

Themes 4: Our Youth and Effective Work

The Negative Attitude Towards Politics

Despite the popular slogan "Our religion is politics and politics is our religion", many of our youth take a negative attitude towards politics. What is our view on this?

Actually, youth do not run away from politics per se, but rather from politics of a specific nature, or from difficult political situations, or from a political leadership which has none of the lofty ideals by which the greater political goals may be realized. The activities of many political parties and movements, along with their inner complexities, may be factors that alienate youth from involvement in this environment.

We may find that a youth refuses to participate in the political discourse because of his negative conception of the subject, based on what he has perceived in his environment, on his readings or on a negative conclusion such as politics is chicanery, prevarication, hypocrisy, that one should distance himself from it.

It is possible, too, that the issue may stem from a lack of self-confidence or fear of political complexities. We feel that the negative attitude may be the result of one or another of these elements. It is incumbent on those who work in the political arena, on the one hand, to extend the horizons of youths to greater political issues that concern the umma; and, on the other, to enhance their outlook on the positive implications of struggle, sacrifice and of drawing closer to God (Exalted), such that politics is no longer intimidating or problematic.

The problem of the negative attitude is probably occasioned by the chicanery, cheating, and deception that are part-and-parcel of *Realpolitik*, and which appear as the very antithesis of morality. In this scenario, politics is reduced to wrangling without any moral guidelines.

On the other hand is the concept of religion, structured on the value of high spirituality which carries at its core, the acceptance of God, and behavior in life according to spiritual, moral, and social values. These values are based on the guidance of God and His ordained Laws. This makes for a great

difference in the understanding of the outlines of political function and the guidelines of religion.

The relationship of politics to religion, however, does not correspond to this prevalent understanding of politics. Nor does it correspond to the prevalent understanding of religion, which sees the latter as being restricted to a narrow sphere of worship. This sphere is completely closed to the realities of life connected to the internal dimensions of human existence; they are contradictory to the external dimensions in individual and social conduct, without in any way entering the arena of life struggles in dealing with any challenges.

The Function of Religion is the Function of Justice

Certainly the function of religion is the function of justice, for even the word "justice" summarizes the entire concept of religion. We must, therefore, coexist in a state of justice with ourselves; we should not wrong ourselves through things that bring on self-destruction, whether in this world or the next.

Therefore, the person who believes in the Lord and obeys Him, harmonizing his knowledge with his daily life, is just with himself because he has focused his being on attaining the bliss in this life and the hereafter. In this way, the relationship between a human being and the Lord is one of justice.

If the person believes that God is His Lord and Creator, who sends down His bounty, brings into being all that surrounds him, looks after him, gives him life, is the protector of everything—one will do justice to God, as he regards Him as the sole deity and attributes no partners to Him.

He obeys, not disobeys, God; acts in accordance with His wishes, rather than attempts to go against them; and he seeks ever more to please God, rather than do the opposite. This is because the right of God over the servant is for the latter to serve Him in every sense of the word servitude [*ibada*], relative to the truth about Lordship elucidated in the following verse:

"It is not for any believing man or believing woman, when God and His prophet have decided a matter, that they should have any option about their decision" (al-Ahzab, 33:36).

The right of God over the servant, then, is that the latter must subject himself to God in everything. And if he should distance himself from this subjugation, whether it be by rejecting God or by associating partners with Him, then he wrongs his Lord. This is what we understand from Luqman's counsel to his son:

"O my son! Do not associate partners with God; verily, association [Ar., "shirk"] is the worst transgression" (Luqman, 31:13).

By the same token, the relationship between one person to another must be one of justice, because God has decreed that each person has rights over humankind. Life is a state of mutual rights among human beings, and none has absolute rights—even the prophets. The prophets' rights over the rest of humankind

is that people should believe in them, accept their message, and assist them.

The rights of humankind over the prophets are that the latter should call them to righteousness, guidance, direction, attestation, instruction, and the like. Therefore, God requests from the Prophet that he observe the right of the *umma* in propagation. This is derived from the words: "

O Messenger, proclaim that which has been revealed to you from your Lord; for if you do not do, then you have not delivered His message" (*al Maidah*, 5:67).

This means that the call to God's way and the responsibility thereof constitute the rights of humankind over the Prophet in respect of guidance, instruction, and attestation. This is equally true of the *Imams*, saints, and *ulama*. We may even go to the highest limit, for God who has the absolute rights over humankind and none has rights over Him—has honored His servants by giving them a right over Him, according to His words:

"Observe my covenant, and I will observe yours" (*al-Baqarah*, 2:40).

