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Part 3: Divine Justice

Lesson 1: What Is Justice?

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

***Why is justice, one of God's Qualities, considered to be a principle of religion?**

***What is the difference between justice and equality?**

1. Why was it selected among all of God's Qualities?

In this study, before anything else, this point must be made clear as to why the great 'ulama consider justice, one of God's Qualities, to be a principle among the five pillars of religion.

God is the Knower ('Alim), Powerful (Qadir), Just ('Adil), Wise (Hakim), Merciful (Rahman), Compassionate (Rahim), Primordial (Azali), Eternal (Abadi), Creator (Khaliq) and Sustainer (Razzaq). Why was only justice selected from among all of these and it became one of the five pillars of religion?

In response to this important question, several points should be noted:

A- Among God's Qualities, justice is so important that many other Qualities return to it because justice in the general, extensive sense means 'putting everything in its place'. Here, then, Hakim, Razzaq, Rahman and Rahim, and similar Qualities, are all dependent upon it.

B- Resurrection - just as we have previously mentioned - is related to Divine Justice as well as the mission of the Prophet and the responsibility of the Imams.

C- At the beginning of Islam, a difference of opinion arose over the issue of the justice of the Creator:

A group of the Sunni Muslims, who were called the Ash'arites, completely denied God's justice. They said that justice and oppression make no sense in relation to God. He is the Ruler of all of the created universe. It belongs to Him and whatever He does, is just. They did not even believe in the intellect's good and evil. They said, "Our intellect alone cannot distinguish between good and bad, even the goodness of doing good or the evil of oppression ..." and many such similar errors.

Another group of the Sunnis, who were called the Mu'tazilites, and all of the Shi'ites, believe in the principle of justice in relation to, the Creator and they believe that God never commits oppression.

In order to separate out those two groups from one another, they called the second group, the 'Adliyah, in which justice ('adl), as a principle, was the sign of the school and the first group were called 'ghayr adliyah' (other than justice). Shi'ites were among the 'Adliyah.

The Shi'ites, in order to distinguish their school from that of the other Adliyah, placed imamate as one of the principles as well. Thus, wherever there is a discussion of 'justice' and 'imamate', this is in reference to 'the Shi'ite Imami School.

D- As the fundamentals of religion are continuous rays of the principles of religion and as the ray of justice of the Creator is extremely effective in human society, and the most important base for human society is formed by 'social justice', the selection or choice of the principle of justice as one of the principles of the principles of religion is a means to establish justice in human society and to struggle against any kind of oppression.

Just as the unity of Essence, Qualities of the Creator, the unity of worship of Him, the light and unity of His Oneness, a solidification of human society and the unity of Qualities are strengthened, the leadership of the prophets and imams is also inspired by the issue of 'real leadership' in human society. Thus, this principle of justice of the Creator, Who rules over all of the world, is the sign of the necessity for justice in all areas of human society.

The great, created universe is based upon Divine Justice. Human society will also not remain without it.

2. What is justice?

Justice contains two varying meanings:

A- The extensive meaning of this word, just as we have said, is 'to put everything in its place'. In other words, it is being in balance and equilibrium. This meaning or sense of justice rules over all of the created universe, in the galaxies, within an atom, in the structure of a human being's existence and all plants and animals, This is what the famous Tradition of the Holy Prophet refers to when he says, "It is by means of justice that all of the heavens and the earth exist."

For example, if the powers of 'attraction' and 'repulsion' of the earth lose their sense of balance and one

of these two is removed or destroyed, the earth will be drawn towards the sun, set on fire and destroyed or it will leave its circuit and wander in the endless space of the universe until it is destroyed.

B– Another meaning of 'justice' is 'the following of individual rights' and the point opposite is 'oppression' in the sense of taking 'the rights of some' and giving them exclusively to others or to take away someone's rights and give them to another, to discriminate in the sense that some people are given their rights and others are not.

It is clear that the second meaning is a 'particular' one and the first one is 'general'. It should be noted that both meanings are truthful in relation to God, even though the second meaning will be more emphasized here.

The meaning of God's justice is not to remove the rights of a person nor give the rights of one to another or to discriminate between people; He is Just in all sense of the word and the reasons or proof of His Justice will be mentioned in the next lesson.

Oppression, whether it be the taking away of a person's rights or by giving the rights of one to another, or wastage and discrimination, does not exist in the pure Essence of God. He never punishes a person who does good. He never encourages a person who does evil, no one will be held responsible for the sins of another. He does not burn the wet and dry together.

