

Part 2: The Nature of Man

We know that there are different perspectives on the nature of man, two of which are contradictory to each other: the mentality of the spiritualists and that of the materialists.

According to the spiritualists' mentality, man in reality is composed of body and spirit. The spirit is eternal, and does not perish with death of the body, and we may analyze the Islamic sources that confirm this perspective.

According to materialists' mentality, a man comprises only as a functioning machine called the "body", which is annihilated with death, and its dismemberment means the dissolution of his personality eternally.

In spite of this great difference in perspectives, there is commonality between both groups of thought. The common grounds are that there are certain non-material elements which may be called intellectual, and which give a man his sense of self value, and personality. If he is deprived of intellect, he will be relegated to the level of animals. Sa'di, the poet, has expressed this idea in the following poem:

"Man's body is ennobled by his soul,

And this fine garment is not a sign of humanity

If man were known by his eyes, nose, mouth and ears,

What difference would there be between a picture on the wall and humanity?"

There is a saying: "How easy it is to become a scholar and how difficult to be a human being." It requires so many qualities that depend on one's personality and worth.

Deviations which take place in an individual, or, society are of two kinds:

1) Anti-values: stand against values, such as tyranny against justice, suppression against freedom, atheism and lack of discipline against devotion and worship, and foolishness and stupidity against wisdom and intelligence. Most deviations do not belong to this group, because such anti-values are

soon defeated.

2) Another group of deviations takes the form of a cancerous growth of one value (not vices) which obliterates all other values through over expression. For example, asceticism is a value and requisite for humanity, but a person, or, society may turn to it to the extent of over doing it and ignoring every other value. Human values may be said to come under one heading, as expressed by Gnostics and modern theologians, and that is a feeling of pain, something which animals lack.

Pain is a source of discomfort, but at the same time it gives an awareness to find the cause, and consequential remedy. In this way, it is a blessing even though it causes some loss. Rumi expresses this idea in a poem:

"The sigh, and groaning which are due to pain, provide a wakefulness at that time. When you fall ill, you feel penitent of guilt. And, a sin will seem ugly to you. Then you resolve to follow the right path, and promise yourself to obey now onwards. So it is certain that sickness has this benefit that it grants you alertness and consequential alleviation of pain. Know then, you who are searching for causes, that the greater the pain, the greater is the awareness and the greater the awareness, the paler the visage."

Being unable to feel pain is like having no stimulus, and lack of corresponding response. It is tantamount to being ignorant. Which is better? To be stupid and ignorant, and feel no pain, or, to be aware and alert, and feel the pain?

It is sometimes said that being a lean Socrates is preferable to being a fat pig. Being learned and wise, but deprived of comforts, is better than a fool enjoying all comforts. Literature is full of complaints of having intelligence, for it deprives its owner of comfort and convenience. A poet says:

"My intelligence and wisdom are my enemies,

I wish that my eyes and ears were not open."

Another poet says:

"Do not be wise to grieve for the crazy,

Be crazy to be grieved for by the wise

But such an expression is incongruous. He who attains the level of humanity, and understands the worth of sensitivity and pain, never says that his intelligence and wisdom are his enemies. He would rather repeat the utterance of the Prophet that "The true friend of a person is his intelligence and his real enemy is his ignorance."

He who considers his intelligence to be his enemy, never feels the uneasiness and misfortunes caused by ignorance, otherwise he would not make such a remark. Even during physical illness, there has to be

pain logically, otherwise the illness could not be diagnosed, and consequently treated; an illness which is sudden and without pain is most dangerous.

What is human pain? It does not mean only physical pain. It is a metaphysical pain considered sacred by mystics, and is peculiar to human beings, for this reason a human being is preferable to an angel, for, an angel is free from pain; therefore, unable to appreciate the quality of such ability that the human beings seek God in their state of pain, while withdraw in a state of sensual pleasure. The man is in reality produced by divine breath in another world, and is not wholly homogeneous with the things of this world. He has a feeling of strangeness, and alienation with all other creatures here since they are all changeable, and perishable, and not worthy of indefinite attachment. The Man, however, has perpetual anxiety, and this is what draws him towards devotion, and worship of God, communion with Him, and proximity to Him, as his origin.

There are many parables in mysticism about returning to one's origin. Poets speak of a parrot brought in a cage from India always longing to break open the cage, and fly back home. Rumi tells the story of a reed which is cut off from its reed-bed, and you hear the moan of the pipe lamenting this separation, and longing for the reunion. Sometimes they compare a person to an elephant which must be constantly knocked on the head so that it gets no chance to think of its Indian homeland.

Most of these parables mean to say that a human being is anxious to return to the original world, and feels the pain of separation, and longs for a divine reunion. Imam 'Ali, in a conversation with Kumayl Ibin-Ziad, declares that there is no one to whom he may divulge the secret of his heart. But, he says there are some individuals in the world who have attained the point of perfect certainty in knowledge, and feel that there is no space to separate them from the spirit of certitude. That thing, namely contentment, which is difficult for pleasure-seeking men, and materialists to achieve, is feasible for them, and what is the source of obstruction for the materialists, namely acquaintance of God, is the means of companionship for the latter.

Spiritualists go along with people, but their spirits soar high, and they feel connected to the physical as well as metaphysical worlds, simultaneously, going through the mystic, and devotional "pains", and communions that 'Ali had.

This love of God makes the devotee wholly unconscious of what goes on around him, and he does not feel any pain even if an arrow is being pulled out of his body. This pain of separation from God, and longing for divine proximity do not end until he attains his goal of joining God. The Holy Qur'an says the heart is soothed by one thing only, and that is the reminiscence of God.

Rumi quotes the parable of a man who was constantly in communion with God, and kept on repeating the divine name. The *Satan (devil)* came to him once, and tempted him in such a manner that he stopped his invocations henceforth. One day, *Satan* came to the man again and said: "With all your repetition of the name of God and your wakefulness at dawn for devotion and your longing, did you ever

hear once from God saying: "Here I am?" If you had gone to any other door, and groaned so much, you would have received a response at least once." This remark appeared logical to the man, so he kept silent. In a dream, an invisible voice asked him as to why he had abandoned his communion. He answered that despite all his longing, and pain of love, he had never received an answer. The voice said: "I am sent by God to give you an answer. The pain of love that He has put in your heart is the response."

Imam 'Ali, in his prayer (du'a) of *Kumayl*, says: "O God, forgive that sin which causes my praying to be confined, and the pain of it to be removed." Thus, the implied meaning is that the prayer is a goal to appreciate God in itself, and not always the means of receiving an answer favourable to one's personal/selfish like, or, dislikes.

Another group claims that the criterion of humanity is to feel the pain of God's creatures, and as Sa'di, the poet, says:

"It is not poverty that has made me pale,

I am pale because of grieving for the poor."

If the hunger and pains of others become more difficult to bear than one's own hunger and pain, it is a value which is the basis of compassionate personality, and a source of other human values. It involves a feeling of responsibility towards other human beings, and their needs, and sufferings.

We see its perfect example in Imam 'Ali, especially the last fasting month of *Ramadhan* in his life. For him it had a new delight, and for his household it was full of anxiety, because his behaviour in that month was quite different from the fasting months of previous years.

"Ali (as) speaks of the following Holy Qur'anic verse:

***"Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, We believe, and not be tried? And certainly we tried those before them, so Allah will certainly know those who are true and He will certainly know the liars."* (Sura al- 'Ankabut, 29: 2- 3).**

He says: "As soon as this Verse descended, I knew that great seditions and trials lay in store for these people, and I asked the Prophet what the Verse meant!" The Prophet answered: "After me, my people will be tested and tried." I (Ali) said: "Those who were martyred in the Battle of Uhud were seventy in number headed by Hamza-bin-Abdul-Muttalib, while I was uneasy not to receive the blessing of martyrdom. Why was I deprived of this?" The Prophet said: "If you were not martyred there, you will be martyred in the way of God."

In the battle of *Uhud*, 'Ali (a.s.) was just twenty-five, had recently wedded Fatimah (a.s.), and had Hassan (as) as his first offspring. A young family usually expects a gradual progress in life whereas the only great wish of 'Ali was to get martyred in the way of God. The Prophet then asked 'Ali (as): "How

much fortitude will you show in martyrdom?" 'Ali answered: "Please do not speak of fortitude; ask me rather how grateful I will be."