Based on the above, each one who observes the rights of the other person is being just with him. And every person who does not observe the rights of the other is a wrongdoer. It follows that the issue of rights applies to every aspect of determining justice and wrongdoing. When we direct the relationship of the human being to life, the environment and the earth, we find that people are sometimes good, sometimes evil.

This is because there is a responsibility to advance life as God wants life to advance. This means that life has as much right over humankind, as humankind has over life, in the aspect of creation. This is what we understand from the Qur'anic verse:

"We have sent our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed unto them the Book, and the Balance so that humankind may persevere in justice" (*al-Hadid*, 57:25),

as we find that all the religions, scriptures, and the messengers operate within the guidelines of justice.

The Connection Between Politics and Religious Justice

We know, then, that justice attracts the politically-minded person, for politics represents the administration of the human relationship with life, by virtue of the discipline which this connection calls for. This holds regardless of whether a well-structured system is represented in the legislation stipulating the rights of every person over his brother, or a changing system is taken into account by the judge and the citizenry in daily affairs—implying that religion permeates every concept of the *Shariah*.

When we realize this, the political connection with justice becomes a religious issue. This implies that religion is present in every concept, legislation, and function. It stands for the deepest justice; indeed,

represents all justice. On this, we must define justice for the relationship between the magistrate, the governed; we need rules for the people in their relationship with the earth, the environment, and the animals. With this there will be no room for justice without politics, since the latter regulates its movements, circumstances, struggles, and challenges.

Politics and Morals

There is another issue, which is that the finer workings of politics may require some positions which are incompatible with the highest morals. For example, when someone challenges you for a situation to which you were unable to respond in an ethical fashion. If you do not meet his challenge, he will use the values you believe in to defeat you and constrain you during the process.

Islam has a means of dealing with emergencies and unforeseen conditions of this kind, since the circumstances of pressure may force you to depart from the guidelines of truth to those of falsehood, if the better good of Islam demands it or the better good of the people in their affairs dictates that you do not tell the truth. This is because, in some situations, telling the truth allows your opponent to use your weak points to pressure you; and if you disclose the truth, it would place you at the mercy of the opponents.

You may have to resort to slander under certain conditions, if the situation so requires. You may have to resort to spying, if advancing Islam requires agents to provide intelligence to the Muslims and if, in the absence of espionage activities, the Muslims themselves would be spied upon and their affairs be known to the other side, leaving Muslims without any information about the other side. In such a situation, the Muslims could undergo such a strife that they begin to slay each other, as when the enemy, in his desire to gain victory over the Muslims, uses Muslim prisoners-of-war as a shield in his war against them.

The ends in these critical situations justify the means; in civil and normal personal matters, however, the ends do not justify the means. The means in critical situations may transform the unlawful into the lawful and the legally permissible to that which is obligatory.

As such, we believe it is fundamental to Islamic politics to go the full length and to be ethically upright. But if a critical situation dictates that benefits for Islam can be achieved by departing from these lines, then the ethics of political maneuvering must be determined according to these new developments.

Politics and Legislation

In Islamic legislation, there are some primary and secondary models for setting the laws. A particular thing may be allowable in the first model and unlawful in the second. Therefore, we affirm Islam covers politics, and when this politics requires some amount of license in things forbidden in Islam, then let the thinker study the particulars of the situation in the struggle to decide if the solution lies in one model or the other.

Politics is part of Islam and does not depart from ethical guidelines. Consequently, we say that our religion is politics insofar as religion functions to draw up guidelines in their entirety for human beings. Likewise, we say that politics is religion because it implies human activity in the field and, as in religion, certain things are permitted in politics.

Our Youth and Political Affiliation

The common practice of parties, movements, and organizations is to recruit students as soldiers for their cause, as living, active elements for realizing their goals. How do we regulate the activities of youth in political movements?

Youth signifies a stage of activity where the person seeks a goal to strive for, a group with which to associate himself, and a way to be active. Politics represents an important factor which relates to every other aspect, whether at the level of government, ruler, law, political relations, or great challenges dictated by the political reality –like tyranny and its aggression, or colonialism and its exploitation, etc.

When the umma faces all of these issues in its positive or negative realities, then it must move to reap the positive aspects, its developments and advancements at a level which ensures its strength, foundation, depth, and support to face the negative aspects. It should work as far as possible to suppress them, to prevent their approach and their spread. The umma cannot reach these goals without the strength of its youth; youth represents a force equal to any challenge, because of the nature of youth. With traits like harshness and machismo, it welcomes challenge.

