Need for Religion

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Allamah Sayyid Sa'eed Akhtar Rizvi explains in depth a question we are often faced with today; why is there a need for religion? He explains what religion is, why we need it, and further understanding the qualities of a religion.

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1) What is Religion?

The Arabic word "Deen" دين which is translated as "Religion" in English is used for several meanings:

(a) "Islam; Belief in unity of God; Worship; Obedience; All the acts of worship; piety;" All these meanings are interrelated and are connected with the belief in Creator.

(b) "Judgment; Reward or Punishment; Account; Order; Law;" These meanings are inter-related and point to the belief in the Life-Hereafter.

(c) The third group of its meanings is: "Custom; character; Habit; Religion revealed and traditional both.'"

The idea behind the word (دين) "deen" is that man, by his nature, has to have a pattern of life based upon some spiritual ideals or ideas which we call 'belief'.

It appears that the word دين is more comprehensive than the English word ''Religion'' which puts emphasis on only ''Human recognition of super-human controlling power and especially of a personal god or gods entitled to obedience and worship, effects of such recognition or conduct of mental attitude, particular system of faith and worship."

2) What is the Need of Religion?

There are many reasons why religion is needed for Mankind:

(a) We know that man is a social animal. Every man depends upon millions of people for his life and its necessities. Also we know that every society needs some laws to prevent injustice and preserve the rights of every member of the society. But who is the right authority to make the Law? One man (be he a monarch or a dictator)? No! Because he, instinctively, will look, first of all, after his own interest. A group of people (be it an aristocracy or democracy)? No! Because every one of them is capable of wrong judgment; and a lot of wrong decisions do not add up to a right decision.

(b) Also, it is apparent that no group of people disengage itself from self-interest. For example, in colonial days the assemblies and councils of colonies were enacting laws to suit the interest of the White rulers. Now, the same institutions (but with different members) are making laws keeping in view the interest of the local population. Self-interest was, and still is, the key word of legislation in the whole world.

(c) Moreover, no man or group of men is in a position to make a comprehensive law based on perfect equity and justice.

So it is necessary that the laws should be made by someone who is superior to man, who has nothing to lose or gain by that law and with whom every man has equal relation. and that one is "Allah". Hence we need the religion

(d) Moreover, all the man-made laws and customs have a very serious defect: they cannot stop crime. This defect makes their existence somewhat superfluous. A thief enters an unoccupied house, in a remote village at dead of night for stealing some valuables. He knows perfectly well that there is no representative of the government for good many miles around the house. He feels perfectly safe from being detected. Is there any law of government which can stop him from committing the crime? The answer is, certainly, "no".

No government can stop the said person from stealing, but Religion can.

Religion, true Religion as explained above, teaches that there is a God, Who knows everything and sees everything; who is Just and Virtuous Himself, and wants us to be just and virtuous; that we are responsible for our deeds in His eyes, and we have to give account of our deeds to Him after our death. If a person believes in it, then (and only then) he can restrain himself from committing sins and crimes and inflicting injustice upon other people.
Laws of government can control the external affairs of a man and even that only at a time and place where its hands can reach. But the belief in God and religion controls not only the external acts but hidden desires and inner thoughts also.

This control is not confined to any particular place or any limited time, because God is omnipresent and omniscient

(e) To realize fully the unquestionable benefits which the society derives from the belief in God and religion, try to think about the chaos and turmoil which the mankind will certainly plunge into if the belief in God is put aside. There will not be any society. Instead, there will be a multitude of people. In such atmosphere every individual is at liberty to do whatever he wishes. He thinks there is no God and no life hereafter, and he has come into being by the chance of a blind nature; and he also knows that the span of life is very short. So he naturally will be overcome by the desire to enjoy this life as much as possible without any regard to anything else. His only consideration will be to avoid being caught red-handed or detected by the government law. And whenever he will feel safe he will not stop at any crime to fulfill his desire, how much heinous that desire may appear to others.

Question: Even an atheist may lead a life which is morally as perfect as that of a follower of religion. So what is the need of religion?

Answer: It is a fallacy, to think that the moral life of an atheist is without any obligation to religion. Because those moral thoughts have been bestowed upon him by no other factor but religion. Religious moral teachings have been ingrained in human mind for thousands of years. They have been bestowed from father to son (heredity) and from friend to friend, (environment). These moral values have become inseparable from his conscience. But what is conscience? It is but the religious and moral thoughts which have come to him from his religious forefathers, and now he cannot escape from them. Conscience is based upon the moral teaching of religion. How can the conscience survive, when those teachings of religion are routed out of the humanity as a whole?