Due to the Prophet's utterance, and of the signs, which 'Ali (as) recognized, and explained, his family and companions became worried. In the last month of fasting in his life, he went as a guest to different places to break his fast, but ate very little. His children asked him sympathetically why he abstained from food so much. He answered that he wished to meet his God with an empty stomach. Then, they realized that 'Ali (as) was anticipating something in near future. Sometimes, he looked up at the sky and said:

"What my beloved Prophet has told me is true and quite near." On the night before the 19th of *Ramadhan*, the children were with him for a time.

Then, Imam Hassan went back to his own house. 'Ali (as) had a private enclosure for prayer where he retired for communion with his Lord after attending to his private, and public affairs. The sun had not risen yet when Imam Hassan went into his private chamber to see his father. 'Ali (as) had a special affection for Fatimah's children. He said to his son: "As I was sitting there last night, I fell into a slumber, and dreamt of the Prophet to whom I said: "I have suffered so much through your people." He said: "Curse them", I cursed them and prayed God to take me away from them, and send an incompetent person to them."

It is strange to see people not following 'Ali (as) to his way, and causing him so much suffering. Such were Ayesha's companions who broke their allegiance with Ali. So, Muawiah with his conceit, knew well what would hurt 'Ali (as) the most. So, he used the 'Outcasts' rebels (*Khawarij*) who heartily, and zealously murdered 'Ali (as). When someone hears all the tragic events, he/she wonders at 'Ali's fortitude, and realizes as to why, in his dream, he spoke of his sufferings to the Prophet, the cackling of ducks is heard from outside the house, and 'Ali (as) predicts that very soon the sound of wailing, and lamentation will dominate that cackling.

His family came forward to stop him from going to the mosque that day, and suggested sending someone else to lead the congregational prayer instead. At first, he mentioned the name of Ja'dat-bin-Hobeira, his nephew, as substitute. But he changed his mind and said he himself would go to lead the prayer. He is asked to have someone as company, but refuses. Later that day when he was laid down with his terrible wound, he said: "I swear by God that the blow of the sword on my forehead was like a lover being united with his beloved, or, like a person looking in a dark night for a well where he could pitch his tent, and is overjoyed to find it."

Anyhow, while setting off for the mosque he was ecstatic, and tried to understand the reason. He felt that a great event was about to take place after he cried out the call of summoning the faithful to prayer, he bade farewell to that dawn, and said: "O dawn, has there been a day in 'Ali's life when you appeared to find him asleep? Henceforth, his eyes will be closed for ever."

As he descended from his pedestal, he said: "Open the way to a fighting believer." We see him as a

perfect man who, in all his epic struggles, always remembered God, and feared nothing in God's plan. As the spiritualists men say, a man is himself the gate through which he enters the world of spirituality. Therefore, there are elements in man's essence, which are not in harmony with the world of matter. This is not only what old psychologists believed, but modern ones, too, admit it explicitly.

The holy Prophet (saw) says: "He who knows himself knows God", and the Holy Qur'an devotes a separate account for man as against all other creatures. It says:

"We will soon show them our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things?" (Sura Fussilat, 41: 53).

You may wonder about the elements in man which cannot be accounted for by material things? This necessitates a long discussion, and is related to answering human core values, and the sense of man's humanity. In the case of animals, there is no separation between them and their entity. A horse is a horse, a dog is a dog, a tiger is a tiger; but, a man may lack humanity, that is, those qualities which are the basis of personality. And, though these qualities pertain to this world, they are not tangible; but, are spiritual rather than material.

Secondly, the criterion of man's humanity, and what gives him personality, is not set forth by nature, or, anyone else, but by man himself. Imam 'Ali-bin-Musa-ar-Reza, the eighth Imam, says: "What is there is known through what is here." As it was mentioned before, all the human values may be summed up into a single value, and that is, having a feeling of pain above various human pains, or, the pain of every living creature. It is the pain of being a stranger to this world, and being separated from his origin in the other world. He longs to return to his own home, and to God, from the earthly world to heaven from where he was driven out incipiently. Yet, his coming into this world has not been wrong, and futile, and has been sent for a purpose.

No matter how resplendent, and perfect a man becomes, one still feels one has not reached the ultimate. One desires something, and when he secures it, one feels no longing for it. Someone said: "I was going round a foreign museum, when I saw the statue of a very beautiful woman lying down on a bed and a fine young man standing on the bed with one leg on the floor and his face turned away from the woman, as if he was on the point of running away." He could not understand what the sculptor had meant by this scene. He asked someone what it meant, and was told: "This scene illustrates the thought of Plato that a man turns with great love, and zeal to something, but on attaining it, that longing dies away, and ends there. It is the beginning of weariness: dislike and escape."

Others who have pondered more deeply over this issue say that man is a creature who cannot be in love with what is limited, and perishable, forever. He longs for absolute perfection, and loves nothing else. That means love of God. Even those who deny God, or, even abuse the Divine, are unaware that in the depth of their nature they love God, but they have lost the way to their beloved. Mohyedin Arabi says no

human being has loved anyone, but his own God. The Prophets have not come to teach creatures the name of God, and His worship, for this is inherent in human nature. They have come to show the difference between the right, and wrong paths, and tell men that they are really in love with absolute perfection. If you think that money, or, social status in life is perfection, you are wrong. The Prophets came to unveil and diminish falsehood, and enable men to find their beloved through venerations, which we have seen performed by Imam 'Ali (as). The Holy Qur'an says:

"Those who believe and whose hearts are set at rest by the remembrance of Allah; now surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts set at rest." (Sura ar-Ra'd, 13:28).

The Holy Qur'an does not ask people not to seek wealth, rank, or comfort, but it says that these things do not give peace and tranquillity, for they are not their ultimate goal.

Other schools of thought emphasize human pain (compassion) for God's creatures, and not for God. The Gnostics, while referring to man's progress towards perfection, say that he embarks on four journeys:

- 1) Man's journey towards God.
- 2) His journey with God in God, meaning knowing Him.
- 3) His journey with God towards God's creatures
- 4) His journey with God among creatures for their salvation.

Nothing can be said better than the above, as long as man is separated from God, everything is wrong, But, after communion with God, and knowing, and approaching Him, and feeling Him with himself, one returns to His creatures in the company of God, to help and salvage them, and bring them near God. If we say that a man journeys from people towards God, he does not attain anything. And if we say he moves towards human beings without moving towards God, he will be like materialist human schools of today, being inconsistent with replacing an infinite objective with a finite goal, because it is absolutely false.

Only those who have absolved themselves first, can deliver others from being enslaved by nature, and other human beings. It means freedom from one's carnal desires to begin with, and from the domination of external nature, and others in the second place.

From the viewpoint of Islam, Is a perfect man the one who feels the pain of others, or, feels for God and then feels the pain of His creatures?

The Holy Qur'an says:

"Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in this announcement." (Sura Kahf, 18:6).

This Verse shows the Prophet (saw) was eager to guide, and deliver people from the captivities and difficulties of this world that he could kill himself by grieving for others.

Then, two other Verses refer to the same thing:

"We have not revealed the Holy Qur'an to you that you may be unsuccessful."(Sura Ta Ha, 20:2).

And:

"Certainly, an Apostle has come to you from among yourselves, grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you, to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful" (Sura at-Tawbah ,9: 128).

Thus, the Prophet felt for other human beings, and did the utmost to the satisfaction of God, for the humanity.

A Muslim must feel both for God, and for God's creatures. At times you must have seen a father taking much trouble, and spending much money for his children's education that he seemed spendthrift with respect to the spending. The Prophet, too, showed the same zeal for his people.

Imam 'Ali (as), too, showed the same feeling as mentioned in "*Nahjul-Balagha*". He received a report from Basra that Othman-bin-Hanif has taken part in a feast. There had been no drinking, gambling, or debauchery. Even then, 'Ali (as) reproached the Governor for attending a wholly aristocratic feast where no poor person had been present. Then, 'Ali (as) began to describe his own pains, saying that he could obtain all means of comfort, and pleasure himself if he wished, but would not leave the reins of his life in the hands of desires. He was thinking of all those in various lands who were poor, and in great need. That is what 'feeling the pains of others' means, He says: "Should I be satisfied with the title of Caliph and commander of the faithful, without sharing the troubles of the faithful?"

