary, these principles [of faith] are very simple and straightforward. The difficulty lies in having faith in them, and in the words of the Imām, passing these principles from the stage of reason to the stage of the heart.

It is here that the issue of commitment is raised. It is possible that a mathematician has no faith in any of his mathematical achievements while at the same time he knows and teaches them well. It is possible that a person is a professor of Greek philosophy but he does not believe in any of its schools, and after teaching them, behaves as if he is not acquainted with this philosophy at all. However, this point is not true about ethics. Ethics is a way of living and a way of viewing oneself and others. A scholar of ethics

cannot, as with a pair of spectacles, remove or change it anytime he likes.

In the words of Max Weber,[321] “Moralities are not chariots that can be stopped any time we want for getting in or getting off.”[322] Ethics makes man committed to himself and urges him to assess and construct himself according to these principles. It is here that the issues of reminding [*tadhakkur*], purification [*tazkiyyah*], and watchfulness [*murāqibah*] come up. Moral maladies, the form of moral reasoning and expression are peculiar to themselves, and cannot be gauged by the theoretical sciences.

It is due to this that the Imām does not express these principles ‘systematically’ and ‘orderly’. Instead he mainly regards them as assumed and expresses their outcomes. The goal in teaching ethics does not lie in learning some principles and appending them to an individual’s body of knowledge. The goal is to let man take a look at himself again, reconstruct his existential palace, and evaluate it.

If our outlook on ethics is of this type, we will no longer be in pursuit of increasing the volume of our information on ethics. Instead, we will strive to increase the volume of challenge and action, and in the parlance of ethics, self-purification. Treading the path of ethics does not require extensive and vast information. It needs high ambition, firm resolution and formidable will:

Dear friend! Try to be a man of strong will power and resolution, so that you may not go from this world as a person without resolution, and hence rise on the Day of Resurrection as a brainless-being, not in the form of human being.[323]

Hence, the topic is not about teaching; it pertains to training, the manner of upbringing and living.

Now let us see what type of person is the one who has come to believe in the principles of ethics and lets them flow in his veins. If we want to present the image of a moral man while taking into account these principles, perhaps we can portray him as follows:

1) Moral man is he who profoundly believes that man is indescribable and so long as he lives in this corporeal world cannot be absolutely regarded as misguided or guided. Consequently, he does not stop even for a moment in ‘creation’ and ‘recreation’ of himself. He is always in pursuit of nurturing and training himself and in transcending himself. He meticulously assesses himself but refrains from judging others. He believes that he should not forget himself and be the judge with respect to the conduct and behaviour of others. Instead, he believes that he is responsible for himself and every individual is responsible. So, he has taken this statement as the epigraph of his life: “Take account of yourself for your own sake because the account of others will be taken by one other than you.”[324]

He knows that he has only a brief opportunity at his disposal to offer whatever he has in the bag. Hence, he neither wastes his time anymore nor spends it in vain in judging other’s conduct and behaviour. He is totally concerned with himself.

2) To be totally concerned with oneself, in his view, does not mean irresponsibility with respect to others. On the contrary, he knows that the diamond of his existence is cut in social activity and in living with

others. So, he views being with others as an opportunity for building himself, and acquires benefit from it. Although he is amidst the people, spiritually he is not with them and moves in a higher plane.

He shows others the way (guidance) and the well (misguidance) but never forgets himself. He deems as his prime concern his own salvation for which he is responsible. He is with the people, yet his soul travels. As such, he is often silent. But once he talks, his speech is of another kind and a cure for the pain of his listeners. He sees the faults of others but covers them. It is because he is aware of the nature of mankind and also knows his duty in this context. It does not mean that he does not see the evil in his eyes, but he sees the good in the eyes of others. He closes his eyes to the shortcomings of others and is concerned with his own defects.

3) This kind of person knows that man is a blend of the spirit of God and the putrid clay, and he takes it as a good augury. He never entertains the idea of denying his physical dimension and of overlooking his instincts. Rather, he has a realistic view of the human dimensions of himself and others. He neither talks about uprooting his instincts nor intends to retreat into solitude and seclusion. Instead, he believes that the same instincts are powerful instruments for his advancement and growth, and considers presence in society as a means for the emergence of his creativity.

Thus, his life in this respect is similar to that of the people. He eats, drinks, mingles with others, and he sees the world not as a calamity and plague but as a vast ground of God, and benefits by it with his needs. He equally knows that satisfaction of instincts, material possessions and benefiting from the world are not his ultimate goal; rather, they are prologue to his perfection and meeting with God [*liqāʾ Allāh*]. So, he enjoys everything moderately and to a sufficient extent. He does not deprive himself of any blessing, but does not also suffocate himself with any of the favours.

4) This kind of person sees evenly the possibility of progress and growth in all, and recognizes all men as creatures of the One God. Therefore, he regards no one as essentially superior to others. Even if he deems himself blessed and favoured by God for having endowed him with the power of discernment and self-building, he never allows this grace to cause him to become proud and boastful, and reckon himself as superior to others.