Even if everyone is in error in a large society, other than one person, God separates the accounts of that one person from that of others and does not punish that person along with sinners.

And the fact that the Ash'arites said, "Even if God sends all of the prophets to hell and all of the criminals and sinners to heaven, it is not oppression," is vain babble and baseless. The intellect, which is never polluted with superstition and discrimination, will not listen to these ugly words.

3. The difference between justice and equality

Another important point which should be pointed out in this lesson is that sometimes 'justice' is confused with 'equality' and it seems that the meaning of justice' is that 'equality should be maintained' whereas this is not so.

Equality is not a condition for justice. Rather, rights and priorities must be considered.

As an example, justice in a classroom of students is not that they all receive equal grades and justice between two workers is not that they receive equal wages. Rather, justice is in this that each student be graded according to his knowledge and ability and each worker be judged according to his work and activity.

In the world of nature also, justice in the extensive sense means just this. If the heart of a whale, which

weighs one ton, be compared to the heart of a sparrow, which is perhaps not more than one gram in weight, if they were equal, there would be no justice and if the roots of a very tall tree were equal to the roots of a small plant, this is not justice and is equivalent to oppression.

Justice is that every creature receives its rights in proportion to its abilities.

Think and Answer

A– Why, among all of the Qualities of God, is Justice known to be or recognized as being one of the principles of religion?

B– Who were the Ash'arites? What do you know about their beliefs?

C– What reactions does belief in Divine Justice have in human society?

D– How many meanings does justice have? Explain them.

E– Does justice mean the same as equality?

Lesson 2: The Proof or Reason for the Creator's Justice

1. Goodness and Evil

We have learned and it seems that this issue is necessary that our intellect distinguish between good and evil to a certain extent. (This is that very thing which scholars speak about in ethical terms as 'goodness' and 'evil'.

For instance, we know that justice and goodness are good and oppression and stinginess are evil. Before religion even mentions these things, it was clear to us. However, there are other issues which exist which our intelligence is not sufficient to understand and we must seek guidance from Divine leaders and the prophets.

Thus, if a group of Muslims in the name of the Asharites deny intellectual goodness and evil and the way of distinguishing between 'good' and 'evil', to think that only religion brought the issue of justice and oppression, and things like this, is completely wrong.

Because if our intellect does not have the ability to choose between good and evil, how should we know

whether or not God would send His message through false prophets? But the moment we say that lying is wrong and evil, and that it is impossible that God would lie, we know that God's Promises are always true and that He is always truthful, we would never encourage deceit and never give miracles into the hands of a deceitful person.

It is here that we can rely upon what religion and the Divine Law says.

Thus, we can conclude that the belief in intellectual good and evil is from religion. (Note this with care).

Now, let us return to the proof of Divine Justice. In order to understand this, we must know.

2. What the source of oppression is

The source of oppression is one of the following things:

A- Ignorance: It sometimes happens that an oppressive person does not, in truth, know what he is doing. He does not know that he is destroying someone's rights and he is not aware of what he is doing.

B- Need: Sometimes a person is tempted to undertake a satanic act in order to attain something that another has whereas if he were self-sufficient, in such a situation, he would have no need to commit oppression.

C- Inability: Sometimes a person is not willing to have the rights of another curtailed but he does not have the power or ability to do anything about it, and without willingness, he commits oppression.

D- Selfishness, bearing grudges and seeking revenge: Sometimes none of these qualities exist but selfishness causes one to aggress against others or the sense of seeking revenge or bearing a grudge makes that person commit oppression or the spirit of 'exclusiveness' and 'monopolization' causes injustice to others.

But noting that none of these ugly qualities and deficiencies exist in God, because He is the Knower of all things, Needless of all things, has Power over all things and is kind to all, it makes no sense for Him to commit oppression.

He is a Being Who is Endless, Perfect and Unlimited. Only Goodness, Justice and Mercy can stem from such a Being.

If He punishes those who commit evil, in reality, it is the result of their deeds which causes this, just like a person who, as a result of the use of narcotics or alcohol, is afflicted with an incurable disease. The Holy Quran says,

هَلْ تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ

"You receive but the recompense of what you have earned." (***10:52***)

3. The Quran and the Justice of the Creator

It is important to note that the Holy Quran greatly emphasizes this point:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَٰكِنَّ النَّاسَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

"Verily God will not deal unjustly with man in aught: it is man that wrongs his own soul." (***10:44***)

And in another place, it says,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ ۖ وَإِنْ تَكُ حَسَنَةً يُضَاعِفْهَا وَيُؤْتِ مِنْ لَدُنْهُ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

"God is never unjust in the least degree." (***4:40***)

And,

وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا ۖ وَإِنْ كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا ۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ

"We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgment so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least." (***21:47***)

Thus, note that what is meant here by 'balance' is the method of weighing good and evil, not like scales of this world.