Avicenna compares this pain to itching which is painful, but pleasant when someone scratches himself. It is not a bitter feeling. In mourning for Imam Husayn, tears are shed because one feels the pain, yet, one loves to participate in such ceremonies. There, one feels the spirit not to be alone, but it is the spirit of all the bodies. Such a spirit motivates one to wear patched up shoes in spite of all available resources in order to be one with a spirit like 'Ali' s.

A poet says grief upon that spirit which is great, for in being great it feels everyone's pain, and its task becomes crucial. 'Ali (as) saw a woman carrying a water skin, and thought that she must be lonely to undertake such a task: he approached her, and politely offered her help, she accepted the offer, and on reaching her house, he asked her if she had anyone to help her. She said that her husband has been killed in the service of 'Ali-bin-Abi-Talib, and she had no one to look after her. On hearing that, 'Ali's whole body was shaken with pity, and he could not sleep all night. Next morning, he and his companions carried some provisions to her house, and there he cooked some meat, fed her orphans, and caressed them, saying: "Forgive 'Ali for having neglected you". Then, he lit the oven, and came near to feel its

heat, and said to himself: "Ali, feel this heat so that you could not forget the heat of hell for neglecting the orphans, the poor and others". This is an example of a perfect Islamic man.

As I said before, when some values prevail radically, these eventually overshadow other values, for instance, an inclination to worship to the extent of forgetting other duties. Now I feel that another radical wave is about to develop, and that is an inclination to social matters of Islam, and neglect of godly duties. If we are to deviate from the path of moderation in Islam, what difference would there be between forgetting the society by turning to worship, and vice versa?

The Holy Qur'an says:

"Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves, You will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Old and New Testaments; like a seed produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them; Allah has promised those among them who believe and do good, forgiveness and a great reward."(Sura al-Fath, 48: 29).

Elsewhere, the Holy Qur'an says:

"Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall."(Sura as-Saff, 61:4).

Here, the Verse describes the Prophet's companions, and those trained by him, and calls those as the enemies of truth" who cover the face of truth, while believers stand firmly against these enemies, and when they are among faithful people, they are perfectly kind to, and united with them.

This is the social characteristic of Islamic society, which has been neglected for so many centuries. The Holy Qur'an continues to say, referred to above that these people who are highly social, always ask God for more, and more for society, and desire God's satisfaction, and that is the highest degree of their devotion¹. The Holy Qur'an says:

"They who turn (to Allah) who serve (Him), who praise (Him), who fast, who bow down, who prostrate themselves, who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and who keep the limits of Allah and give good news to the believers." (Sura at-Tawbah, 9: 112).

These are the divine qualities of a people, and those who reform society. And the Holy Qur'an speaks of:

"The patient, and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend (benevolently), and those who ask forgiveness in the morning times."(Sura 'Ali-'Imran, 3: 17).

The word 'patience' in Holy Qur'an stands for 'resistance, especially for those who are honest and truthful ones, in battle; and all the qualities mentioned in the verse are inseparable.

There is a description of the companions of Imam Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, in various narrations saying: "All night, they are engrossed in worship, and in the daytime they are like lions." There is another narration about the Prophet's companions, which says: "The Prophet went one day to visit the companions at Safa, habitually. It was between dawn and sunrise. He saw a young man staggering along, his eyes sunk in the sockets, and looking frail. The Prophet asked him: "How did you begin your morning?" He answered: "I have begun it with certainty," meaning what "You have told us through the tongue and ear, I have found it through insight".

The Prophet said: "There is a sign for everything. What is the sign of your certainty?" He answered: "Its sign is that it keeps me thirsty in daytime, and sleepless at night." meaning his certainty does not allow him to break his fast, or, to sleep, The Prophet said: "This is not enough. I want further signs." He answered: "Now that I am in this world I have a vision of the next world, and I hear the voices of those who are in both heaven, and hell. Let me name those of your followers who are in heaven, and those in hell. (Rumi has expressed all this in a poem.)

Then, the Prophet asked him: "What is your wish?" He answered: Martyrdom in the way of God." Thus, this man is a true Muslim with that wish, and in the way he spends his days, and nights. It is his feeling for God that has produced his other feeling of pain. The Holy Qur'an says:

"O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient." (Sura al-Baqarah, 2: 153).

To be an authentic Muslim in society, you must pray with all sincerity. Some people despise prayer, consider it be suitable for old women, and think it enlightenment to be only sociable. You may have heard that Omar (first caliph) omitted the sentence of "Hasten to good deeds" from the call to prayer. He thought it as an enlightened step, but he was wrong. His time was the peak of Islamic victories, and effervescence of Islamic Jihad. Soldiers attacked the enemy in groups and, in spite of being small in number, vanquished it. Their number was no more than fifty to sixty thousand, and yet they fought against two empires, each of which had an army of several hundred thousand. The soldiers of Islam fought on two fronts, and were victorious in both. Omar's reason for that omission was that as the people are called to pray, which is the best devotion, and the best deed, they would think that there is no need to call them to other good deeds such as the jihad, for, it would divert them, and substitute prayer for other deeds. He suggested substituting the sentence: "Hasten to good deeds" with "Prayer is better than sleep" (call for prayer at dawn).

He did not contemplate as to why the small army of Islam was victorious over larger armies. Was it the superiority of weapons of the Arabs over those of the Persians, and the Romans? No, because the two civilized countries of that time were well equipped while the Arabs' armaments were substandard. Was it

because the Arab race was stronger? Again no, for, we have seen what Shahpur, the King of Iran, did to the Arabs, and how he fastened iron chains to their shoulders. It was the power of faith that defeated the Persian, and the Roman armies, and the power that is derived from that sentence in daily prayer: "Hasten to good deeds."

When a man stands at night to have communion with God, his morale is elevated. The Prayer means revitalizing faith, and the repetition of the phrase "God is great" in prayer makes everything else seem so trivial, and insignificant. Such a man, on seeing so many hundred thousands of soldiers before him, says to himself: "God is greater than all, all powers belong to Him, and we should rely on Him". It is the prayer that gives him strength. When going to holy war is a duty incumbent on a person, he must report, and his staying on for prayer in the mosque is prohibited. The condition for the prayer to be acceptable to God is to go on a jihad, while the condition for the jihad to be acceptable to God is to perform ones prayer. The Prayer without jihad is null and void, and jihad without prayer is likewise, null and void.

In the system of Islamic values, devotion ranks at the top, but, it must be based on the conditions corresponding to the Holy Qur'anic criteria. The Prayer is real only when it shows its effect by being vigilant over wicked acts. It is the prayer that leads to other worthy values.

'Ali (as) is the sun of all Islamic values, and a comprehensive personality. On one occasion we see him as a protagonist in the battle field, as if he had been a soldier all his life. Then, we find him elsewhere as a mystic, who knows nothing except loving the communion with God. As an example, we cite two cases from "*Nahjul-Balagha*". In the first case, a military encounter of 'Ali (as) with Muawiah at Siffin, on the bank of the Euphrates. Muawiah ordered his men to block the way to the river so that 'Ali's men could not have access to water, and would be forced to surrender.

'Ali proposed to hold debate with his enemies to solve the problem, and to prevent unnecessary bloodshed between two groups of Muslims. Muawiah discussed the matter in his war council, and it was decided not to let 'Ali's men have access to water. 'Ali (as) delivered a discourse to his men, which was more effective than a thousand drums, trumpets, and military anthems. He told them the obvious fact that Muawiah had gathered a number of perverse men, and had blocked the way of 'Ali's men to water, and said: "You must choose one of the two alternatives, first you must quench your swords with evil blood, and then quench your thirst next."

Then, Ali (as) uttered a sentence which created much excitement among all of his followers. He asked them as to what life, or death meant, and said: "Is life just walking, eating, and sleeping? Is death the act of being buried under the earth? No, that is not life, and this is not death. Life is to die victoriously, and death is to live as condemned, and vanquished.

