

Respecting Rights and Despising the World

From the content of Islam's regulations about the justice and loyalty of individuals towards one another, about the justice and duties of leaders and officials, about judging and the other duties of magistrates and arbitrators and the problems related to their tasks, and about witnesses, it becomes clear to what extent in this religion the rights of the individual are to be respected and to what extent their observance is considered obligatory.

And this prompts questions and misgivings as to how these rights can be so respected in Islam while the whole Islamic theory is clearly based on contempt of the world and its delights. The rights of people toward one another are related to the circumstances of life in the world; related, for example, to one person not seizing and consuming the property of someone else. When it is a person's view that a certain object is worthless, all the other things which are related and dependent on that object will also seem worthless. Therefore, since in the view of Islam the world itself and the worldly life are worthless, how can Islam consider the rights related to the world and to worldly life to be valuable and worthy of respect?

Intrinsic Values and Relative Values

In reply to this question, it must firstly be said that the actual meaning of the world having no value in the view of Islam must become clear. Ambiguity in this subject leads to many doubts and misgivings. If the worth or worthlessness of objects is considered in light of the objects themselves, they will all be valuable. In other words, everything is valuable for itself because everything is a part of creation and creation for itself is the essence of value. Existence, say the philosophers, equals merit.

However, when we consider a thing in the light of its relation with another thing, in the light of the effect it has on that other thing, we see that it is possible for an object, in relation to that other object, to be quite without value. That is, it is possible for it to have no effect on that other thing, neither in benefit nor in loss. On the other hand, it is equally possible for it to have a value in that it has an effect. If it has a positive effect, then we say that it has a positive value, and if it has a negative effect, then we say that it

has a negative value.

Looking at the positive value, which is a relative value – the value of a thing for another thing – we see that it can be one of two types: it can be considered alone; meaning that we say, for example, that money has value for a human being. Or we can consider its relative value compared to the relative value of a third thing. How much value, for example, does money have for a human being compared to health, knowledge and ethics?

The value of a grain of sand or of a fly or a mosquito in the human view is absolutely nothing; its existence having no effect on the human at all. It follows, of course, that just as the thing itself is worthless, so the rights which pertain to it are also worthless in the human point of view. Money, on the other hand, has value for a human being because it can be useful for his condition and can finance his ideas and plans. When, however, it is compared to health, knowledge, or honor, it loses its value and becomes worthless; not simply of little value, but of no value. It is not such that if the sum of money is large enough it is worthy of comparison to honor. No.

A person who likes money, and who at the same time has a high and noble character, will strive to earn money only for as long as his honor and self-respect remain intact, and the moment that money causes injury to his honor and self-respect he will overlook it, whether it is a little or a lot. Even if all the wealth of the world was offered to such a person, still he would not be ready to pay for it the price of his honor and self-respect. In the view of such a person money has a value, but not one which is equal to those of self-respect, honor, and ethics. When compared to such values, the value of money simply fades away. There is no question of a small amount being incomparable but a large amount being comparable. On the contrary, even a lot of money is incomparable to a little honor and respect.

Ali (a.s.) expresses his mentality like this: "*By God! If I were (to be) given the seven regions with what is under their skies to rebel against God by robbing an ant of a husk of barley, I would not do it!*"

This means that the whole of existence in the view of Ali (a.s.) is not worth an act of injustice to an ant.

By this sentence, Ali (a.s.) does not belittle the value of the world and of what pertains to it. On the contrary, he raises the value of justice. He does not intend to tell us that because the world and all that is under the skies is so worthless he, in exchange for a small action, the committing of injustice to an ant, does not want it. Not at all. What he is telling us is that injustice is such a serious affair that all that pertains to existence is nothing compared to the minutest form of injustice; the injustice of robbing a husk of barley from an ant.

Thus we see that the world having no value in the view of religion is true according to the meaning of comparative value. In other words, the world does not have such a value that one gives up all ethical and social principles – lying, breaking one's word, committing injustice, trampling the rights of others, and so on, all for the sake of worldly, material gains. It doesn't have such a value that we unjustly cause distress to others for its material delights and comforts, or even that we trample on the rights of an ant.