Anybody who ponders deeply upon this point will come to the conclusion that no morality can hold is ground, if separated from belief in God and religion.

3) Misunderstandings About Religion

Often we hear some patent slogan used against ”Religion” they are nowadays widely used by the communists. They are:

(a) Religion is anti-science.

(b) Religion was a drug invented by capitalists to keep the oppressed classes content with their wretched condition. In other words it was opium to make people seep.

(c) Religion retards material and intellectual progress.

Let us, now examine these allegations. All these statements have been made by the Europeans (from Karl Marx to Bertrand Russell) who had known a particular religion only i.e. Christianity. They committed

the intellectual sin of seeing a particular religion and assuming all religions (Including Islam) must be of the same caliber. It was, to say the least, a fallacy, if not a deliberate deception.

To explain the above statement, it is necessary to pint out just in general outline what was the attitude of Christianity towards knowledge and progress.

‘’From the sixteenth century A.D. the conflict between the church and science began. This most unfortunate struggle was not started by the scientist but by the protagonists of Christianity, who feared that their religion was in dire danger of losing its hold on the masses. Their house of cards was threatening to fall down. Both Catholics and Protestants, though they were at logger-heads themselves, took the same stand against the impact of revolutionary scientific theories of Copernicus and Galileo. They did what every tyrant, afraid of his inherent weakness, does. Ruthless persecutions were launched against the brave scientists who defied the church and said what they knew was the truth.

‘’At first we should take Copernicus (Nicolaus Koppernik) 1473-1543, as he was the man who set the ball rolling. He did not dare to publish his work, “On the revolution of Heavenly Bodies”, for a long time due to the fear of the church. In the end he successfully tried to appease the church by dedicating the book to the Pope. In fact his publisher wrote a preface alleging that the theory of the earth’s motion was only a hypothesis and not an assertion as positive truth. In the words of Lord Bertrand Russell, ‘For a time, these tactics sufficed, and it was only Galileo’s bolder defiance that brought retrospective condemnation upon Copernicus. (*Religion and Science*)

‘’Luther, also, opposed the Copernican system on the theological grounds.

‘’Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), though once a friend of Pope Urban VIII, was thrown into the prison of Inquisition by the orders of the same pope and threatened with torture if he did not recant. Galileo’s only crime was that he supported the Copernican system because of the observations made with his telescope. These observations were more difficult to cope with for the church than the theoretical of Copernicus.

“Giordano Bruno (1549-1600) was another victim of the cruelty of the ‘tolerant’ people. He was burnt alive.

‘’As Lord Bertrand Russell has written: “Theologians were not slow to point out that the new doctrine would make the Incarnation difficult to believe.” (*Religion and Science*)

“So the Inquisition announced the following as the truth: “The first proposition that the sun is the centre and does not revolve about the earth is foolish, absurd, false in theology and heretical; because expressly contrary to the Holy Scriptures. . .

The second proposition that the earth is not centre, but revolves about the sun is absurd, false in philosophy, and from a theological point of view at least opposed to the true faith.' (*Religion and*

Science).

"And as it was not enough, the Jesuit Father Melchior Inchofer postulated that 'the opinion of the earth's motion is of all heresies the most abominable, the most pernicious, the most scandalous; the immovability of the earth is thrice sacred; arguments against the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and the Incarnation should be tolerated sooner than an argument to prove that the earth moves.' (*Religion and, Science*).

Faced with this ruthless oppression, the scientists, in their turn, denounced Christianity as "anti-intellectual, anti-science, a pack of superstitions and degrading to human progress." What is not understandable is that they aimed their broad-side to all the religions; certainly Islam can never be termed 'un-scientific, illogical or anti-progress.

4) Evolution and Religion

It is said that the 'Evolution' has proved that there was no need of a Supreme Being in the scheme of the universe.

Though the best place to deal with this question would have been in the Unit 2 (God of Islam); but I propose to give here some points for the student to ponder.

First of all, let it be clear that here I am not talking about the truth or otherwise of the theory of Evolution. This is not the place for it.
Secondly, that mere change within the basic type of living things is not 'evolution.'

The theory of organic evolution involves these three main ideas:

1. Living things change from generation to generation, producing descendants with new characteristics

2. This process has been going on so long that it has produced all the groups and kinds of things now living; as well as others lived long ago and have died out, or become extinct.