'Ali's men advanced swiftly, and drove back Muawiah's army, which was now deprived of water. Muawiah wrote to 'Ali begging for access to water, but 'Ali's companions were opposed to it. 'Ali (as), however, was acting chivalrous, and said that they must not prevent the enemy from accessing water, by

creating difficulties for it. Winning victory in such a way would be unmanly, and unworthy of him as a Muslim. Thus, he showed that manliness and magnanimity are loftier than vainglory. Rumi, in his poem, calls 'Ali the lion of God, in courage, but he says no one can perceive Ali's magnanimity.'

Then, we find 'Ali at a different scene, and in a different garment when he is free from public duties, and is engaged in his devotion and worship, and utters the following prayer: "O God, you are a greater companion for your saints than any friend. You are willing than anyone to aid those who trust you. You observe the innermost thoughts, and secrets of your friends, and lovers, and are well aware of their insight, and knowledge, and know that their hearts beat and long for you."

You should listen to, or, read the Du'a-e-Kumayl, which is 'Ali's supplication, and, in content, it surmounts to the height of mysticism. There is something in it beyond the two worlds; physical, and metaphysical. It shows solely the relation of a sincere, humble, and loving servant to the holy essence of providence (God). The way Imam 'Ali (as), and Imam Zain al -Abideen (as) commune with God at the dawn in the month of Ramadhan, shows us how to approach God as our first step; then, perform our selfish duties. We should abstain from self-indulgent inclinations.

Imam as-Sadiq (as), just moments before passing away, summoned his kith and kin, and uttered one sentence before breathing his last. He said: "Our intercession does not apply to those who take prayer as trifle."

The life story of 'Ali (as), may be divided into six phases: the most amazing being the last one. The first period is from his birth to the open declaration by the Prophet about Islam. The second period is from the Prophet's ordainment to his Emigration to Medina. The third period, different from the other two, is from the Emigration to Medina to the death of the Prophet. The fourth phase is from the Prophet's death to 'Ali's own Caliphate, a period of twenty-five years. The fifth phase is his four, and a half years of Caliphate. And the sixth, or, the last phase is of only two days from his receiving a sword strike on his head, until his martyrdom.

The last phase is the most amazing of all because 'Ali shows his perfection as a human being in the way he faced death. On receiving the strike, he uttered two sentences, namely: "Get hold of the man", and "I swear by the God of the Kaaba that I have received my salvation through martyrdom".

A physician, called Assad-bin-Amr, was brought to him, and he diagnosed that poison had pervaded 'Ali's blood. He said that he could do nothing, and recommended that the Imam should pronounce his last will. When Umm Kulthum, Imam Ali's daughter, saw ibn Muljam, she spoke harshly to him, and asked as to why he had acted thus towards her father, and expressed the hope that 'Ali (as) would recover. The cursed man said: "Have no hope, for I have bought this sword for a thousand dinars, and paid another thousand for smearing it with poison. The poison is so potent that it will not only kill your father; it could kill all the people of Kufa if used against them".

They brought 'Ali (as) some milk, and he told those around to treat the assassin kindly. Then, he

addressed his kith and kin, and said: "O! descendants of Abdul Muttalib, after my death do not go among people saying what has happened to me and accusing such and such a man. No, my assassin is only one man."

He then said to his son Imam Hassan: "My son, this man has given your father only one stroke of the sword. After me, you have the choice either to set him free, or, punish him. If you choose to punish him, deliver him only one blow whether it kills him, or, not." Then, he asked if they have fed, and treated the assassin well. That is how he treated his enemy, and that is why Rumi, in his poem, calls him the lion of God, and says no one can perceive the extent of Ali's magnanimity.

All this shows 'Ali's manhood, and humanistic approach. The poison was affecting him profusely, and his companions are weeping, and groaning; but, they saw his smirk, and lips uttering this sentence: "I swear to God that what has happened to me is not reproach, this death, and martyrdom in the way of God is something for which I had longed all my life, and so much the better that it has happened during the act of devotion." Then, 'Ali used a simile that is well known among the Arabs. The desert Arabs were in the habit of staying where there was grass, and when it had withered, they moved elsewhere. In hot weather, they sought a place at night where water could be found. He said: "I am like a lover who has found his beloved, or like one looking for water on a dark night, and is overjoyed to find it".

In those last moments, they were all around 'Ali's bed. Poison had done its lethal damage, and from time to time 'Ali (as) fell into oblivion, and whenever he opened his eyes, he preached to those present. His last words which were fiery contained a twenty-point address directed first at his sons, Hassan and Husayn, and then at his other children, and finally at all people who may hear his words until the day of Resurrection.

Generally, everyone who has pioneered a school of thought has a theory about man's perfection, or, ideal of a perfect man. Ethics is related to "what should be", and not "what is", and once a man may acquire these ethical qualities, he will attain the peak of humanism. The views of various schools in connection with perfect man may be summarized as under:

1) One view is from intellectualists who view man in terms of his mental qualities, and think that his essence is his mind, and his faculty of thought. This is the view of ancient philosophers including Avicenna. For them, a perfect man was a sage, and his perfection lay in his philosophy. By theoretical philosophy, they meant the proper general understanding of the whole existence, and that is different from science, which means understanding only a fraction of entire existence (property).

To show the difference between science and philosophy, the following explanation may elaborate the issue. You might wish to know something about a city. This knowledge may be general, or, specific. A municipal engineer can draw the plan of the city to show its limits, and divisions into various precincts, parks, streets, and squares, in which you would not be able to locate your house. Another man can supply all the local information of a precinct, which a general engineer cannot. A philosopher gives you a

plan, and picture of the whole existence in general, and tries to find its origin and cause, its beginning and end, and its phases, and general principles. If you ask this man something about a plant, an animal, a stone, a star, or the sun, he may not be able to answer your question. For the philosopher, the picture of universe as a whole is significant even though the details may be vague, or even unknown.

To intellectualists, finding the general broad picture was the goal, and its attainment the sign of perfection, in which the world of intellect corresponds with the objective world. They thought this was possible through the use of reasoning, logic, and reflection. They believed in two types of philosophy:

- a) The Theoretical philosophy, or, understanding the world as it is, and
- b) The Practical philosophy which meant the complete predominance of human intellect over all of his instincts, and other faculties.

Books of ethics judge matters on this basis, and our ethics is a Socratic one based on intellect. Does your intellect dominate your passion, or, vice versa? Does your intellect dominate your anger, and fear, or vice versa? Thus, if you can manage to understand the world through reasoning, and allow your intellect to dominate “the self”, then you are a perfect man.

2) Another school is the school of love, or, Gnosticism. By love is meant affectionate devotion to God. Unlike the intellectual school which is the school of reflection in which all actions are intellectual, the school of love is all action, a vertical rather than a horizontal motion, though at a later stage it assumes a horizontal direction. At first it is an upward flight towards God. They do not believe in logical reasoning as the means of advancement; it is the spirit of man that overcomes one until it reaches God. It berates the school of intellect, and this subject is the basis of one of the finest debates in literature between love, and intellect, and those who are engaged in such discussions are themselves mostly Gnostics who have given love victory over intellect. This school considers intellect as a trivial part of man’s existence, and only a means to an end, whereas the essence of man is his spirit, which belongs to the world of love involving nothing, but moving towards God. That is why the followers of this school, such as the poet Hafiz, prefer love, and its intoxication over intellect.

Their monotheism is based on the unity of existence, which takes the form of absolute truth once a human being understands that position. It means that a perfect man becomes ultimately a part of God, or, having godly attributes.

3) Another school of thought thinks of perfect man depending neither on intellect, nor, on love, but on power, meaning thereby force, strength, or, something similar. In ancient Greece, there was a group called Sophists who explicitly claimed that might was right, and weakness meant absence of right. Thus, justice, and injustice had no meaning for them, since might is right, and every human being endeavoured to gain power without any condition, or, limitation.

In the last two centuries, this idea was revived by Nietzsche, the German philosopher. He, and his followers say truth, honesty, and goodness are all nonsense. If a person is weak, it is his own fault, and

he deserves to be vanquished. He believes religion is invented by the weak, being himself is opposed to religion. Note this is opposite to Karl Marx's view that religion is invented by the strong to enslave the weak. Nietzsche thinks the weak have invented religion to limit the power of the strong, and the treachery of religion to mankind has been to propagate such ideas as generosity, kindness, humanity, and justice etc. among the people, and this has deceived the strong into diminishing their power for the sake of humanity.