Human Logic

Human logic is an extremely good way of thinking and looking at things; sublime. It is a mistake to think that the view of religion is that the world has such little value that not even a lie should be told for its sake; that not even a single act of deceit or injustice be committed for its sake. The truth is that religion gives so much importance to rights and principles, to belief, faith and ethics that it considers that for the sake of these things the world and what it contains must be overlooked.

And this is the reality. If we perceive the nature of the human being and of humanity and of spiritual values we cannot come to any other conclusion. Throughout the whole world, even materialists are forced to give importance to rights and principles and to consider material comforts and pleasures as lesser things than beliefs, principles and rights. The fact remains, however, that this matter has been perfectly expressed only in the language particular to expressing the worthlessness and unimportance of the world; the language of religion. Only on the basis of religion can this logic be given to mankind, can mankind be made to believe that beliefs, principles, and rights are a level above material comforts and pleasures. When the basis of religion becomes lost to mankind, the basis for the acceptance of humanity being superior to worldly benefits is also lost¹.

On the other hand, whenever we consider the world itself – overlooking the fact that for its sake sins are committed, principles are opposed, rights are trampled on – we see that the world has a positive value for us. In the terminology of the Holy Prophet, "*The, world is a form for the hereafter.*"

Or, in the words of Ali (a.s.), "*It is a place of prostration for the lovers of God, a place of prayer for the angels of God, a place of descension for the inspiration (wohy) of God, and a 'market place' for the guardians² of God.*"

The religion of Islam with this, its sublime system of logic, does not lessen the value of the world from what it is and what it is understood to be. What it does is raise and publicise the values of spirituality, of the caution of acting virtuously for God (*taqwa*), and of social rights, all of which are understood by fewer people.

Therefore, the worthlessness of the world is a comparative worthlessness. And its comparative worthlessness is in no way incompatible with maintaining the rights which pertain to it.

So, the firm Islamic regulations about rights which were mentioned at the beginning of this discussion are an indication of the fact that the worthlessness of the world in Islam is a comparative worthlessness.

Justice and the Fate of Society

Secondly, in reply to such questions I would ask whether Islam wants the Islamic society to remain in existence or not. Of course, it is obvious that it does. I would then ask whether it is possible for a society

to survive without revolving on the axis of justice and securing the rights of its members.

Has not our sublime Prophet told us, "*Property survives with disbelief but does not survive with injustice*"? That is, when a society is fair and just it can remain intact even if its members are disbelievers, whereas when injustice overtakes a society as a result of class distinctions it will not remain intact, even if its members – as far as their beliefs are concerned – are Muslims.

The Quran is full of verses which inform us that the reason for the destruction of this people or that people³ was their own injustice. Yet in one place we are told,

***"Your Lord is not such that He destroys a township for an injustice while its people are righteous."* (11: 117)**

Most of the commentators are agreed that what is meant by "*an injustice*" is the injustice of polytheism (shirk), for polytheism is one of the types of injustice:

***"Polytheism is definitely a great injustice."* (31: 13)**

And thus it becomes clear that what we are told is that God the Sublime and Almighty does not destroy civilisations for their disbelief and polytheism if, as far as their social rights and relations are concerned, they are just and righteous. So, this is the second reason why Islam contains its regulations about temporal rights and justice.

The Role of Justice and Social Rights in Spirituality

Thirdly, let us suppose that the worthlessness of the world is not relative and comparative. Let us suppose that the world in the view of religion is an unqualified evil. If we have such misgivings, however, still there is one thing we cannot doubt about: the reason and goal for which God's Prophets were sent to us. They came to teach a chain of pure beliefs with which to purify the souls of mankind. "**I was sent to complete the perfection of ethics**", declared the Holy Prophet. The Prophets came to encourage people to do good and to stop them from doing bad. In the view of Islam, one group of things are good and another group of things are bad, and the Prophets came to call humanity to the good and to eliminate the bad.