4. Invitation to Justice and Equity

We have said that the qualities of the human being must be like a ray of God's Qualities and in human society, God's Qualities are widespread. According to this principle, to the same extent that the Holy Quran stresses the Justice of the Creator, He has also stressed justice and equity in human society and the individuality of individuals. The Holy Quran says that oppression and injustice will destroy society and that the fate of oppressors is of the most painful kind.

The Holy Quran, in addition to mentioning the fate of past tribes, has often repeated this truth for people to see the result of oppression and corruption and what punishment will be given, fear that you not suffer such a fate.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ ۚ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

"God commands justice, the doing of good and liberality to family members and He forbids all shameful deeds and injustice and rebellion ... " (***16:90***)

It should be noted that committing oppression is an ugly act, to accept oppression and suffer suppression is also wrong according to Islam and the Holy Quran,

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۖ وَإِنْ تُبْتُمْ فَلَكُمْ رُءُوسُ أَمْوَالِكُمْ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ

"Deal not unjustly and you shall not be dealt with unjustly." (***2:279***)

In general, submission to inequity encourages oppression, increases suppression and aids oppressors.

Think and Answer

1. Can our intellect, independent of the Divine Law, distinguish between good and evil?

2. What does oppression stem from? What is the intellectual proof of God's Justice?

3. What does the Holy Quran say about the justice of the Creator and how does it negate oppression from Him?

4. What is a human being's responsibility in regard to justice and oppression?

5. Is it also a sin to submit to oppression?

Lesson 3: The Philosophy of Signs and Evil

From the earliest times to the present, a group of the unaware went against God's Justice and expressed ideas that either God's Justice did not exist or even sometimes they not only negated justice but used it as a means of proving the nonexistence of God like unexpected catastrophes such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural calamities, and differences of these types which can be found among people and also calamities and evil which extend to human beings or plants and animals.

1. Relative Judgment and Limited Knowledge

Normally, all of us, in our judgments and determination of confirmations, stress the relation things have with us. For instance, we say, such and such is near us or far from us in other words, in relation to us.

Or such and such a person is strong or weak, that is, in comparison to our physical ability or spiritual situation. In issues relating to good and evil and calamities and natural catastrophes, people's judgment is usually the same.

For instance, if rain falls in a region, we have nothing to do with what the total effects of the rain were. We only think about our own environment, home or pasture areas, or, at the most, our own city. If it was a positive event, we say that it was God's Blessing and if negative, we call it a negative event.

When they destroy a building in order to build a new one, and we only share in its dust, we say that it was a bad event even if in the future a hospital will be built there which everyone can make use of and even if the rain had positive effects in other parts of the city.

In our normal judgments, we consider a snake bite to be a calamity without recognizing the fact that this very bite and poison is an effective means of defense for this animal and disregarding the fact that sometimes from this very poison, a life-giving medicine is produced which saves the lives of thousands of people.

Thus, if we do not want to be misled, we must look at our own limitations and in our judgments, not only look at things in relation to ourselves but rather consider all sides of the issue and judge from all points of view.

In principle, events in the world are all linked together like a chain. The hurricane which hits our city today and a heavy downpour of rain which brings floods is one of these long links which is completely related to other links and is related also with an event which took place in the past and will take place in the future.

The conclusion or result is that putting one's finger on only a small part of an issue and judging it accordingly is not to have used one's intellect and logic.

That which is worthy of creation (that which creation deserves) is complete goodness but if something, from one point of view, is evil, goodness prevails. A surgical operation is discomforting, from one point of view, and, from another, beneficial. Thus, goodness is relative.

For further development and discussion, let us look at the occurrence of an earthquake. It is true that in one area, destruction occurs but if we consider its relation to other issues, we can change our opinion.

Does an earthquake relate to the temperatures and pressure within the earth or does it relate to the

attractions of the moon which continuously draws the earth towards itself and it sometimes breaks or does it relate to both? Scientists have differing views.

But whatever of these exist, the effects upon another thing must be considered. That is, we must know what effect the temperature; inside the earth has in creating oil resources, which is the most important ·energy material in our age and also the creation of coal, etc. Thus, goodness is relative.