He (Nietzsche) thinks those who say that 'one should combat the self' are wrong; rather, the self should be nourished. Those who speak of equality are wrong; there should always be inferiors working for the superiors in order to enable them to grow, and produce "the superman". He is against the equality of the sexes because the male is created as the stronger sex, and the female is to serve the male. Thus, this school thinks superman, or, the perfect man to be at par with a strong, and powerful man, and perfection means power.

Such ideas have consciously, or, otherwise subconsciously become prevalent among the Muslims, and sometimes we carelessly speak of life as the "survival of the fittest," whereas this phrase means that defence of right, and truth is ignored (might is right attitudes). Without such a war, no priest, monk, or, clergy could peacefully engage in worship in churches, temples, or, mosques; and they should all be thankful to the soldier who makes this worship possible.

It would be great for mankind to reach a stage of education, and perfection where no assault on humanity would exist, and no legitimate war would be needed. Islam presents such a society in the form of the rule of Mahdi, the awaited Imam (as). It is said that then even wild beasts will be reconciled with one another, and there will exist no aggression amongst the living beings.

A sentence is alluded to Imam Husayn (as), which is neither correct, nor, verified as having been uttered by him. This sentence has become prevalent in the last fifty years, and it is: "One should fight a jihad for the sake of one's opinion". Such a sentence is in agreement with Western ideas, while the Holy Qur'an says that a jihad must be waged in the way of right, and truth.

A belief may be right, or, wrong. Another school of thought says that one should have a belief, and an ideal for which one must put in efforts, no matter what that belief is. But the Holy Qur'an says these efforts must be made in the way of right, and if the belief proves to be wrong, it must be reformed. Often, it is necessary to combat one's own belief to discover the truth, and then begin combat in the way of truth. The idea of the "survival of the fittest" is the basis of the supposition that "might is right", an idea derived from Darwin's philosophy about animal life, and applied to human life.

But, we cannot consider human beings to be at the same level with animals with regard to the fact that war is the only way of survival. If this is so, what could be said about co-operation, unity, sincerity, and affection among human beings? They may say these acts, and sentiments, too, are for survival, and are imposed on human beings by a superior enemy. It is a necessity to have these elements to face a stronger enemy, the proof of this is that no sooner the enemy is removed, than unity turns into

dispersion, and differences and disputes arise among them even when there are only two individuals left.

As the schools of intellectualists, and love meet with opposition, the school of might is faced with those who negate it, and say that man's perfection lies in his weakness, and not in his strength for when he has power, he will show aggression. Sa'di, the poet, has made the same mistake by saying:

"I am the ant that is trampled on,

And not the wasp to make others groan with the pain of my sting.

How can I express my thanks for this blessing

That I have no strength to hurt people."²

Reasonably, the fact whether one be an ant, or, a wasp is not the reason one should get hurt, or, hurt the other. One should be thankful to have strength and having the sense to not hurt others. Sa'di speaks also of an ascetic who had retired to a cave, and when he was asked as to why he did not live in the town among people, he answered: "There are too many elegant, and pretty ones, and an old man slips on an abundance of flowers."

Sa'di also expresses the opposite view in another poem describing the difference between an ascetic, and a man of learning, and says an ascetic wants to save his own skin, whereas a man of learning tries to save a drowning man.

The Holy Qur'an speaks, in Chapter "Yusuf" which is called "The Best Story", of him:

"Who guards against evil and is patient,"(Sura Yusuf, 12:90),

meaning Yusuf who, in spite of all the available resources for seeking pleasure, controls himself, and guards his chastity. He is threatened with death if he does not yield to lustfulness, but he says in the same Chapter:

"My Lord! The prison house is dearer to me than that where they invite me to; and if Thou turn not away their device from me, I will yearn towards them." (Sura Yusuf, 12:33).

This proves that man's perfection does not lie in his weakness, even though the opposite view is expressed in many of our poems. For example, Baba Taher Hamadani says: "Help me against the eye, and the heart, for, what the eye sees, the heart desires. I must make a dagger with a steel blade, to hit the eye in order to liberate the heart."

This poet should also have hit his ears so as not to desire what he hears! What an example of a perfect man who cannot control himself except by getting rid of his organs and limbs!

We have many examples of such weakness, and abject sense of morality in literature, but we should

remember that human beings are prone to err, and go to excess. When we compare other schools of thought with the genuine Islam, we realize that Islam must have come from God. Socrates concentrates on one aspect of man while each one of Plato, Avicenna, Mohyedin Arabi, and foreign scholars stress other specific aspects. But, all of them are led astray. If so, then how can a prophet rely only on his human brain, and produce such a fine, progressive and comprehensive school of thought? All those thinkers are minor compared with him, and he is their teacher who speaks last, and best.

There is another school of thought about a perfect man that is based on love, and self-realization. This school dates back to several thousand years, and has produced lofty ideas in ancient Indian books, some of which have also been translated into Persian, such as *Upanishads*. The great scholar Tabatabai who had read this book was greatly impressed by its lofty thoughts. In this school, self-realization is the basis of all human accomplishments. Socrates (presumably of prophetic origin), and various prophets as well as the Prophets of Islam express this point.

But this school concentrates on the above single point only. Gandhi's collection of essays, and letters called 'This is my faith', is a fine book in which he says: "I discovered three principles by the study of Upanishads, which have been my guide in life: firstly, there is only one reality, and that is to know the self. This is the point by which he criticizes the West, and says those in the west have understood the world, but not discerned themselves, and for this reason they have brought misfortune upon themselves, and the world.

Secondly, he who understands himself will understand God, and others. Thirdly, there exists only one power, the power of dominating oneself. If one can dominate oneself, it would be possible for him to dominate everything else. Gandhi also says there is one goodness, and that is to desire for others what one desires for oneself. Indian philosophy is based on self-realization, contemplation, and renunciation of desires, and discovery of one's reality, which, in turn, produces affection.

In modern times, that is, in the last three centuries, a number of schools of thought have appeared which have a social tendency. One school considers a perfect man as a classless individual, and believes that belonging to a class, particularly a high class, is the sign of being imperfect, whereas perfection means equality with others. Another school like existentialism, emphasizes liberty, social awareness, and responsibilities. Another school agrees with this, but says that being quarrelsome is a requisite for this attitude.

Another school believes in enjoyment, a school that is somewhat close to the school of might. It says that one should get maximum benefit out of the blessings of creation to attain perfection. Those who consider knowledge as the height of perfection desire it in order to know nature, and thereby dominate it to serve mankind. Thus, for them knowledge is a means, not an end. Such people belong to the school of maximum enjoyment.

These were the various views that have been expressed about a perfect man, and we will elaborately

describe the views of Islam in this connection, and show the relative value of Intellect, might, social responsibilities etc. in it. Another manifestation of man's perfection is the way he faces death, because the fear of death is a weak point in man which produces many miseries, and submission to much cruelty.

If there is no fear of death, the whole life will be transformed. The magnanimous men are those who face death bravely, or, even seek it casually, not a death which is suicide, but one which is for a goal to attain which they feel to have a mission, and responsibility. Suicide means abandoning responsibility, while death for the sake of duty is happiness. This kind of death is welcomed only by saints for whom death is nothing other than a continuation of abode, or, as Imam Husayn says "It is like crossing a bridge to reach a place which is inconceivable." It is reported that when he was being beheaded, he had a smile on his lips.

Such men have both a great power of attraction, and repulsion; they have very loyal friends as well as wicked enemies that knowingly oppose the truth. The noble Imams of Islam were such perfect men, and models for their society.

Thus, man is the only creature who can separate "self" from himself, whereas stones, plants, and other living creatures are unable to remove from themselves the qualities given to them in creation. But man should acquire his humanity, which has nothing to do with his biological aspects. As Sa'di says: "Man's body is ennobled by his soul, and this fine garment is not a sign of humanity:"

Being born a human being does not make him human. He has the potentiality of being human in the same way that he has the potentiality of being a learned man. A biologist, or, a physician is not the only reason to show this humanity to us. It is something which is not denied even by the most materialistic school of thought, and yet there is no material criteria for it.