It is clear to all that the instructions of Islam are in three parts: beliefs (*aqa'id*); ethics (*akhlaq*); and commands (*ahkaam*) regarding actions. Beliefs include belief in God and His Oneness, in the Prophets and in the rewards and punishments of the hereafter. The ethical instructions tell us, for example, to be humble, to have cautiousness of God (*taqwaa*), satisfaction with God, gratitude, patience, forgiveness and kindness, to be loving, in agreement and united with others, to have pure spirits free of malicious jealousy (*hisadat*), spite, fear and miserliness, not to be unjust and malicious, and so on. The commands of actions are also known.

Some regulations are grouped under the heading of worship ('ibadat), which centre on the various types of formalized prayer, on fasting, *Hajj*, *jihad*, and commanding to what is recognized as good and prohibiting from what is rejected as bad (*amr be m'aruf wa nahyan al-munkar*) and others. There are more which deal with inter-social relations such as the prohibitions of lying, backbiting, abusing, murder, alcohol, gambling, usury, hypocrisy and so on.

So, if we have doubts and misgivings about anything else, these aspects of the teachings of religion are perfectly clear. It is irrefutable that the point of Islam is that what it considers good is to take place and what it considers bad is not to take place.

Having established this, let us now ask ourselves a question. When the rights of the people are observed and the society is just, with no discrimination, no deprivation and no feelings amongst the people of being cheated, will pure beliefs, ethics, hearts, and actions become more prevalent in that society, and the grounds for crime, corrupt ethics and perverted beliefs decrease? Or is it opposite – the unjust society the better place for the purification of the soul and the refinement of the self – the more extremism, injustice, deprivation, disagreement and conflict, the better? Which of these two views is the correct one? Or is there another possibility, the possibility that the conditions of society, whatever they may be, are not at all connected to the ethics of the individual and that the reckoning of ethical matters is totally separate?

No sane person would state that the more society becomes confused regarding justice and rights, so the ground for purity of belief and refinement of the self and for righteous actions becomes more fertile. The most that can be said is that the existence or non-existence of social justice, the observance or non-observance of people's rights, makes no difference to the ethics of the individual. The opinion of many religious people of today is that these are two separate spheres which are in no way inter-related.

However, anyone who thinks this way must be told: Bravo for your obscure perception! Bravo for your absurd way of thinking! General conditions and the existence or nonexistence of social justice definitely have an effect on human behaviour, on human ethics, even on human thought and belief. These things affect all three levels; the level of thought and belief; the level of ethics and morality; and the level of behaviour and ethics.

Social justice and Thought and Belief

Firstly, let us focus on the level of thought and belief. Whenever we turn to our literature and view the works and ideas of the great Muslim writers and poets, we notice that while many of them had become aware of great realities, had discovered sublime manifestations of Divine Wisdom (*hikmah*) and had very subtle thoughts and ideas, still at times a pollution is to be found in their thinking that leaves us amazed. We see, for example, that they have given importance to the subject of luck. The thing which of all things they have unduly sensationalised the most is luck, saying that "man himself may sleep, provided his luck is awake!" In their view, once luck appears, all other things become worthless. Knowledge, reason,

struggle, skill, ability, craftsmanship, the strength of the arm – when compared to luck, all these are nothing coming to nothing!

Thousands of verses and lines have been written by great famous men about luck. Yet if they were to be asked the exact nature of luck, whether they could possibly define it, or whether, since they had so often mentioned it and must therefore know it well, they could produce some evidence to prove its existence or define it. Not one of them could answer.

These great men have simply noticed a strange ambiguity, and from here their belief in luck was formed. What did they notice? They lived in a society and saw, on the one hand, individuals spending lifetimes in struggle and effort yet living all the while in deprivation. On the other hand, they saw that, for no apparent reason, idlers were being esteemed and were enjoying the comforts of luxury and success. What they saw were the ignoble being honoured and the reasonable being treated with contempt. What they saw was the absence of any balance between struggle, skill and expertise on the one hand and gratification, profit, and one's individual rights on the other.