3. These different living things are related to each other."

(*World Book Encyclopedia, 1966*)

Thirdly that in spite of all assertions to the contrary, Evolution is still a theory, not a fact.

Fact as Webster's third New International Dictionary says is ''an actual happening in time or space'', a ''verified statement.''

Now what is the ''verification'' of this theory?

A prominent evolutionist W. Le Gros Clark, writes in his book, *The Fossil Evidence for Human*

Evolution:–

‘’The chances of finding the fossil remains of actual ancestors, or even representatives of local geographical group which provided the actual ancestors, are so fantastically remote as not to be worth consideration.

‘’The interpretation of the paleontological evidence of hominid evolution which has been offered in the preceding chapters is a provisional interpretation. Because of the incompleteness of the evidence, it could hardly be otherwise.’’

The science News Letter said in 1965: “The fight is among scientist over just how man did evolve, when he did so and what he looked like.

The above mentioned Mr. Clark writes: “What was the ultimate origin of man?. . . .
Unfortunately, any answers which can at present be given to these questions are *based on indirect evidence* and thus are *largely conjectural*.”

A former president of the American Association for the Advancement of science wrote in Science Magazine in support of evolution:–
‘’Come now if you will on a speculative excursion into prehistory. *Assume* the era in which the species sapiens emerged from the genus Homo . . . hasten across the millenniums for which present information depends for the most part on *conjecture* and *interpretation* to the era of the first inscribed records, from which some facts may be gleaned."

L.M. Davies, a British Scientist, once said: "It has been estimated that no fewer than 800 phrases in the subjunctive mood (such as *'Let us assume* ' or *'We may well suppose'* etc.) are to be found between the covers of Darwin's 'Origin of Species' alone."

When you ponder upon the statements quoted above and especially the phrase given in italics by us, you will come to this conclusion that Evolution is not an established *fact*, but only a theory, among many theories which have been advanced since the beginning of mankind to explain the nature of universe. Many of such theories are now discarded, but once they had the same hold on minds as the theory of Evolution has at present. And this hold on minds does not make it any more perfect.

Indeed, one scientist, Dr. T.N. Tahmisian, a physiologist for the Atomic Energy Commission, said: “Scientists who go about teaching that evolution is a fact of life are great con men, and the story they are telling may be the greatest hoax ever. In explaining evolution we do not have one iota of fact,” He called it "a tangled mishmash of guessing games and figure juggling' Another scientist, head of a college science department, J.W. Klotz, stated in 1965 that "acceptance of evolution is still based on a great deal of faith."

And this theory has yet to find enough evidence to support itself. How can such a 'theory' be used to

refute the existence of a 'Supreme Being'?

Finally, even the evolutionists do acknowledge that there is the need of an "Ever living, All Knowing, Almighty Being," in the scheme of the Universe as explained by the theory of 'Evolution'.

But, once committed to the denial of God, they are attributing these virtues to that 'Nature' They say that 'Nature' adopted this "Nature" planned that.

Let us see what is this 'nature' anyway? It is nothing but an abstract idea formed in human brain after careful study of the behavior of things, If may be found within the things; but it has no independent existence, And in any case, there is no record of any conference of the 'natures' of various things, held to decide how to co-ordinate their functions. Flowers never conferred with the bees to seek the bees' co-operation in their pollination, offering them, in exchange, their nectar. But we know that bees could not live a single day without flowers; and thousands of flowers would long have been extinct but for the bees.

So, you see, the evolutionists recognize the need of a 'Planner', a 'Designer'. But dogmatically go on repeating that that designer and planner was the 'Nature' (which is just an abstract idea) or the 'Matter' which is a 'Senseless, lifeless thing'.

5) The so-called Pascal's Bet

A Muslim poet has said:

قال المنجم و الطبيب كلا هما لن يحشر الاموت فلت اليكما

ان صح قو لكما فلست بخاسر ان صح قولى فا لخسار عليكم

"The astrologer and the physician both said: 'The dead will never be resurrected.'
'I said: Keep your counsel, If your idea is correct I will come to no harm (by my belief in a Day of Judgment); but if my belief is correct, then you will be sure loser (by not believing in that Day)"

Allamah Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (died in 1111 A.D.) mentions in Mizanul-Aamal that: "Ali - God have grace on him - said to a man who contested with him on the question of the other world: If the truth is what you pretend (i.e., there is no life hereafter), then we shall all be saved; but if the truth is what I have said (i.e., there: is a life hereafter) then you will be condemned and I shall be saved.