We begin the discussion with the school of intellect. According to ancient philosophers, the essence of man is his intellect. As man's body is not a part of his personality. His spiritual and psychological peculiarities, too, are not a part of his true personality. Only his power of thinking is the measure of that personality. What he sees is nothing but a tool, and a means for his thought; so are his desires. A perfect man is he who has attained perfection in reflection, and has understood the world of existence as it is. According to this school, intellect is capable of discerning the reality of the world, and can, like a mirror, truly reflect that reality in itself. Islamic philosophers who accept this view believe that this is the Islamic faith, which is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

To them, it means understanding the universe, its origin, and processes, its system, the direction of its return, faith in God, and angels as the steps of existence, faith in the world as a created thing, faith in the idea that God has not left the world to itself but guides it through prophets, and faith in the fact that everything has come from God, and returns to Him, namely Resurrection. These Philosophers consider this discernment to be philosophical and general, and not a scientific one which is a partial understanding.

The schools that have opposed the intellectual school are the *Illuminati*, or, the Platonian philosophers, and the Gnostics; the school of love, and the school of traditions, and annals. In modern times, and in the last four centuries, the school of love has risen against the school of intellect, and it claims that intellect is in the service of the senses, and can only make use of the product of the senses, like a factory turning raw materials into some substance or object. Nevertheless, the intellectual school holds its own ground against various onslaughts.

Let us see how the school of intellect compares with the view of Islam. The first point is the validity, and genuineness of intellectual understanding. Many schools deny this validity for intellect. In Islamic texts, however, we come across an extraordinary support of intellect, which is not seen in any other religion. Compare Islam with Christianity, and you will see that Christianity gives intellect no right to interfere in matters related to faith, and it is the duty of the clergy to check every reflection, and reasoning in the question of faith.

Islam, on the contrary, believes that nothing but intellect has the right to interfere in religion, For example, when you are asked as to how you came to believe in the first principle which is monotheism, your answer must only be that it was through intellect. If your reason is based on imitating the elders, or, following the example of others, such a belief is not acceptable, because it should only come through reasoning.

The Holy Qur'an constantly speaks of reasoning. Annals and traditions, too, consider intellect to be great importance, so much so that the first chapter of such books is devoted to intellect. Imam Musa ibn Jafar (as) says that God has sent two signs for man, the internal messenger, which is man's intellect, and the external prophet, which means those men who, are to guide human beings. These two complement one another, and without them man cannot attain happiness. Sometimes, it is said that a wise man's sleep is worthier than an ignorant man's worship, and the former's refraining from fasting is better than the latter's fasting; and his remaining stationary is wiser than the latter's movement. No prophet was ever ordained by God before he was granted intelligence. We consider our Prophet as having divine wisdom, and this is in contrast with Christian belief in which the intellect, and religion are quite apart.

From the viewpoint of philosophers, the essence of man is his intellect, and all other things such the senses, memory, imagination, talents, and aptitude are tools, and the means for that intellect. Islam does not confirm this point, but says that intellect is one of the branches of man's existence, and not the whole of it. The idea of philosophers, who declare that faith is limited to only understanding, does not correspond with what Islam says. In Islam, faith is a reality which is more than mere understanding. It is also inclination, submission, humility, and love.

An astronomer knows the stars, but he has no love, and inclination for them. A mineralogist does not necessarily have a feeling for mines, and minerals. A person may have the knowledge of something, and dislike it at the same time. In politics very often one knows one's enemy better than oneself. For example, in Israel there may be individuals who know the Arabs, and Muslims better than the Arabs and

Muslims know themselves. In the same way in Egypt, or, Arabia, there may be specialists on Israel. But do these specialists also have an inclination towards the country of their study? Often, this knowledge is combined with hatred.

The Holy Qur'an gives the best examples of those who know God, the prophet, and the basic principles of religion highly, and yet they are pagans and infidels. Does Satan not know God, yet, act against God? He knows God better than any other creature, and has worshipped Him for thousands of years, as Satan was an angel for thousands of years in the company of other angels? He knows the prophets too, and is well aware of Resurrection, and hereafter. Yet, the Holy Qur'an calls him an unbeliever³.

If what the philosophers say about understanding were true, Satan would then be the top believer. But he is not, and opposes the truth that he knows so well.

The Holy Qur'an says:

- 1) "I swear by the fig and olive,**
- 2) And Mount Sinai,**
- 3) And this city made secure,**
- 4) Certainly we created man in the best make.**
- 5) Then we rendered him the lowest of the low.**
- 6) Except those who believe and do good. (Sura at-Tin, 95: 1-6).**

The Verses 1 to 5 are the basis of theoretical wisdom and Verse 6 is practical wisdom.

So far, three points have been explained in connection with the school of intellect:

- 1) Intellect is the basis, its perceptions are reliable, and it can secure true knowledge.
- 2) Intellect is not the whole of human essence, and Islam does not confirm it as such.
- 3) What is called Islamic faith is the perception of intellect or understanding.

But what is important is that faith is preliminary to action, and has no genuineness of its own, and this, in turn, brings two schools of thought face to face. What is meant by the genuineness of faith? Is it because faith is the basis of human deed, and one should constantly strive according to a plan, and for a goal, using faith as its foundation? For, activity is inherent in man's nature, and this requires a basis of thought, and belief, a matter which can be compared to building a one-room house as a goal, and all other acts, or, things, or, parts such as the base and walls etc. are inevitable to that goal.

In today's social schools, such as communism, a set of views, and beliefs exist which is based on materialism (hence limited in scope). There also exists a series of social, political, economic, and moral principles, which are considered as the foundation, but not the goal. Materialism cannot be considered as a goal for a communist. This inclination was due to a silly conflict of the church with such social and

political thoughts, and especially with freedom, so that this view became prevalent in Europe that man must be free, and have a right in society, and forget God, or, believe in God, and forsake the right, and liberty. Thus, in order to find a solution, they rejected religion as a foundation. A communist thinks wrongly that without materialism, no social, political, and economic principles can be explained.

Recently a number of communists who say that materialism is not a necessity, and communism could be had without materialism have appeared in the world. For them faith in those mental principles has no genuineness of its own, and these are used only as a basis of world vision on which they can build up their school.

In Islam there is faith in God, angels, prophets, Imams, and Resurrection, but do these faiths figure only as the basis of thought and belief without being genuine in itself? No, this is not true. In Islam while faith is the foundation of thought, and belief, and Islamic ideology is built on them, this foundation has a genuineness of its own, and here philosophers are right in thinking that faith has its own authenticity. If its value is for action, then action without faith is nothing at all. Faith is one pillar of happiness, and action is another. In Islam the perfection of man in this world, and especially the hereafter, depends on his faith, for, in Islam the spirit is actually independent.

The spirit has its own perfection, and is eternal, if it does not attain perfection, it is deficient and cannot secure happiness. The Holy Qur'an says:

"And whoever is blind in this world, he shall (also) be blind in the hereafter; and more erring from this way." (Sura al-Isra', 17:72).

Here, blindness does not mean physical blindness, but figuratively, the spiritual blindness, which prevents man from discerning truth, and having faith in it. If someone performs even all the good deeds possible in this world, enjoys the good and forbids the evil, and lives like an ascetic, and devotes his life to the service of mankind, but at the same time he does not understand God, and Resurrection, and this world of temporary existence, he is undoubtedly blind here, and will also be blind in hereafter. The Holy Qur'an says:

"He shall say: My Lord! Why hast Thou raised me blind, and I was a seeing one indeed? He will say: Even so: Our communications came to you, but you neglected them; even thus shall you be forsaken this day" (Sura Ta Ha, 20: 125-126).

Nahjul-Balagha asserts the genuineness of faith, and says about men of God that when they call on God, and beg forgiveness, they feel within themselves the breeze of salvation, and there are people in every era who have communion with God, Fakhr Razi says in a quatrain; "I fear that I may pass away without having truly understood the world, and without going out of my physical being into my spiritual existence."