Because this was what they saw in their society, gradually their observations of society took the form of a kind of philosophy that can be called the "philosophy of luck". The name that they gave to all the instances of the chaos of injustice, whether they understood them or not, was the word luck; and sometimes they have extolled it like idiots. Luck, the idea and philosophy, has no source at all except in the chaos of injustice and unjust divisions within society.

Overlooking this source, there are no more than two other sources of inspiration for the idea of luck to have sprung from. One is religion, and poets have sometimes taken inspiration from verses of the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet and, occasionally, the traditions of the Immaculate Imams. However, throughout the whole of the Quran and the content of the Prophet's traditions and those of the Imams, a mention of luck is nowhere to be found. The other possible source of inspiration is reason, knowledge or philosophy. Yet from the earliest times whenever luck has been mentioned in such circles or books it has been discussed as being a mere superstition.

Where, then, has this extraordinary idea about luck and its amazing power arisen, for the power of luck to be perceived of as being far superior to reason, knowledge, work, effort, skill, industry, strength, and, in fact, everything else?

The basis of inspiration for this satanic thought is nothing other than the disorder of society, the system of the privileged few and deprived masses, the system of discrimination without merit. Whenever the justice of society becomes shaky, whenever merit and rights are not observed, whenever the considerations of personality and the recommendations of this party or that party are influential over and above the considerations of ability and merit, whenever this happens, ideas about luck and suchlike are bound to gain strength and popularity. And this is because luck means no one thing being a condition for any other.

What a difference there is between a person who maintains that there is a result to effort and struggle, who believes that,

"the human has nothing but what he strives for". (53:39),

and the person who says that all efforts are futile and that nothing in life is a condition for anything else? How much difference there is between the belief that

"Verily God does not change the conditions of a people until they change their own conditions"
(13: 11)⁴

and the belief in luck! This, then, is one example of how the quality of social justice has an effect on thought and belief.

Pessimism towards Providence

Again, if we look into Muslim literature, we find another example. We notice a line of thought that can be called "feelings of complaint about providence", by which is meant the currents of the creation that affect the individual's material life. What abuse providence has been subject to! It has been called a tyrant, a cruel oppressor, and each and every name that tells a story of oppression, persecution, treachery and deceit has been given to providence. And this reached the stage where providence has been maintained to have a special spite and hatred towards the good and pure.

However, the providence complained of was not the seven heavens, the time and space of creation. On the contrary, it was the social environment of the complainers themselves. Whatever they said was a reflection of their personal, inner, spiritual selves. In addition, the words of a poet reflect not only his own feelings and condition but also the feelings and condition of his era and society as a whole. When the poet looks around him and sees everywhere injustice and oppression, whether he fails to perceive the cause or whether he understands it but cannot say anything, it is quite likely that he will vent his feelings on what he sees as "the crooked wheels of providence".

As a result of these conditions, a kind of pessimism and suspicion towards the currents of creation is developed. The idea strengthens that providence is based on injustice towards the good of mankind, and that between providence and the good there exists a kind of ancient enmity and spite. In such conditions, people definitely become pessimistic. They express pessimism towards creation, and even towards the Creator.

So, one of the direct effects of the disruption of social justice is the disruption of orderly thought, accompanied by a belief in a system of chaos and in the futility of the true factors of prosperity and which appears in the form of a belief in luck, the effects of which we find even in Muslim literature. Another is a pessimism and suspicion, "having a chip on one's shoulder", towards the creation and its holy Creator. These are two effects of injustice on thought and belief.

Social Justice and Ethics

Let us now see how a prevailing social system of injustice causes ethical corruption and disturbance of the soul. Good and bad ethics, like every other thing in the world, have a cause. Neither good ethics manifest without a cause nor bad ethics. The individual's mould and nature is effective, the conditions and suggestions of the environment are effective, and one of the things that definitely has an effect in corrupting the individuals ethics and poisoning his soul is deprivation and a sense of being cheated. Malicious jealousy, spite, enmity and malevolence all begin from here.