That is the very sound, practical, down to earth reasoning in favor of believing in a Creator and a Day of Judgment.

Then Al-Ghazali explains that Ali did not propound this argument in order to cast a shadow of doubt on the reality of the life-hereafter; but it is merely an argument to convince those people who are incapable of knowing that by logical demonstration.

One thousand years after Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s) came the famous mathematician Pascal (died 1662 A.D) and his famous ''Parido Pascal'' (Pascal's Bet) by which he wished to prove the same thing to the same group of people. His argument can be briefly stated in this way:

"If you believe in the life-hereafter you will gain everything if it really exists; and you lose nothing if it does not exist. Therefore, it is better to bet that it does exist." (Pascal: Ben sees, edited by Y. Brunchircy, Paris 1912, p. 439).

Is it mere coincidence? Or did Pascal get the idea of his (Parido (= bet)) from Islamic sources? Asin Palacios believes that Pascal must have read it in the Ihya-ul-uloom of Al-Ghazali. But as mentioned above, Al-Ghazali himself refers in Mizanul-Aamal that Ali bin Abi Talib was the author of this argument.

Therefore, we must put the credit where it belongs and accept that Pascal, though he did not acknowledge it, had got his idea from Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.).

6) Necessary Qualities of a Religion

So far, I have been explaining the need of religion in a general term.

Now let me enumerate what should be the qualities of a religion, if it is to fulfill the needs mentioned above.

(a) First of all, Religion must satisfy the intelligence and intellect of the Man.

Of course, there are many religions whose motto is “First believe, then you can understand." Frankly speaking, such religions retard the mind and should be termed (and are in fact called) "anti-intellect." Islam, as explained by the Shia Ithna-asheri faith, gives foremost place to intellect and reason. "Intellect" is one of the four basic sources of Shia Ithna-asheri shariat. Not only this. This faith emphasizes that the matter of faith must be understood by the believer by his own reasoning.

(b) Religion must teach and practice dignity of man.

There are religions which demand that its followers should prostrate before the pictures or statues of some human beings or some animals or other inanimate things.
Such religions degrade their followers to the furthest extent, and should be condemned as such.
Some other religions teach the superiority of one race or caste over others.
It was Islam which was and is the pioneer of the equality of mankind and which, for the first time in the history of religions, taught and practiced the human brotherhood, equality and equity, and presented the

dignity of humanity as a fact to the astonished eyes of the mankind.

(c) Religion must be a complete guide to develop human body, mind and spirit as a whole.

There are some religions which put too much emphasis on spiritualism and ignore the body and mind; there are others which have a great deal to say on physical or intellectual advancement.
Such religions cannot take their followers very far, because the development taught by them is lop-sided It is only Islam, as explained by Shia Ithna-asheri faith, which develops a person as a whole - body, mind and soul all together.

(d) Religion must have a complete code of life.

Religions just preaching to "love thy neighbor" without showing the way, are useless when faced with the practical problems. Islam has a complete code of life which guides a man in his family life, social commitments, financial matters, moral and ethical behavior perfectly.

(e) Religion must be in conformity with the human nature.

There are religions which tend to ignore the nature of man. For example, some religions teach celibacy. They declare by their behavior (if not in so many words) that the Creator made a mistake in creating sexual urge in human beings. Also, they forget (or pretend to forget) that natural instincts cannot be crushed, and that such impositions tend to lead the person to secret liaisons.

And, I wonder what would be the future of humanity if all the mankind becomes the practicing followers of such a religion? Surely, the mankind would be extinct within a space of 40 or 50 years.

Needless to say that such a religion cannot lead mankind to prosperity, because by its nature such religion is against continuity of humanity.

(f) Religion should not be a tool in the hands of oppressor to suppress the masses.

Many religions are rightly accused by the atheists of being just an instrument of the feudal overlords to suppress the oppressed masses and muffle the voice of protest. Such religions, for example, taught the theory of 'Predestination'. Thus, the masses were lulled to believe that all the evil doings, tyranny, and wickedness of the ruling classes were just a manifestation of the Will of God; therefore, such thing should be fore born without any protest.

Such religions have no place in this enlightened century. It is only Islam, as explained by the Shia Ithna asheri faith, which said that such a belief was humbug, that every man is responsible for his own actions and that its responsibility should not be shifted upon God.

It will appear from the above, criteria that among the vast multitudes of the world religions, it is only the Islam (Shia Ithna-asheri faith) which fulfils all the necessary conditions of a true and enlightened religion.

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