In Islam, knowing God, and knowing angels as the media of the world of existence, and knowing

prophets and saints who are, in another respect, the media of God's blessing to us, and the knowledge of the reason for our coming to this world, where we are going to, and of our ultimate return to God like every other created thing, all these understandings are genuine, and, at the same time, they are the basis of Islamic ideology.

Therefore, neither faith should be sacrificed for our actions, nor, the actions for the faith. Consequently, it can be said that the perfect man of philosophers, on the whole, is not perfect, for, he possesses a partial perfection by seeking that perfection only in his intellect. Such a man is full of knowledge attained through limited capacity of human sense(s), but without yearning, zeal and motion.

In Gnosticism, knowledge, and intellect have been much scorned. Islam while accepting the concept of love does not scorn intellect, reasoning, and logic. That is why in later periods of Islam, there appeared a group that respected both love, and intellect. Sheikh Shahabeddin Sohrverdi, from the Sect of *Illuminati*, is one of them, and to a greater extent Mulla Sadra Shirazi who thinks this way of love, and intellect must follow the Holy Qur'an, and has no desire to scorn the concept of love like Avicenna, or, Sufis who look down upon intellect.

Another issue found in Gnosticism, but, is unacceptable to Islam, is that its introvert nature dominates its extrovert side, and its individualistic aspect almost obliterates/overshadows the social side. In Gnosticism, a perfect man is engaged with his own self, and that is "the self" is everything. But in Islam, in addition to love, righteousness, self-purification, and spirituality, a perfect man is also an extrovert, and sociable.

The companions of Imam Mahdi (as) are said to be devout worshipers at night, and like lions during the day, The Holy Qur'an speaks of both aspects:

"They who turn (to Allah), who serve (Him), who praise (Him), who fast, who bow down, who prostrate themselves, who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and who keep the limits of Allah; and give good news to the believers." (Sura at-Tawbah, 9: 112).

In this Verse, the points mentioned up to the subject of prostration are internal acts of devotion, and the remainder of the Verse is related to social duties.

The Holy Qur'an refers to similar matters:

"Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Old Testament and their description in the New Testament; like as seed produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them; Allah has promised those among them who believe and do good, forgiveness

and a great reward.” (Sura al-Fath, 48:29)

In this Verse, the first part speaks of the social side of the Prophet, and his companions, while the next part refers to acts of worship, and devotion. But in this devotion, they are trying to win God's satisfaction which is the highest priority for them.

This devotion to win God's satisfaction is extravagantly seen in “the perfect man” of the *Sufis*. Some Gnostic leaders who have been deeply influenced by Islamic teachings, and have often pointed it out observe this weak point. And yet there has been an excess of introversion, so that extroversion has been effaced.

There is another aspect and that is mortifying the self, by which is meant purification, and avoiding selfishness, and narcissism, but the Gnostics, in emphasizing these things, have forgotten the positive aspect of purification which is magnanimity, and qualities that are beyond materialism, and biology, that is, non-material human values.

Without a survey, and analysis of various schools of thought, we cannot fathom the depth of Islamic views in this connection. We mentioned before that the Gnostics have scorned the intellect, and have exalted love to a position much higher than intellect, but it is an exorbitant approach to consider reflection, reasoning and logic as insignificant.

It is said that Avicenna who lived in late fourth century, and the beginning of the fifth century of *Hijrah*, and was a great Philosopher of the intellectual school, was a contemporary of a very distinguished Gnostic called Abu-Sa'id Abol-kheyr. Avicenna lived in the Transoxania region of Balkh and Bokhara, but after refusing Sultan Mahmood's invitation to join his court, he fled in fear to Neishapur where he met Abu-Sai'd. It is narrated that these two retired into closed door meetings, together for three days to discuss their views, and came out of their one-on-one meeting only for the purpose of offering congregational prayer. After this visit, Avicenna was asked about his impression of Abu-Sa'id, and he said: "He sees what we know." And, when Abu-Sa'id was asked about Avicenna, he said: "This blind man follows with his stick the way we see and follow", an answer which shows contempt for intellect.

What we say is that if we place the view of the Holy Qur'an on one side, and the Gnostic view of intellect on the other, we would realize that they are incompatible. The Holy Qur'an attributes a great worth and respect for intellect, reflection, and even pure intellectual reasoning as compared to Gnosticism.

Imam 'Ali (as) is considered as the fulcrum of Gnosticism by all groups, and sects of *Shi'a* and *Sunni* (about seventy sects in number), and only one group follows Abu-Bakr. In *Nahjul Balagha* " 'Ali (as) has, according to Ibn-Abil-Hadid, expressed the gist of Gnosticism in just four lines whereas all Gnostics have discussed this in so many books. But, the same 'Ali elsewhere expresses as a philosopher whose reasoning no philosopher can rival. Thus, the perfect man of Islam differs from the perfect man of Gnosticism in its growth of intellect. Another view of Gnosticism is that what one wishes to offer others should be from within the self. For them to become perfect, one should purify oneself, pay attention to

God only, and to nothing else, retire within oneself, and sever one's relations with external things. Thus, they attribute no importance to debating, and logical reasoning, as Rumi, the poet, says. "The leg of a reason is wooden, and a wooden leg is very unruly." Elsewhere he says:

"If an intellectual discussion is pearl and coral

Something else the essence of life;

Talk of life is in a different rank

And the wine of life is of a different order"

What was the end of the road for the philosopher? It was to be a world of thought and reflection, a mirror in which to see the world.

What is the end of the road for the mystic? To reach God by self-purification, and love, and travel the course under the care of a more perfect being.

The Holy Qur'an says:

"O man! Surely you must strive (to attain) to your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him." (Sura al-Inshiqaq, 84: 6).

It means that after attaining Him, you will have total contentment,. It is puzzling is that after attaining that rank, one desires nothing but God's grace. Abu-Sa'id says in a quatrain:

"What can one do with life after knowing you?

What can he do with a wife, children and household?

You turn him crazy, and grant him both the worlds.

What does one need for both worlds, when one is mad only for you?"

The above points show what a perfect man is from the perspective of Gnostics: that when he attains God, he becomes His perfect manifestation, and a mirror of His essence. What does Islam think of self-purification? The Holy Qur'an says:

"He will indeed be successful who purifies it, and he will indeed fail who corrupts it..." (Sura ash-Shams, 91:9- 10).

Is self-purification in Islam the way of knowing God, or, is the recognition of God possible through reflection, and reasoning? Concerning self-purification, a sentence of the Prophet is quoted by both *Shi'*as and *Sunnis*, that is, if anyone can purify himself for God for forty days, i.e. if he regards God's satisfaction as the only worthy thing, and abandons all desires, he will become a man like Abraham, of

whom the Holy Qur'an says:

"Say: indeed my prayer, my devotion, my life, and death are all for God."(Sura al-An'am, 6: 162).

Thus, a knowledge that springs from within is acceptable to Islam. God says to Moses in the Holy Qur'an:[4](#)

"Then they found one from among our servants whom we had granted mercy from us, and whom we had taught knowledge from ourselves."(Sura al-Kahf, 18:65).

Moreover, the Prophet is quoted: "Is it not true that devils move round the hearts of Adam's sons, and create dust, and gloom whereas Adam's sons could see the angels with their heart's eye." And, again the Prophet says: "If it had not been for your talkativeness, and if it had not been for your heart which is like a pasture in which every animal grazes, you would be able to see what I see and hear what I hear."[5](#)

Thus, it is not necessary to be a prophet to see, and hear. Many could do so; like 'Ali (as). He was ten years old when he accompanied the Prophet (saw) to the temple, and the cave of Hirra, and when revelation came to Muhammad (saw) for the first time which carried him into a trance, 'Ali, too, could hear the sounds from the occult. He says: "I told the Prophet that when revelation came I could hear the groans of Satan." The Prophet said: "O 'Ali, you can hear what I hear, and see what I see, even though you are not a prophet."[6](#)

In this way, the only effect of self-purification is not only to purify the heart, but sincerely remove carnal desires, and its greater result is to produce knowledge, and wisdom from within. It is narrated that one day the companions of the holy Apostle said to him: "We fear to be hypocrites." They were true believers, yet, they felt this anxiety. The Prophet asked the reason. They said: "When we come before you, and you preach of God, resurrection and sin, we have a deep feeling of penitence that is so pleasant. But, when we leave you, and go back to our family, we find ourselves as we had been before. Is this not hypocrisy" The Prophet answered: "No, this is not hypocrisy which is the act of being double-faced. What you describe is about two conditions of the mind, when it is downcast." Then he continued: "If you remain in the same state as when you are with me, then the angels will shake hands with you, and if it becomes a habit with you, you can walk on water without being drowned."