Exceptions

Of course, there are exceptions; there are people upon whom deprivation and acts of injustice do not have these effects. Such people, however, are outstanding in that their souls are immune to such evils; the power of their faith is such that these effects are checked. Exceptional people are a level above the level of thought of general people. Let us cite an example:

Imagine a family consisting of a mother and father and their children. In their household food, fruits, sweets and clothes are all divided amongst the family. The thoughts, opinions, and feelings of the children on such occasions are not the same as the thoughts, opinions and feelings of the parents. They are not on one level, they are on two levels.

Firstly, the feelings that the children have towards one another: whenever one of the children sees that his share of the food, fruits, sweets, or clothes is less than that of another, he will become upset, will sulk, will cry, and, because he will have the sense of being deprived and of being subject to injustice, he will form the intention to take revenge. Thus, the parents who want their children to be happy and healthy in body and in soul, find it necessary to refrain from all kinds of discrimination right from the beginning.

Discrimination is the seed of conflict, the seed of malicious jealousy, and the seed of revenge. Discrimination becomes the cause both of pressure, torment and unhappiness in the deprived child's soul, and of the favourite child becoming selfish, reliant on others, weak-willed, quick to take offense, and, in a word, spoilt. Most parents, when their children become physically unwell, refer them to a doctor; while they pay little attention to the health and soundness of their children's souls. These they count as insignificant, while really the importance of spiritual health is no less than the health of the body; in fact, it is infinitely more.

My point is that, because children think on one level, the deprivation of one in relation to another has a bad effect on them. The parents, however, whose thought and reason is on a higher level, think in a different way and have a special type of kindness. They do not suffer these types of deprivation. Whether they receive less food, or less fruit or fewer sweets than their children, or none at all, they do not become unhappy, they do not become rankled.

It is exactly the same as this in society. Exceptional individuals, who are like the parents of the nation, are not affected by being deprived. In conditions of deprivation and injustice they are exactly like those parents who want the best for their children; wanting what is best for their nation.

The Holy Prophet, at the battle of Ohud, when his enemies had thrown a rock at his blessed forehead and had broken his tooth, raised his hands in supplication saying: "*O' God; Guide my people (and forgive them) for truly they are Ignorant.*"

Similarly, when speaking about the orchard Fadak, Ali (a.s.) said: "*A group were greedy for it and another group were liberal with it – what om I to do with Fodok or (property) other than Fodok – when tomorrow the sign of the self is a grove; its remains disintegrating in its darkness.*"

Effects of Discrimination on Ethics

These, then, are exceptional individuals; while the other individuals who make up the nations of mankind are like the children of the family. Those of them who are deprived are subject to pressure and torment in their souls and become spiteful and vengeful, while the souls of the pampered few from amongst them become spoilt, selfish, indifferent, impatient, idle, extravagant and wasteful. Malicious jealousy, spite, vengefulness, enmity and hatred are developed amongst one class, while amongst the other indifference to work, extravagance, and wastefulness. So we can easily see the general conditions that appear amongst the people as an effect of injustice.

There is a famous supplication (*du'a*) of the Prophet which begins with this line: "*O' God; grant us a fear of You that will intervene between us and disobedience of You.*"

Islamic supplications are amongst the best kinds of ethical and spiritual teachings. What great spiritual and social subtleties have been expressed in the language of the supplication! In this supplication we find the line: "*And direct our revenge towards those who were unjust to us.*" This phrase has a subtle point which needs explaining. The Holy Prophet did not ask God to take revenge from our oppressors, he asked God to direct our revenge towards the people who have actually oppressed us.

The word revenge (*thor*) or (*tha-ar*) has the meaning here of desire for revenge, the sense of vengeance. The Holy Prophet is saying that as an effect of being the object of injustice our souls are subject to pressure and torment, and desire revenge. Whenever our souls enter this condition – wherever, whenever, and however it occurs – its effects will also occur. It is like the spark of a fire that is going to burst into flame. The psychologists and psychiatrists of today have ascertained that feelings of spite and enmity, once they appear in a person's soul, can possibly be temporarily suppressed and relegated to the depths of the soul and be forgotten as far as the consciousness is concerned, but in reality they cannot be completely done away with; they remain active in the depths of the soul, unknown to the external consciousness, until they find a way to come to the surface and manifest themselves.