And also what effect the ebb and flow of the tides stemming from the pull of the moon on the oceans has upon life within the water and its creatures and often, watering a dry coast line in places where sweet water meets the oceans. This is also a relative good.

It is here that we understand what relative judgments and limited information we have when we look at issues like this as dark points which the attractions of the created world contains and however much more we look at the relationship between phenomena, we become more aware of its importance.

The Holy Quran tells us,

الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

"Of knowledge, it is only a little that is communicated to you." (***17:85***)

2. Undesirable events and warnings

We have all seen people who when drowned in blessings, fall under influence of pride and selfishness and in this state or condition, many of the important issues and duties are forgotten.

And, also, we have all seen that at the time of the calmness of the oceans of life and complete restfulness, how such a state of sleep and forgetfulness is given a person, which, if it continues, will bring great misfortune to that person.

Without doubt, some of the undesirable events of life are in order to end that state of pride and to do away with this sleep and forgetfulness of life.

You have most certainly heard that experienced drivers complain abou.t roads which are flat, level and lacking any twists or turns, ups or downs and they describe these attractive qualities as dangerous ones. Why? Because the monotony of this road causes a driver to fall asleep and it is here that danger comes to him.

It has even been seen that some countries have created artificial ups and downs and put holes to prevent such a danger.

The path or way of life of a human being, is also the same. If life does not have any ups or downs or

potholes, and if undesirable events never occur, a state of forgetfulness of God and sleep will come and prevent a person from undertaking his or her duties and responsibilities.

We are not intimating that a human being must create undesirable events for himself or herself or welcome misfortune because calamities have continuously been and will continue to be. Rather, we say that one must be attentive to a part of this philosophy which is to prevent pride and forgetfulness because these are enemies and barriers to wellbeing and happiness. We repeat, this is the philosophy of a part of these undesirable events, not all of them because they have other aspects, as well, which, with the Will of God, will be mentioned in further lessons.

The Holy Quran tells us,

فَلَوْلَا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَٰكِنْ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

"When the suffering reached them from Us, why then did they not learn humility?"(***6:43***)

Think and Answer

1. What people have mentioned the issue of calamities and catastrophes in their ideology?

2. Mention some calamities and catastrophes. In your own life, have you ever met up with them?

3. What is meant by relative judging and total judgment and absolute evil and relative good?

4. Are earthquakes and hurricanes only harmful?

5. What positive effects can undesirable events have upon one's psyche?

Lesson 4: The Philosophy of Undesirable Events in Life

We have said that a group of the materialists have coercively made use of the issue of unpredictable occurrences of calamities and difficulties which occur in the life of human beings as an excuse to deny the justice of the Creator and sometimes, to deny even the existence of God!

Now we will continue the discussion of the previous lesson.

3. A Human Being is nurtured through Facing Difficulties

We again repeat that we should not create difficulties for ourselves, but, at the same time, it often happens that difficulties increase our will-power just like iron which is strengthened when placed in hot smelting pots. In the smelting pot of difficulties we become experienced and more persevering.

War is basically not good but sometimes a difficult and long war causes the abilities of a nation to blossom and transforms dispersion into unity and quickly makes up for our falling behind.

A famous Arab historian says, “The blossoming of civilization has appeared throughout history in various parts of the world. It followed a country being attacked by a powerful foreign country, being awakened and mobilizing their forces.”

Of course, reactions to difficulties are not similar among all people and all societies. One group falls into despair, weakness and pessimism and reaches a negative conclusion but there are individuals who have the right attitude when faced by these difficulties and are stimulated, mobilized by them, begin to move and they are filled with excitement and enthusiasm.

But because in such situations, many people judge by what appears on the surface, they only see the bitterness and difficulties and ignore the positive and constructive effects.

We do not claim that all bitter events have such effects in a human being but at least some people are in this way.

If you study the life of geniuses of the world, you will see that almost all of them suffered difficulties and great misfortunes. There are fewer people who are raised in comfort and luxury who have shown themselves to be geniuses and who have arisen to a high position.

A good commander of an army is a person who has seen a difficult and long battle. Their economic genius’ are people who have fallen into difficulties in the economic market.

Great politicians are those who have passed through hard and difficult political struggles.
In summary, we can say that the difficulties and anguishes which human beings bear, nurtures them.