Our Gnostic literature which is considered to be among the masterpieces of the world, owes everything to Islam, All the delicacy that you find in the works of Rumi, Hafiz, Sa'di and Naser Khosrawi is derived from Islam. Hafiz says explicitly that he owes everything to the Holy Qur'an. Sa'di says something similar in the story of Jacob and Joseph. When Joseph made himself known as a successor of his father, Jacob, in the line of prophet hood to his brothers in Egypt, he gave his shirt to his brothers to carry to his father who had gone blind with the sorrow of separation from his dearest son. According to the Holy Qur'an, Jacob on taking the shirt said:

"Most surely I perceive the greatness of Yusuf, unless you pronounce me to be weak in

judgment, " (Sura Yusuf, 12:94).

Sa'di in his poem says; "Someone asked that man who had lost his son, O wise old man of sound judgment, You got the scent of his shirt from Egypt; How was it that you could not know of his fall into the well?" He answered: "Our condition is like lightning, One moment it appears, and then it is gone. If the humble man stays in his own place, He would be exalted in both worlds."

To confirm the above points, the following passage is quoted from 'Ali's utterance from Nahjul-Balagha⁷ speaking of a mystic wayfarer: "He has revived his intellect, and killed his passion, so that divine asceticism has made him delicate, and the coarseness of the spirit is changed into tenderness. In this condition, a spark strikes out of his interior, and illuminates his way, and he follows it until he reaches his destination which is his safety, and permanent dwelling, and his ultimate goal." Thus, a perfect man should have purified his "self" first.

Islam says that a wayfarer of humanity holds an exalted position in having covered various stages of journey, and reaching a place where there no longer stands a veil between him, and God. He sees Him with the heart's eye, and he no longer requires any outward manifestations such as the sky, the earth, the nature, and the leaves of trees etc., in order to discover God. Someone asked Imam 'Ali (as) if he had seen God. He answered; "I never worship a God that I have not seen. But, this act of seeing is not with the eye (physical), or, in a certain direction, but, with the heart, and in all directions."

However, there are some matters in the school of Gnosticism, which are scorned, for being in agreement with Islam's views, and for this reason the perfect man of Gnosticism is half-perfect. The views of the Gnostics in this connection are more important for us than those of philosophers, such as Aristotle, and Avicenna, since the views of the latter are mostly confined to their books, and have not become prevalent among people. Whereas those of mystics, both in prose, and poetry, and in the form of parables, have influenced public thought greatly.

Such school of Gnosticism offers a number of ideas acceptable to Islam, while in other respects it is open to criticism, and its perfect man of Islam. The Gnostics, unlike philosophers, do not consider intellect as a criterion of man, but only as a means, that the real ego is related to the heart, not for the physical body, but the centre of sentiments, and to whatever is desired by intellect. A mystic attributes much importance to love, and emotion which are the strongest in the man; his love is not a sexual one, but a love that rises high until it attains God who is his beloved. He also believes that this love is not confined to man, but exists in all creatures, and in all products (creation). Rumi compares this love to an ocean over which all nature, and all skies, and the heavens are like foam. Hafiz says in a poem: "We have not come to this door for rank, and glory,

We have taken refuge here from misfortune.

We are wayfarers of love from non-existence,

And, we have come so far to the realm of existence".

The last two lines are almost a translation of a sentence uttered by Imam Sajjad, the fourth Imam, in praise of God who created the world, and roused it to love God. Thus, for a Gnostic the ego is what shows love, not what shows contemplation.

For a philosopher, a man can reach perfection by means of logic, deduction, reasoning, and reflection, whereas for the Gnostic, the speech, and the knowledge are of no avail, but a pure heart is required, a heart which is purified from all vices, to turn to God, and drive out the devil from the heart to make room for the angel which is the light of God. Hafiz says in this connection:

"I intend if it is at all possible, to do something to end my sorrow.

The privacy of the heart is not for strangers; once the devil goes out the angel comes in.

Talk of precepts is for the darkness of the longest night,

Seek the light from the sun, and beg it to come out, why sit at the door of the ungenerous masters of the world? How long do you wait for the master to come out? Do not abandon mendicancy if you wish to find treasure, by following the wayfarer who comes forth."

Gnosticism is a school of introversion in which the heart is greater than the world, even if one side is placed the whole universe, on the other, the heart which is, according to the Holy Qur'an, the divine spirit breathed into man⁸. They call the world the 'small man', and the heart "the great man", or, the small, and the big world, Rumi says;

"If you are Adam's offspring, stay like him, and see all particles within yourself,

What is in the vat that is not in the stream?

What is in the house that is not in the town?

This world is the vat and the heart is the stream'

This world is a room and the heart a wonderful city."

Gnosticism negates extroversion and believes that the attainment of God must be from within. Hafiz says in another poem:

"For long the heart desired *Jamshid's Cup*,

And begged from strangers what it had itself,

It sought from the lost ones at the seashore,

A pearl which was out of the shell of existence.

A lovesick man had God with him at all times.

Yet he saw Him not, and cried out: 'O, God,

Last night I took my problem to the Magi priest,

Who could solve it by his confirmation?

I asked: "When was this Cosmorama Cup given you?"

He said: "That day when He built the azure dome,

And that fellow who has risen up the gallows

was guilty of revealing secrets."

Rumi describes in a parable, a man who kept on begging God for some of the treasures which were hidden by so many people under the earth. One night he dreamt that someone came to him as God's messenger to show him the place of treasure. He pointed out a certain hill from the top of which the man should shoot an arrow, and the treasure would be where the arrow fell. Next day, he found the hill, but he did not know what direction he should shoot at. He decided to shoot at some direction, but failed to find the treasure. Every day he tried a different direction, but his labour of digging the earth with a pickaxe, and spade produced nothing.

Another night the same fellow appeared in his dream, and the man complained to him for having given him wrong indications. The man was asked if he had found the hill, and he answered that he had, and spoke of having pulled the bowstring hard to let the arrow fly, the fellow said; "I never told you to draw the bowstring; I only said; "Let the arrow drop by itself."

Next day, the man went there and put the arrow on the bow, and let it fall, and it fell at his feet. He dug the earth at once and found the treasure.

Rumi concludes the story by saying:

"God is nearer to you than the jugular vein,

And, yet you shot your arrow afar.

You got your bow and arrow, and made yourself ready.

Your shot went afar, whereas the treasure was near."

One of the recent learned priests said that he had heard the above story from a preacher who had mastered the "Mathnavi", but the priest did not know what it signified, and asked the priest its meaning. He answered it in one sentence, and said: "It is within yourself." Thus, the outside world as compared to

the heart is scorned in Gnosticism, whereas the words attributed to Imam 'Ali show that the world is the major thing, and man is a minor one.

If we compare the Gnostic view with the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an, we find some positive aspects in it as well as deficiencies. The Holy Qur'an does not ignore nature and says:

"We will soon show them our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth."(Sura Fussilat, 41:53).

Of course, we agree that the noblest enlightenment for man is within himself, but we cannot disregard the outside nature as a manifestation of God.

There is a very fine point that the Gnostic view has had a deeper influence on the public than philosophical ideas on account of their poetic delicacy, and warmth and beauty. The influence of Rumi's, Hafiz's and Sa'di's thoughts is found in every home. That is the reason why we have devoted more space to this discussion than to the school of philosophy.

- [1.](#) Sura al-Fath, 48:29.
- [2.](#) Sa'di's "Golestan", Chapter 3, Story I.
- [3.](#) Sura Sad, 38:74.
- [4.](#) This is said to be Khaja Khidhr who by a miracle is still alive.
- [5.](#) Me'raj-Sa'ada p. 11.
- [6.](#) Utterance 220. p.337.
- [7.](#) Nahjul-Balagha. Semon 190.
- [8.](#) Sura al-Hijir, 15:29.

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