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Lesson Four: Resurrection, a Manifestation of Divine Justice

The question of divine justice a question which has numerous dimensions must be raised at this point.

We observe that in this world the good and evil deeds of men are not subject to any final accounting. Criminals and oppressive rulers, who with their claim to absolute sovereignty encroach on men's lives and their freedom, may enjoy opulence and luxury until the end of their lives.

They shun no action that their polluted minds inspire in them, but they are not caught in the firm grasp of justice and law, and they do not suffer the natural consequences of their deeds. There is no power or authority to prevent their oppression, to stop their encroachment on the rights of others, or to restrict the scope of their power to their own private affairs.

In the end both the oppressor and the oppressed, the one polluted with sin, and the wise one who strives to gain mastery over his passionate instincts and acquire virtue, who attains abundant spirituality through the admixture of piety to his conduct all will close their eyes on the world. It is true that religion forbids all forms of submission to unbelieving rulers and the acceptance of the tyrannical edicts put forth by oppressive governments, and that it regards resistance to all kinds of aggression as a necessary dictate of religion and life.

Nonetheless, confrontation with oppressors does not always yield a positive result, and in the course of the struggle people may be trampled by the power of the oppressors and lose their lives. Were the file to be closed in this world on the deeds of the good and the evil so that they were buried for ever in the cemetery of nothingness, what would become of the infinite justice, wisdom, and mercy that God cherishes for His servants God, the traces of whose justice and wisdom are manifest throughout His creation?

If we accept that God has created an environment in which numerous evildoers and oppressors are able to continue on their chosen path until the last moment of their lives, without recognizing any limit on their

behavior, to stoop to any vile act in order to gain power and gratify their desires if we accept that this is possible without their being called to account, and that the oppressed continue to writhe beneath the lash of injustice and deprivation until their last gasp can all of this be called anything but oppression and injustice?

Now we know that nobody who has the slightest notion of love and justice would consent to such a state of affairs; how then could the most Sacred Essence of God, from Whose being infinite pity, love, and justice flow forth, accept such injustice and place on it His seal of approval? How would the creative mind of man, the most sublime aspect of his being that guides him to knowledge of himself and the universe judge this matter?

It is true that God has not directly permitted the commission of a cruelty against a given person. However, the fact that a certain collectivity grants some criminal oppressor the freedom and power to act as he wills and in the end exempts him from all punishment is in itself a clear form of injustice. The link between God's justice and the need for a precise accounting of men's deeds thus makes irrefutably clear the necessity for resurrection.

In addition, certain crimes and evils are so extensive in their effects that they cannot be adequately punished in this world, with its limited time-span. Crimes are sometimes so grave that the punishment inflicted by men is not equal to the task of imposing on the criminal the punishment he deserves.

The criminal plunderer for whom the world is nothing but a carcass on which to feed kills and consumes at will; his hands are stained with the blood of hundreds or thousands of people whom he drags into the slaughterhouse. He is so sunk in the mire of vice and injustice that he is incapable of learning lessons from the past or thinking of a better and more enlightened future. If despite all his crimes his soul were to be taken in just the same way as that of one of his victims, the punishment involved would be unjust and grossly unequal, for he would then have been punished simply for one of his victims and all his other crimes would remain unpunished.

Many crimes are, then, beyond the scope of worldly retribution. If we wish to analyze matters more logically, we must look further, beyond this world. There is also the consideration that no authority in this world has the power to restore to men all the rights which have been violated.

Similarly, the world does not have the capacity to reward virtue in a fitting and complete manner. When we attempt to assess the value of the unrelenting efforts that the pure and the virtuous expend in this world, which is full of trouble and pain, we realize that the rewards available here are very slight.

What reward commensurate with the value of his efforts can be given in this world to one who has benefited millions of people with his treasury of knowledge and learning or sincere and devoted service?

How and where in this world will one be rewarded who devotes all his life to the worship of God and the support of His servants, whose services extend in manifold ways to whole societies, and who ultimately

gives up his life for the sake of divine goals?

No life remains for him in this world to enable him to reap the fruits of his devotion and self–sacrifice. The temporal limitation imposed on life in this world does not even permit the pious to receive their reward. The Qur'an says.