The umma, then, must work towards harnessing the strength of youths in issues of greater concern. When it desires that youth take this role, or when the youth is inspired to take it up, then he must study the intellectual, political, and functional manifesto of the party or the movement in question, with respect, on the one hand, to the youth's affiliation and intellectual and doctrinal beliefs; and, on the other hand, to his concern and involvement in the affairs of the umma, on a level where it realizes its main goals in staying the proper course. A youth must also study the leadership and the motivations of this political center. He must do some background research on what its motives are, and the guidelines within which it operates.

A youth must investigate with a fine-toothed comb every aspect of this political center—the hidden and the obvious—until he is convinced that efforts are not being wasted, not merely answering some personal urge in this or that direction. He must not take a path where elements of truth are used to foment corruption. All these considerations need to be considered among the issues that could change sincere, dedicated efforts into wasted undertakings, merely efforts expended in the wrong direction.

Therefore, we counsel youth to critical and precise examination of the issues, in each aspect of the political reality. The political arena is filled with barriers and deep holes, corridors, caves, and caverns—and it is necessary that youth feel out the territory carefully when either going forward or staying put.

Affiliation under Fear

Some youths who are members in parties say that their affiliation resulted from ignorance or fear.

When a person acts on marginal issues rather than social or personal realities, certainly it is possible that he may adorn a bit here, and act on personal negative or positive factors there. When the issue is one of self-determination—i.e., when his actions are associated with those of others in order to put his efforts in a lawful undertaking reflecting a matter of importance to the party—whether or not associated with this or that center of politics, an entry into war here or there, the establishment of an undertaking for the country according to this or that pole—then it becomes a matter of self determination for which the person must accept full responsibility, positive or negative.

With regard to man or to Muslim youth, certainly God calls him to account for every negative result in proportion to his link with it, and in terms of his strength and esteem in it. So that he must fear God in his undertakings, as well as assume responsibility for his people now and for the future.

The Separation between Religion and Politics

As some people express it, "separation" here entails specialization—i.e., religion has its role and politics its role. Is it proper then to separate them?

Religion does not represent a condition that can be detached from life; likewise, politics does not represent a limited condition in the affairs of humankind. If religion extends to every aspect of daily life, how can we restrict it to a specific area? And if religion extends to every aspect of human life, how can we restrict it to a specific sphere? Specification and limitation rather are for things which can be indeed particularized; how can we seek to limit that which does not accept particularization and which covers every aspect of life?

Yes, it is possible to have specification in religious culture and its facets, and the same in political culture and its individual spheres. But cultural specialization is one thing and specialization of the role of something is another. There is a difference in saying that the role of religion is a limited one in a particular arena, with no relation at all to politics; and that the role of politics is limited to a specific setting which bears no relation at all to religion. The reason is that religion plays a role in every aspect of life and political facet; and politics plays a role in every aspect of life and religious facet.

Woman in the Political Theatre

What is our view of those who say that Islam has wronged the woman in the area of politics, since it has excluded her from the judiciary, leadership of the country, and other political activities?

We figure that Islam has given women rights in many political arenas, and when Islam legislated the

exclusion of women from the judiciary, this did not in anyway lessen their right in this sphere. It was rather a precautionary measure taken for probity, in consideration of emotional makeup of women, which is a noteworthy female characteristic—something which motherhood requires but which may become a factor in her issuance of judgments.

When the judicial dimension dictates that there should be a particular perspective here (in the judiciary) and another one there (motherhood), it was a precautionary measure in the interests of probity and not a blemish on women's honor.

As far as leadership of a country is concerned, it may be found in the disposition itself; or it may be that specific complications arise from circumstances associated with a leadership, which may not be in harmony with the ethical or other limitations needed to distinguish between the roles of men and women.

The Woman and Leadership Positions

More precisely, does Islam forbid women from rising to the position of cabinet ministers or national leaders?

This query may require new research, because of a *hadith*—though not recognized by us as relevant to the subject under discussion—which states that : "The nation that is led by a woman will never succeed." This *hadith* may have been applicable to the type of rule that was prevalent in previous eras, based on a type of authority vested completely in the ruler. However, when the governance is such where the ruler is under scrutiny and subject to protocol, this ruler cannot break the judicial principles of lawmaking and governance, both of which ensure propriety through recourse to knowledgeable people, consultants, and a parliament.

Therefore, one may put aside the *hadith* that appears on this subject in favor of the view that new research is needed. We need to ascertain whether the problem evolves around the role of the woman in office, implying that such a position is not for her; or it revolves around the type of functioning of authority for that office based on either absolute or restricted power.

