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The Role of knowledge in Development

We found that in the process of man's development, the heart is the main wayfarer that proceeds towards Allah (SWT) in the way of servitude. In the wake of the activities of the heart, other efforts would assume a form of servitude and would bear an impact on man's development.

The genuine process of development would commence when man recognizes the means and the end, and treads the path (towards this end) with will-power and choice. Thus its main condition is (to have) learning and knowledge. Now we must consider the role of knowledge in the process of development. Is it a perfection or not? And if it is a perfection, is it genuine, relative or preferential?

On the value and importance of knowledge, various extreme views have been expressed. Some, like the Mashsha philosophers, regarded knowledge and philosophy not only as a perfection but also as a principle and the ultimate point of all human perfection. As already pointed out, the perfect human being is one who has logical knowledge of all facts of existence. On the other hand, another group of persons are of the view that acquired knowledge has no relationship with human perfection. "Official learning is a hubbub altogether." They have not sufficed even with this. They have regarded learning as a block and barrier in development. They have even called it "al-Hifalbul-Akbar".

At this point, we do not intend to analyze and interpret these statements or to justify and find a way to bring them together. Rather, on the basis of the method of this discussion and issues we have so far proven, we intend to find the position of knowledge in the process of development.

After realizing that man's ultimate perfection is to reach *qurbah* with Almighty Allah and to establish an intuitive link with Him, there is no question that the final stage of man's process (of development) is of a speculative type. Such speculative knowledge is an innate desire and genuine perfection. It is even the ultimate point of all perfection. But the point is in acquired and mental knowledge. In this regard, the following must be pointed out:

According to the interpretation already mentioned for perfection, one can regard knowledge as man's perfection, because knowledge is an existential trait acquired by man. Through knowledge, man rejects

non-existence and imperfection. For this purpose, knowledge is naturally sought by man.

We have explained that each existential trait is not absolutely the perfection of that which is qualified with it. Rather existential traits are at times genuine perfections and at other times, preferential and relative perfections. Relative perfections will be deemed the true perfection of a being, in case they serve as means to reach genuine perfection.

If they are used contrary to the direction of the ultimate perfection, they will be a prelude to imperfection and ultimate downfall, even though they are perfections as compared to lower degrees.

Knowledge is either acquired, theoretical or practical. Although theoretical sciences have no direct relationship with the trend of development, some of them such as divine sciences, facilitate the recognition of the objective for man. In case they are employed to reach *qurbah* with Allah (SWT), they will serve as an invaluable preferential perfection.

Although other theoretical sciences are not a prelude to the recognition of the objective or a means to reach it, they can greatly contribute to the required recognitions. These are especially those sciences which unveil the mysteries and philosophies of existence and which can play an effective role in eliminating vital requirements which are a preferential value. Enjoyment of these blessings could be a motive to thank and worship Allah (SWT) and thus it can establish connection with man's true prosperity. However the relationship between practical sciences and man's process of development and its preliminaries needs no explanation. Obviously man's conscious development hinges on them.

We must emphasize that all acquired sciences pave the way and broaden the facilities for man's true progress. They never bear a certain and indispensable impact on man's prosperity. As a result, learning, in the form of mental reserves, could not be considered as a potential perfection for man, unless it becomes a means to reach *qurbah* with Allah (SWT), to promote theism, to show the means, to enjoy divine blessings so as to thank (Almighty Allah) or to prepare the ground for the development of oneself and others.

With respect to the issues set forth, our position vis a vis pragmatism becomes clear.

The advocates of pragmatism which is a manifestation of humanism, are of the view that science and art are valid if they provide a better standard of living. What is essentially valid according to the pragmatists is useful work for living.

In response to these, we mark that neither worldly life nor efforts made for individual and social welfare are possessed of genuine value, so that science and art would become valid in the light of them. The only thing which is essentially valid for man is the *qurbah* of the Almighty Allah and whatever facilitates this *qurbah* will be valuable to the same extent and to degree that it serves as a means. The perfect human being bears no label other than theism and accepts no ism other than *Ilahiism* and regards genuineness exclusive to Allah.

“ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ...”

"That is because Allah is the Truth, and that what they call upon besides Him, that is, the falsehood... (22:62)."

As a consequence, neither acquirement of knowledge and art nor individual and social work possesses absolute validity. All of them will gain validity only in case they are done to serve Allah (SWT) and are carried out in the light of (establishing) relationship with Him.

The following might be set forth: Even though pragmatism regards validity based on usefulness in earthly life and cannot be approved as such, a pragmatic inclination towards genuineness of work for life in the Hereafter is acceptable. Consequently, performing deeds useful for life in the Hereafter has relative validity but science and art are deprived of even this relative validity.

It must however, be borne in mind that man's prosperity is rooted in the heart and not in body organs and limbs and the means. The heart has the principal role in moving towards *qurbah* with Allah (SWT). Thus relative validity belongs to the activities of the heart and external deeds become valid in the light of them and not the vice versa. In the same way that science could become valid as a prelude to decent deeds, it could play a more important role as a prelude to belief which is prior to action and its basis.

The Relationship of Science, Belief and Action

If taken in the sense of mental acknowledgement, belief is the same as science and its permanence is not optional because reason takes in some science extemporaneously and man has no power to acquire or confirm them.

Although some sciences are normally acquired optionally with their preliminaries, they are not kept up by choice. That is to say, these preliminaries might involuntarily come to mind upon hearing a sound or seeing a line. Man might involuntarily perceive and confirm them. Indeed, when the preliminaries of knowledge are prepared by choice and will, there will necessarily be motives for acquiring them.