"Shall We make those who believe in God and do good deeds like those who work corruption on earth? Shall We requite pious and God fearing men like the sinful and the doers of evil? Do those who have committed foul and sinful deeds imagine that We will grant them a rank like that of those who believe in God and do good works, so that they wilt be alike in death and in life? Theirs is a false and ignorant notion. God has created the heavens and the earth in justice, and ultimately every soul shall receive the requital for its deeds, without any injustice" **(45:21–22).**

From the day that he first steps into this abode of dust until the moment the earth draws him into its embrace, man has to struggle with hardships, difficulties, problems and misfortunes.

The Commander of the Faithful, `Ali, peace be upon him, depicts this transient, pain–filled world as follows:

"The world is a dwelling the inhabitants of which are overcome by sorrow and pain. It is a world well–known for its deceit and trickery and lacking in all stability. Those who enter this dwelling will never enjoy safety or tranquillity. Its circumstances are constantly changing, and its pleasures are reprehensible and blameworthy. Repose and tranquillity are nowhere to be found in it. Every instant it fires the arrow of disaster at man, before finally dispatching him to the jaws of death and destruction."

Can it be believed that such a world, replete with pain, misfortune and hardship, should be the final aim and goal of creation? That a God all of Whose actions are based on excellence and order and the signs of Whose justice and wisdom are manifest throughout creation, should have created man only for the sake of such a world?

Comprehensive and Universal Order

It must be remarked at this point that the order we see in the world is a divine order, one that includes all things in its scope. All created objects in the universe, whether large or small, ranging from the minute particles of the atom to the countless planets that are scattered throughout space, are created and take form from the justice that rules the whole scheme of creation. This vast system of being does not escape the direct influence of the rule of justice for a single instant; this is a reality that can be deduced from all the phenomena in the world of creation.

Should the component parts of this system deviate even so slightly from their prescribed orbit, the necessary principles on which the order, of the universe is based would collapse, resulting in its destruction.

Despite all his remarkable talents, man forms a part of this universal order; he cannot be regarded as exempt from its comprehensive and universal rules. The only factor that sets him apart is his possession of freedom which enables him to be creative and inventive; it opens up before him a path for attaining his goals and purposes. It is indeed a source of pride for him that alone among all the creatures of the phenomenal world he is able thanks to this unique quality and the potentialities it yields to tame his destructive impulses and reconcile them with his constructive activities. By creating man free, God has demonstrated both the underlying order of the universe and the changes that are brought about in that order by the disobedience of man.

Were man to be directed ineluctably toward the acquisition of spiritual riches and the path leading to happiness, were a deterministic power to conduct him toward lofty values, there would be no pride in this for man. We must therefore accept that by receiving the gift of freedom and will from God, man must one day stand in the court of God's justice to be judged there according to the universal principle of all creation justice. It cannot be believed that man should be exempt from the justice of the Creator that prevails throughout the universe, thus becoming an element of disharmony.

If we take into consideration on the hand the functioning of the principle of justice throughout the entire scheme of being and on the other hand the fact that many rewards and punishments cannot be dispensed in this world, it becomes obvious that the nature of men's deeds and accomplishments must be subjected to examination in another world and at an appropriate time. The proof lies in the deduction that can be made from man's essential nature (as a being possessing freedom), for all the dimensions of his being, all his ideals and fundamental needs, will come to fruition in the hereafter.

Thus we can understand well that God Who has no need for the creation of man will never destroy or obliterate our being before it attains perfection. This is unthinkable, and no intelligent person would consent to such an erroneous notion.

The Requital of Deeds

It is obvious that the deeds of all sinners cannot be fully requited in this world. Nonetheless, some punishments do occur in this world, as can be seen from those pages of history which record the disastrous fate of certain wrongdoers. Indeed we ourselves witness time and again the bitter and painful fates they undergo; after suffering torment and humiliation, they go to their deaths in utter disgrace, although no one had been able to predict such an inauspicious end for those powerful tyrants.

The existence of such a remarkable linkage between corrupt action and ultimate disgrace cannot be ascribed to simple coincidence; it must on the contrary be regarded as an instance of requital taking place in this world. The Qur'an says:

"God will cause them to taste humiliation in this world, and the torment of the hereafter will be much greater, if they but knew" **(39:26)**.

Such chastisements sometimes function as alarm bells, as warnings to the sinners, encouraging them to come to their senses, to change direction and reform themselves before it is too late. These warnings remind them that good and evil are the two pans of the balance in which our deeds will be weighed, and that no abomination or moral corruption will go unpunished, in just the same way that no good deed will remain unrewarded.

