

The Spiritual Message of Shi'ism

The message of Shi'ism to the world can be summarized in one sentence: "To know God." Or in other words, it is to instruct man to follow the path of Divine realization and the knowledge of God in order to gain felicity and salvation. And this message is contained in the very phrase with which the Holy Prophet commenced his prophetic mission when he said: "Oh men! Know God in His Oneness (and acknowledge Him) so that you will gain salvation."

As a summary explanation of this message we will add that man is attached by nature to many goals in this worldly life and to material pleasures. He loves tasty food and drink, fashionable dress, attractive palaces and surroundings, a beautiful and pleasing wife, sincere friends and great wealth. And in another direction, he is attracted to political power, position, reputation, the extension of his rule and dominion and the destruction of anything that is opposed to his wishes. But in his inner and primordial God-given nature, man understands that all these are means created for man, but man is not created for all these things. These things should be subservient to man and follow him and not vice versa. To consider the stomach and the region below it as a final end of life is the logic of cattle and sheep. To tear-up, cut and destroy others is the logic of the tiger, the wolf and the fox. The logic inherent in human existence is the attainment of wisdom and nothing else.

This logic based upon wisdom with the power which it possesses to discern between reality and the unreal. It guides us toward the truth and not toward things our emotions demand or toward passions, selfishness and egoism. This logic considers man as a part of the totality of creation without any separate independence or the possibility of a rebellious self-centeredness. In contrast to the current belief that man is the master of creation and tames rebellious nature and conquers it to force it to obey his wishes and desires, we find that in reality man himself is an instrument in the hand of Universal Nature and is ruled and commanded by it.

This logic based upon wisdom invites man to concentrate more closely upon the apprehension he has of the existence of this world until it becomes clear to him that the world of existence and all that is in it does not issue from itself but rather from an Infinite Source. He will then know that all this beauty and ugliness, all these creatures of the earth and the heavens, which appear outwardly as independent

realities, gain reality only through another Reality and are manifested only in Its Light, and not by themselves and through themselves. In the same way that the "realities" as well as the power and grandeur of yesterday have no greater value than tales and legends of today, so are the "realities" of today no more than vaguely remembered dreams in relation to what will appear as "reality" tomorrow.

In the last analysis, everything in itself is no more than a tale and a dream. Only God is Reality in the absolute sense, the One Who does not perish. Under the protection of His Being, everything gains existence and becomes manifested through the Light of His Essence.

If man becomes endowed with such vision and power of apprehension, then the tent of his separative existence will fall down before his eyes like a bubble on the surface of water. He will see with his eyes that the world and all that is in it depend upon an Infinite Being who possesses life, power, knowledge and every perfection to an infinite degree. Man and every other being in the world are like so many windows that display according to their capacity the world of eternity which transcends them and lies beyond them.

It is at this moment that man takes from himself and all creatures the quality of independence and primacy and returns these qualities to their Owner. He detaches himself from all things to attach himself solely to the One God. Before His Majesty and Grandeur he does nothing but bow in humility. Only then does he become guided and directed by God so that whatever he knows he knows in God. Through Divine guidance he becomes adorned with moral and spiritual virtue and pure actions that are the same as Islam itself, the submission to God, the religion that is in the primordial nature of things.

This is the highest degree of human perfection and the rank of the perfect man (the Universal Man; *al-Insan al-kamel*), namely the impeccable Imam who has reached this rank through Divine grace. Furthermore, those who have reached this rank through the practice of spiritual methods, with the different ranks and stations that they possess, are the true followers of the Imam. It becomes thus clear that the knowledge of God and of the Imam are inseparable in the same way that the knowledge of God is inextricably connected to the knowledge of oneself.

For he who knows his own symbolic existence has already come to know the true existence that belongs solely to God who is independent and without need of anything whatsoever.

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