This motive might be the sense of curiosity. Or it might be the attainment of honour, material enjoyment or the satisfaction of Allah (SWT). Only in the latter case will it be deemed worship. The materialization of such worship should however, have the precedents of knowing and recognizing Allah (SWT).

Belief, as stressed in this discussion and as deemed the basis of prosperity in the Qur'an and the religious texts, refers to a truth diametrically opposed to *kufr* and giving up faith. It is different from knowing and recognizing. Many a time, man knows something but his heart does not accept and admit it. As a result, he deliberately opposes it and when necessary, denies it verbally as well. Such a negation which is knowingly done is worse than one carried out unknowingly and is more disadvantageous for man's development as stated by the Holy Qur'an:

“وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنْفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا...”

"And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them... (27: 14)."

Quoting Hadrat Musa (AS), it addresses Fir'awn as:

“...لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ بِصَائِرٍ...”

"... Truly you know that none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth has sent down these... (17: 102)."

In the meantime, Fir'awn said:

“...مَا عَلِمْتُ لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرِي...”

"...I do not know of any god for you besides myself... (28:38)."

In the period of the Messenger (SA) of Allah and afterwards, there were people like Fir'awn who denied the realities. There still exist such people as well. The psychological motive behind such a denial is that man sees the acceptance of some realities as a barrier in his freedom and slovenliness and as obtrusive in the strong desires which he cannot give up. The Holy Qur'an states:

“بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ”

"Nay! Man desires to give the lie to what is before him (75:5)."

More explanation will be later given in this regard.

The conclusion is (as follows): Belief means the heart's acceptance of that which reason and the mind have confirmed, the (heart's) undertaking of all its means, and the (heart's) summary decision to carry out its practical requirements. Thus belief hinges and depends on recognition. But it is not the same as knowledge and it is not its permanent requirement.

Hence the relationship between belief and action is made clear, because belief requires action but is not the same as outward action. It is rather its root and provides direction for belief. The worth, merit and active advantage of the action depends on belief. If an act does not spring from belief in Allah (SWT), it will have no effect in man's true prosperity, even if it is a good act and brings about great worldly rewards for the agent and for others:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمَانُ مَاءً حَتَّى إِذَا جَاءَهُ لَمْ يَجِدْهُ شَيْئًا وَوَجَدَ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ فَوَفَّاهُ... حِسَابُهُ

"And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like the mirage in a desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water; until when he comes to it he finds it to be naught, and there he finds Allah, so He pays back to him his reckoning in full... (24:39)."

...مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ أَكْأَعْمَالُهُمْ كَرَمَادٍ اشْتَدَّتْ بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي يَوْمٍ عَاصِفٍ ۚ لَا يَقْدِرُونَ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا عَلَى شَيْءٍ

"The parable of those who disbelieve in their Lord; their actions are like ashes on which the wind blows hard on a stormy day; they shall not have power over anything out of what they have earned... (14:18)."

وَقَدِمْنَا إِلَىٰ مَا عَمِلُوا مِنْ عَمَلٍ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ هَبَاءً مَنْثُورًا

"And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust (25:23)."

Thus belief is man's first step in his trend of development towards the ultimate perfection, i.e., the *qurbah* of Almighty Allah. This step is the root of step taken later and the essence of all stages of perfectibility.

The second step in man's process of development is an activity performed by the heart after establishing belief in Allah (SWT) and without the interference of body organs and limbs. This means remembrance of Allah (SWT) known as *dhikr*.

...وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

"... And remember Allah much, that you may be successful (62:10)."

The stronger and more concentrated this remembrance is, the more effective it will be in man's progress. It may be that a moment's complete remembrance is more effective than years of physical worship.

The third step constitutes other spiritual acts performed by man while remembering Allah (SWT). These include thinking and reflection on divine verses and on the signs of His power, grandeur and wisdom. Permanence of *dhikr* and reflection will bring about cordial attachment and affection:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ...

"Those who extol Allah, standing, sitting and (lying) on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth ... (3: 191)."

Then it is the turn of various body activities. In other words, the summary decision which is a requisite of belief becomes evident in various manifestations and in the form of major and minor will-powers. 'These will-powers which are, in one respect, secondary to the main will-power strengthen *dhikr* and belief.

“...وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي”

"...Keep up prayer for My remembrance (20: 14)."

“وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ”

"... And the good deeds lift them up... (35: 10)."

Likewise if will-power is contrary to the demands of belief, it will gradually weaken belief. Thus the relationship between belief and action is exactly the same as that between the root of a plant and the vegetable functions. That is to say, intake of nutritious food would lead to the growth and solidification of the root and intake of poisonous and disadvantageous material would weaken and finally dry the tree from the root. In like manner, decent deeds are effective in the permanence and solidification of belief. Doing indecent deeds and committing sins would weaken and finally dry belief from the root:

“فَأَعْقَبَهُمْ نِفَاقًا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ يَلْقَوْنَهُ بِمَا أَخْلَفُوا اللَّهَ مَا وَعَدُوهُ وَبِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ”

"So He made hypocrisy to follow as a consequence into their hearts till the day when they shall meet Him because they failed to perform towards Allah what they had promised with Him and because they told lies (9:77)."

“ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا السُّوْءَ أَنْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ”

"Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the communications of Allah and used to mock them (30: 10)."

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