A Western philosopher writes:

"The world resembles a multiplication table; however much you manipulate it, it retains its structure and shape and always yields the same answer. Whatever method we may choose to solve a mathematical problem, the figures that result will be the same. Nature silently but ineluctably reveals all secrets: it punishes every crime, rewards every virtue, and compensates for every act of oppression.

"What we call retribution is a universal need; it causes the whole to appear from within its constituent part. If we see smoke, we are certain that it has arisen from fire, and if we see a hand or a foot we have no doubt that it is attached to a body.

"Every act carries its own requital. To put it differently, in accordance with the law of which we have spoken, every act completes itself in two ways: first by way of action and reaction within the thing itself, in its objective nature, and then with respect to its outer qualities. What we mean by outer qualities is none other than what is commonly called retribution and punishment. The retribution that takes place in the thing itself can be seen with the eye; the retribution that takes place in the external quality of a thing is visible only to the intelligence. This second form of retribution is inseparable from the thing itself, and may not become apparent for some time.

"The consequences peculiar to a given sin may appear years after the sin was committed, but they will definitely occur because they are inherently attached to it, like the branch of tree to its trunk. Alternatively we may say that both crime and punishment are the branches of a single trunk. Retribution is the fruit that suddenly emerges from the blossom of the pleasure that the sin yields." (*Falsafa i Ijtima'i,* p. 378)

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The appearance of the consequences of evil acts is a clear sign that God Almighty does not accept corruption and wrongdoing, and that all sinners will receive their due punishment in the next world.

In addition, the positive educational effect of requital should not be underestimated, both on the individual and on society. The whiplash of punishment should from this point of view be regarded as a form of mercy and divine favor, leading to men's awakening and their aspiring to purity. It is a form of compensation the payment of which earns men abundant benefit.

In order for His justice to reach the fullest extent possible, God has freed man of the shadow of determinism and granted him the divine trust which even the mountains had been unwilling to bear.

Ascent to the lofty station of true humanity is possible only through effort and striving, by passing through the furnace of trial. The Qur'an says:

"Every man is a pledge for his own deeds" **(74: 38).**

What is meant by this is that whatever appears in this world in the form of a sin or misdeed takes on in the hereafter the shape of the implementation of justice and the punishment of the transgressor. It is belief in the pre-eternal source of all existence and His all-embracing justice that impels man to act correctly and with justice himself.

Imam al-Sajjad, upon whom be peace, made this supplication to God:

"O God, I know that there is no cruelty or oppression in any of Your decrees or commands, and that You do not hasten to punish anyone, for only he hastens to perform an act who fears he may miss the opportunity, and only he who is weak and impotent feels the need to commit oppression and cruelty. You, O Creator, are pure and exalted above both these defects."

A theologian says:

"It is better for all mankind that they spend their lives in the service of the One God, for the spirit that serves God is the legitimate commander of the body, and the mind that serves God brings under control the passions and unruly emotions of man. I ask therefore what justice can possibly exist in the person who does not serve God. It can plainly be seen that such an individual does not rule over his bodily form by means of his spirit, nor over his emotions by means of his intellect."

For those who do serve God the ideal life is that which comes after death. As the Qur'an says:

"The hereafter is the abode of true life, and the life of this world is but play and amusement" **(29:64).**

Those devoted to God not only do not fear death, but even wait longingly for the moment that the angel of death shall whisper melodiously in their ear:

"O sacred spirit, return to your Creator, satisfied and well-pleased" **(89:27-28).**

These verses of the Qur'an are also relevant:

"On that day your journeying shall bring you to the presence of your Lord." **(75:12).**

"Your return will be to your Lord" **(96:8).**

"There is none in the heavens and the earth but will come before God as His servant. He is aware of the number of all His creation, and they shall all individually be present before Him on the day of resurrection." **(19:93-95).**

In the other realm happiness will be the essential goal of all beings, and pleasures will be available for them that we cannot even imagine.

In short, this life full of confusion and oppression is only a small part of the totality of life. One group will earn as the final result of its deeds permanent abode in the propinquity of God's mercy, while another group will find itself condemned to be the neighbors of Iblis in eternal torment. Are these two destinies in any way equal the misery of hellfire and the blessing of paradise? It is up to man to choose freely between them.

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