Job Rivalry and the Difficulties of Stratification

Is it possible to steer away from this problem of job stratification which delineates between one rank and another?

If the supervisor and his subordinates come to oppose each other, with respect to the identification of one thing with another, then it leads to an unnatural situation. For when a worker assumes that his employer controls him, and feels coerced, then no matter how much service and opportunity, rights and good conditions that this employer provides for him, he will always think of his employer as an exploiter, a controller, and a tyrant.

If the employer feels that the employee wants to confront him and to keep him from the positive results which his project has brought, then the issue here become transformed into something resembling stratification—in that each party looks at the other from an absurd viewpoint, or from the point of view of exploitation and counter-exploitation.

However, when the relationship between the worker and the employer is structured in a way which allows the worker to work sincerely and according to conditions that make him feel worthy and independent, without in any way impinging on the rights of the employer; and when the employer does not look at the worker merely as part of the means of production, but rather as a person who has needs and desires similar to those of the employer himself; then the employer must realize that the worker can help him achieve his goals and desires.

In this spirit, work must be cooperative. When the workers are in a cooperative work setting, then no individual should attempt to breach the conditions which such cooperative working dictates on the employer whether it be a country, a person or a company. Rather it must be where the employees can discuss a problem freely with the employer, and have the right to decide and the right to whatever achieves their good and that of the employer.

Difference not Destruction

Are our words regarding employment in companies to be taken as specific to workers and not the other domains; or is it that student societies and youth groups may be considered under the rubric of the topic?

The professional organizations we are speaking about provide several positive aspects, for they bring into being actual guidelines for the development of the relevant field, be it in the area of nurturing, education, medicine, engineering, or the like. This is because these organizations may improve the services, or strengthen relations between one group and another, each complementing the other in one field or the other.

We are concerned that the process of forming organizations does not lead to the fragmentation of this society, since establishing such groups is acknowledgment of the various specialties of this society. This should reflect the different needs or services in the area of operations of each group. When these organizations transform themselves into interactive, complementary bodies, cooperating on mutually agreed terms, and striving to enrich their common existence, then they are a positive rather than a negative force.

Each professional organization that has several specialties must carefully try to establish a program that best achieves its goals and attains the positive consequence of benefiting the world. It should not be overcome by political bigotry, but rather operate on the level of political competition working towards specific political goals. But it must not isolate itself from the broader issues of society. It must not focus

on itself only when the society wants it to work for a national goal or some such thing.

Towards International Islamic Student Activity

There are calls for Islamic student bodies and youth groups to form a foundation that encompasses all Muslim students, regardless of their affiliations. To what extent is this actually possible?

When we speak of the Islamic vis-a-vis non-Islamic student movements, it is possible for us to lay down certain general outlines which are connected to the welfare of Muslim student groups involved in student activities. This may be done in a manner whereby the Islamic component dominates the non-Islamic component of the other groups.

In this spirit, perhaps we can consult with each Islamic student body which we wish to amalgamate into a single student organization, meeting with Islamic organizations so that the various political viewpoints do not influence a particular issue, and that unity in diversity or diversity in unity may reign.

This certainly requires much study and effort, in the course of which we may take the edge off much of the bigotry, factionalism, and political disagreement.

The technological age—or the race towards it—is undoubtedly something positive. However, how can it be relied on? What are the negative aspects involved?

Striving towards something can be a positive element when it carries with it the results of humankind's long experimentation. It can do so when it has an active, dynamic, and rich culture, at a theoretical and experimental level; or a diverse working background at the level of assessing things in abstract and practical terms. It may, however, be negative when it restricts the aspirations of man, restricts his activities, taxes his resources, and then gets transformed into something devoid of value, possessing nothing that inspires effort any longer.

In fact, it may change the work to whatever attracts man's exhausted efforts and saps his resources. We may find that a long technological age may drown a person in imitation, by dictating the parameters in which he lives. The circumstances which mental and intellectual conditioning has developed has become so deep-rooted that it prevents any progress that could represent a new thrust at a methodological level or in the pursuit of goals.

Workaholism

One may become engrossed in the work one does, the purpose of which is simply accepted—or accepted through the leadership that initiated a project and then became stultified in the process. Indeed, the work itself becomes an object of worship in one's outlook; so much so, it does not leave room for any other viewpoint, unless it be in agreement with that of the leadership. The consequence is that people may distance themselves, perhaps in the hope of benefiting from new developments under

another leadership.