Arrogance and pride are absent in him and he knows well the satanic temptation in this regard. Such a person does not keep aloof from others on the excuse of knowledge and strength, and never regards himself as being special. He does not cast his attributes in others' teeth through his clothes, language or some of his silent gestures, and knows how strong the temptations of Satan are and in what manner he attempts to make man proud and arrogant but "be certain that all these are guiles of the Devil and wiles of the self." [325]

For, the Messenger of God (s), with all his spiritual loftiness, was never enticed by such pretences and was always the confidante and companion of the most indigent strata of the society. The great men of religion have been so, too. For instance, Shaykh 'Abdul-Karīm Hā'irī, the founder of the Islamic

theological center in Qum, in spite of his being of high social standing, and an undisputed Shāh Religious Reference Authority, “ used to sit on the floor and tell strange jokes to the most junior of students.[326] Such a person never humiliates others because of his being a man of morality; neither does he consider himself as being superior. Instead, he mingles with all and clamors in the midst of social life. Moral attributes only make him humble; not arrogant.

5) Such a person is fond of knowledge and seeking knowledge, and believes that his knowledge in relation to the things unknown to him is as a cup to the ocean. So, he ceases not even for a moment in learning, and he knows that the time he spends in learning is actually an investment that he has made and that he will reap much benefit from it.

He believes that the angels of heaven have stretched their wings above the seekers of knowledge and knows that knowledge is the legacy of the prophets (‘a). As such, he is always a seeker of the way of knowledge and a wayfarer in the path of learning. Yet, he equally knows well that knowledge is not the goal and that the goal of man should not be the accumulation of terminologies and filling up of his mind with facts. The purpose of knowledge is psychological and spiritual nurture and training. Hence, knowledge that possesses these attributes is valuable and worth searching for. It should abduct man from himself and in his stead construct another creature.

So, he is not in pursuit of virtueless knowledge; rather, he is in quest of existential truths—truths that outline his fate and raise him from being a creature equal to the animals to the status of the angels and from there to a loftier plane, to being a godly man. Yes, in his opinion such knowledge is becoming of him, and he considers the fact that “they lend their ears to that knowledge which is beneficial to them”[327] to be the mark of the upright people. For this reason, he is fascinated by profitable knowledge and between the different kinds of knowledge; he distinguishes the seeds from the straws and selects the beneficial ones.

6) He keeps a long[328] distance away from vices such as greed and jealousy. He knows that once he gives free rein to his instincts, in no way will they be satiated and ‘the cup of greedy eyes’ [*kāzeh-ye cheshmeh harṣān*] filled. He, likewise, believes that jealousy toward others is an indication of lack of faith in God, and can only be to his detriment; not to his good. So, these two traits that poison man’s life and pour venom into the cup of his life, are absent in him.

He perceives his beginning and end as good, and as such, he does not entertain greed. He knows that the sustenance of everyone is that which he eats, drinks, wears, and in which he sits. Moreover, it is no longer the sustenance of the individual; rather, it is the sustenance of those who remain. So, why should he trouble himself for the others and provide them with the comforts of life that will cause him hardship and misery?

He has also removed the root of jealousy from himself; he knows that his jealousy will not lead to the disappearance of others’ fortunes. Furthermore, as he believes in the wisdom and justice of God, he

sees no reason to be jealous. Rather, he is of the opinion that the possessions of others are the result of being wise, and his lack of fortune is not the grounds of his abjectness.

7) His view on the world is both optimistic and realistic. If we take the world away from man, with what investment and provisions will he proceed to the hereafter? Thus, he never says anything bad about the world; he regards it as the arena for self-building, prosperity and providing for himself. Even if he sees that some Qur'anic *yahs* and *hadiths* have reproached the world, he knows that it refers to worldliness and negligence of the final goal and destination; not negation of the reality of the world and its essence.

8) He believes in the rule of action and reaction. He knows that every input has its corresponding output; nothing in the world is futile and vain. So, his actions are measured and he is the observer of his own conduct. But he also knows that one's wrong conduct should not necessarily lead to penalization in this world and that the wrongdoer should definitely be duly punished. From his viewpoint the world is not the place for recompense and retribution; rather, it is a 'test bed'. The other world is the place for reward. Even if a person is punished in this world it is actually a favour God has done on him which has prevented him from persisting in his deviations.

9) Since he thinks of God as just and wise, and has an optimistic outlook on the world, he reckons tribulations and adversities as constructive and derives benefit from them for his growth. So, he never complains against the universe and firmaments of tribulations [*falaq-e kajmad*]. Rather, he believes that behind all these sufferings is a great disguised wisdom in favour of his growth.

10) Finally, such a person is always in the process of self-assessment and, like a strict accountant, takes stock of himself. He systematically opens his record and impartially evaluates himself. He gives positive grades for his good deeds and negative grades for his bad ones. He promises to himself never to repeat such unscrupulous acts. He not only meticulously controls his behaviour, but also supervises his thinking and imagination. He does not permit the butterfly of his imagination to fly wherever it likes and around every flower. Instead, his entire existence is under his command and at the end of the year he rebuilds himself, goes beyond himself, and enters a loftier plane:

عنكبوتان مگس قدید کنند

عارفان هر دمی دو عید کنند

*Every moment the mystics make two celebrations;
But the spider-like men let dry the fly to prey on it.*

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