The Holy Prophet is asking God for that spark, which is in our hearts and which will one day burst into flames, not to burn others; if it is going to burn anyone let it burn those who treated us unjustly and who were the cause of the spark in the first place. If a system is unjust to a person and it is such that, with his reason and will, he consciously takes revenge, he doesn't revenge himself on another individual. If a crime is committed by the butcher, the punishment is not carried out on the baker. When, however, a person follows not his free reason but those feelings relegated to the depths of his soul, he does not take into account such considerations.

The Holy Prophet was asking God to make us such that our revenge and spite be just enough for us to smite our enemy; for a heart of thorns and a wild desire for revenge not to appear within us as a result of injustice and deprivation that in turn would torment and put pressure on our souls, making us proud, head-strong, malicious and unjust. He was asking God not to make us such that we take pleasure in being unjust and in trampling the rights of other people.

Just Ethics in a Just Society

Superb ethics consists of just and balanced ethics. It is both obvious and certain that if a society is not just and well-balanced, if social organisation and social regulations and social rights are not just and well balanced, the ethics of the individual will also remain unjust and unbalanced. The effects of an unjust society are not only to be found amongst the common people who are deprived but also amongst the privileged class who allocate most of God's blessings for themselves. The common people are subject to pressure and become nervous, while the others manifest idleness, dependence on others, thanklessness, indifference and extravagance.

About this special class, in his famous order to Malik ibne Ashtar, Ali (a.s.) writes that: For a governor, no one is more extravagant in times of ease, less help in times of difficulty, more hateful of equity and justice, more demanding, ungrateful and unforgiving, and less enduring in emergencies than this special class, and that the axis of religion and the real central-point of Muslims and the source of success over the enemy is the general population; and that Malik's attention should always be towards the common class, not towards the privileged few.

How well Ali (a.s.) has explained the mentality of the privileged class who are the unduly favoured of society!

There is a tradition from the Holy Prophet who said: '*Be equal, your hearts will be equal.*' Meaning that we are to be fair and just, and that there should be no differences or discrimination amongst us, in order for our hearts to become close and on the same level.

From this we realise that if there is an unjust rift in responsibilities and the blessings of God, there will also exist a gap between our hearts, and we will not be able to be compassionate with one another or think along the same lines or be united on one front.

The Holy Quran tells us:

"And hold fast to the rope of God together and do not become disunited, and bear in mind God's favour to you when you were {deadly, spiteful} enemies and He joined your hearts in affection, that by His blessing (of Islam) you became brothers." (3:102)

As is perfectly clear, the content of this verse is about the unity that Islam brings to mankind.

The Secret of Islam's Success

If Islam only had the one ethical aspect like some ethical school the aim of which is only to give ethical suggestions, advices and admonitions, and itself only deal with sermons and admonitions and had nothing to do with forming and organising society, it would have been impossible for it to build the new society, united both in thought and in heart, that was to change the course of history.

There is no doubt that which united the Muslims' hearts was the belief and religiousness of Islam. The Holy Prophet introduced the greatest cause of this unity which was unity of belief; he brought the people under the standard of *La ilaha illa Allah* (There is no god except God). But he did not content himself only with faith and belief. He was also attentive to the obstacles to unity. He removed those barriers, those difficulties – the numerous causes of the disunity of people's hearts, the causes of spite, malicious jealousy, and desire for vengeance, those discriminations in the matter of social and individual rights. And when the circumstances are appropriate and these barriers are no more, when there is faith and belief and no unfair discrimination; the effect of all this, which is unity and brotherly love and cooperation, itself comes into being automatically. And this it cannot do if the appropriate circumstances exist but the barriers also exist, or if the barriers do not exist but neither do the appropriate circumstances.