This may occur, too, if the obsession in the initial stages of the project makes it seem that the other stages necessarily depend on previous ones; that they could cause revision because of new developments in the data, changes, and new efforts that bring to light the errors of past endeavors. As such, we see that many Islamic movements have become frozen in their sanctifying, at the first stage, of things that need no such consecration. This is because there is a difference between respecting a person or a stage, in the light of the factors which call for such respect—whether they be intellectual or in terms of work done—and hallowing this person and his position far beyond what he actually deserves.

Such sanctification is the obsession with a particular personality or stage; it makes you lose your clarity about the stage, or what you will encounter in the future.

Therefore, I feel that the time of action may be important in the normal course of experimentation. But it may become a negative element when transformed to a state of frozenness, among the other elements of the undertaking. In this state, an experiment limited to viewing this person, who has become recognized in the movement he started, now becomes so far-reaching that its influence is sought on every subsequent development.

We may feel that some of those involved in movements should retire to open the opportunity to new people in the movement. I do not mean by this that the previous elements of the movement should be abandoned. I state that the old elements may live in the past in a way that makes it difficult for the Islamic movement to develop people.

If the old elements see that they now have experience, and that surrendering the leadership to new elements represents a foolhardy venture, from an intellectual or functional viewpoint, then this may create a new negative issue. This means that the second and third ranks of those involved in the movement will remain in a state of self-sufficiency but with a sense of failing.

This will cause the old elements to be in a position whence they are unable to extend support, since their abilities do not permit this. Or, because their minds are not in accord with the new reality in which new growth have sprouted. Or, one may work on the foundation for entering a development which had not been considered in terms of the changes, because they do not possess all the factors that undergo this test.

Along with this problem, the old activists may open the opportunity for the new people through mentorship and, at some time, providing names until the new elements become part of the established hierarchy.

In this way, they may hand over the movement, probably with new initiative, new strength, new elements—especially if we realize that many historical activists may be afflicted by weariness, which may cause them to display intellectual and political fatigue. In this way, they participate in restricting the

movement, wishing for the movement to remain limited to their spent resources. And so, without knowing it, they thrust the movement towards failure and conclusion.

This is one issue. Another is the sanctified glorification of the historical leadership of the movement, intellectually or politically. This unconsciously suggests that development has reached a level beyond which there is no room for further progress. It may cause a mental struggle against every new idea, on the grounds that such an idea is different from the concepts cherished by a hallowed leadership or a hallowed stage.

There is a difference between respecting those who had initiated the movement and giving them absolute sanctification. The latter makes idol worshippers of activists; whereas respect changes them into people who welcome strength in the interest of newer, more vigorous elements for the future.

Addendum of Narrations (4)

On Experience

- Imam 'Ali said: "Issues are by experiment and test, and deeds are by experience."
- He also said: "Experience provides beneficial knowledge."
- He said: "He who has little experience has been misled, and he who has much experience has been made less inattentive."
- He said: "Experience is the best disciplinarian."
- He said: "To learn from experience is the highest of intellect."

On Groups

- Imam 'Ali said in the last portion of his counsel: "I exhort you to fear God and to look at your affairs."
- He also said, "You must stick to the rope and bond of God, be from the party of God and His Prophet, observe the covenant of God and its hold on you, for Islam began as a stranger, and shall return to being a stranger."
- He also said, "Would it make you happy to belong to the victorious party of God? Fear God [Exalted] in all your affairs, for certainly God is with those who fear Him, and those who do good."

On Politics

- On the authority of al-Imam al-Sadiq, from the Messenger of God: "There are two groups from my umma—if they are righteous, the whole umma will be righteous, and if they are corrupt, then the whole

umma will be corrupt." He was asked, "O Messenger of God, who are these two?" He said, "The jurists and the rulers."

- On the authority of al-Sadiq: "The learned of his time are not stumped by confusion."
- And from the Messenger: "Whoever rises and does not concern himself with the affairs of the Muslims is not a Muslim."
- 'Ali, *al-Amir al Mu'minin*, said: "The weakness in politics of those in authority is their ruin."
- He also said, "Governance is politics."
- He said: "Who is deficient in politics is deficient in governance."
- He said, "The best guide to expanding the intellect is to estimate things positively."
- He said, "Justice is the best politician."
- He said, "The best politics is justice."
- He said, "Woe to tyrannical policy."
- He said, "The fundamental requirement of politics is justice."
- He said, "The politics of the just lies in three things: He is gentle in firmness, meticulous in justice, and best in intentions."
- He said, "The essence of politics is to give friendship."
- He said, "Kindness blunts the sharpness of disagreement."
- He said, "If you rule, be kind."
- He said, "Patience is the best of politics."
- He said, "Controlling the self is the best politics, and leadership with knowledge is the best leadership."

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