So it must not be thought that Islam united the people solely through introducing a single belief. No, in addition, it also removed the barriers of unfair discrimination and social rifts and differences. If it is said,

"Come to an expression equal between us and you: that we worship only one God and associate nothing (in belief or worship) with Him." (3:64),

meaning that we should come towards a belief which is the same to all of us in that it is good, in that it is the truth and beneficial one so it is followed by "and that some of us do not take some (others) as Lords other than God", and equality is also proposed.

The Holy Prophet on his farewell Hajj told us: "*O people! Truly your Lord is One and truly your father is one; all of you are from Adam. And Adam is from earth. Arabs are not superior to non-Arabs, (there is no superiority) except by (measure of) one's having care and virtue before God (taqwa).*" Superiority is only, only attained by *Taqwa*.

Then the Prophet added: "*Have I propagated?*"

"Yes", his listeners replied.

"Then the present must propagate to the absent." the Prophet told them.

The Effect of justice on General Behaviour

So now we can take it for granted that the existence or non-existence of justice also has an effect on behaviour, because, when one's thought, belief and ethics are affected, one's actions will definitely be affected as well. The Quran tells us,

"Say: everyone acts according to his personality." (17:84)

Each person acts according to his thought, his belief, the state of his or her soul, the root of all human actions lies in the human's soul.

Besides social injustice, unfair differences, discrimination and the sense of being cheated and deprived having the effects that they do, which we have mentioned, the condition of poverty and need, whatever it is caused by – whether by injustice or something other than injustice, is itself amongst the motivations of corruption. And if it is coupled with the feeling of being cheated and deprived, it becomes worse. And if it is coupled with a grudge caused by the luxury of certain groups, it becomes even worse. Then it will be said:

*The truth I do declare
I will never see the day
I sit outside and stare
while rivals feast and play.*

This feeling of "I will never see the day" becomes the cause of theft, of taking bribes, of embezzlement of public wealth, of sins, of fraud, of deceit and trickery in business, of people stealing, taking bribes, overcharging and underpaying, and all for the sake of climbing a social class and so on.

Ali (a.s.) spoke about poverty to his dear son Muhammad ibn Hanafiyah, saying: '*O dear son! I fear for you poverty, seek refuge with God from it. Truly it is a deficiency in religion, the frightener of reason, the cause of hatred.*'

Firstly, what does it mean "A deficiency in religion"?

Is poverty a sin? No, poverty is not a sin, but it quickly delivers those who do not have firm faith to sin. Many are the sins that arise from poverty and need. Thus the Holy Prophet has said: "*Poverty is near to being disbeliever.*" Poverty can make a sinner of the human soul and weaken human resolution.

Another effect of poverty is that it is "the frightener of human reason and common sense (aql)." Reason and thought lose their equilibrium as the effect of poverty, need, and the non-existence of the means of

life. In such circumstances the human can no longer think well or draw proper conclusions. In the same way that disasters produce anxiety, so does the condition of poverty and need.

Of course, there are again exceptions, who are not this way, events do not affect them, their tragedies and disasters do not affect them this way. But these exceptions are few.

The third effect of poverty is that, "it is the cause of hatred", i.e. the cause of spiritual distress and the rankling of the human being. Or perhaps what is meant is that the poverty-stricken will hate other people, considering them responsible for his own poverty.

Islam, then, with its regulations ensuring the firm establishment of social justice and the adherence to social and individual rights, is not a religion of self-contradiction and paradox. It simply realises that these regulations and their observance are absolutely necessary for the blossoming of mankind. A blossoming which it intends to be spiritual and ethical, partly as a result and partly as a condition, material.

1. It is interesting to reflect on this point in the light of the near religion-less societies of the West. There, despite "official" claims to advanced humanity and the observance of principles and rights, we see that the general tendency is to value material comforts and pleasures to the almost total seclusion of beliefs, principles, rights and all the other human values. (Translator's note)

2. God's "Guardians" are those people like Prophets and Imams who we are to be guided and led by and who guard the Divine teachings from misinterpretation, deviation and loss.

3. Such as the people of the Prophet Lout (a.s.)

4. In the view of Shi'ite Islam, this verse is considered very significant in that it announces a condition for the promised worldwide system of justice with the coming of Imam Mahdi (a.s.)

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