The Holy Qur’an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَرِثُوا النِّسَاءَ كَرْهًا ۖ وَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ لِتَذْهَبُوا بِبَعْضِ مَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِينَ
بِفَاحِشَةٍ مُبَيِّنَةٍ ۚ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

"It may be that you dislike a thing and God brings about through it a great deal of good". (***4: 19***)

4. Difficulties cause one to turn back to God

In the previous discussions, we have seen that, little by little, our being has a goal or purpose. Our eyes are for a purpose; our ears are for a purpose; our heart, brain and nerves each have been created for a purpose. Even our finger tips have a philosophy behind them. Thus, how is it possible that our total being be without a purpose?

At the same time, for the completion of this task, one must look every once in a while at one's sins and one's transgressions must be shown or pointed out. In facing difficulties in following God's Commands, one becomes familiar with one's ugly and evil deeds and will turn back to God. It is here that a part of the difficulties and unforeseen events are, in reality, Divine blessings.

The Holy Qur'an says:

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

"Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of (***the deed***) ***that the hands of men have earned, that*** (***God***) ***may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back*** (***from evil***)***."*** (***30:41***)

Noting what we have said above, painful events are confirmations of evil and interpreting them as calamities that are considered to be in opposition to Divine Justice is far from logic and intellectual reasoning because the further we go into this narrow way, we will better understand the various philosophies.

Think and Answer

1. What is the purpose of our Creation? How can we reach there?

2. How is a person strengthened by facing difficulties?

3. Have you ever seen people or read about them in history who have suffered difficulties and developed themselves? Write about their Lives,

4. What does the Qur'an say in relation to our Sins?

5. Which people attain positive results from bitter events and which ones, negative results

Lesson 5: Once Again the Philosophy of Signs and Catastrophes

Because of the fact that a discussion about signs, catastrophes, sudden events and unpleasant events is a very difficult and complicated one and is most often discussed in the area of ontology and monotheism we are obligated to the student to study this issue further from another point of view which is more readily understandable by the general reader.

5. Difficulties and Ups and Downs give Spirit to Life

Perhaps it is difficult for some people to understand that if life was only filled with blessings, it would lose its value.

It has been proven today that if you place an object in the middle of a room, and you give it a strong, uniform light from all directions and the object and the room both be completely smooth, we will not be able to see the object because when shadows are placed next to light, the dimension of the form is made clear and the shadow separates the object from the light and then we can see it.

The value of the gifts of life as well as the weak or strong shadows of difficulties cannot be seen. If throughout life, there were no such thing as sickness; the pleasure of health would never be sensed. Following a night of a high fever and the morning dawn, when the fever breaks, the memory of such a night, when one regains one's health and thinks back on that night of fever and pain, one realizes what a jewel good health is.

In general, a uniform kind of life, even the most comfortable kind of life is tiresome, spiritless and death like. It has often been seen that individuals, because of a comfortable life, empty of any kind of difficulties, find it so boring that they attempt to commit suicide or else they continuously complain about their life.

You will find no architect with taste who will design the walls of a large room to be totally smooth and uniform. Rather, he carves curves and lines into it.

Why is the world of nature so beautiful? Why is the view of jungles which fill the sides of mountains and streams with twists and turns among the small and large trees so interesting and attractive?

One reason is the lack of uniformity. The order of light and darkness and the coming and going of day and night which the Holy Qur'an emphasizes in various verses, has a great effect upon ending any kind of a tiresome life of human beings, why?

Because if the sun continuously be in one place in the sky and uniformly give light to the earth, if its position never changed and night would never come, in addition to the other problems this would have, in a short period of time, all human beings would get tired.

It is because of this that we must accept that at least most of the problems caused by unforeseen events give a spirit to life, making it sweet and bearable. It manifests the values of blessings and gives the human being the possibility to benefit from the gifts to the extent possible.

6. Difficulties one makes for one's self

Another point which we feel it is necessary to mention at the end of this discussion is that many people fall into error in their reckoning of the causes and effects of unforeseen events and the oppression which takes place through the hands of oppressors are considered to be signs of the injustice of the Creator of the world and the disorder in the work of humanity is considered to be the fault of disorder in the structure of creation.

Just as they sometimes say, "Why is each stone made to block the way?" Why do some earthquakes strike cities and cause little damage but in the rural areas, many people are taken as sacrifices and many lose their lives in the fallen refuge of their homes. What kind of justice is this?

If calamity is to be divided, why is it not divided up equally?

Why the edge of sorrowful catastrophes always falls upon the deprived people?

Why in contagious diseases, these people most often suffer?

These are all beside the fact and do not relate to the system of creation and justice of God. These are the results of oppression, exploitation and colonialism of human beings in relation to one another.

If it were not for the fact that the rural people are abased and poverty-stricken because of the oppression of the cities and they were able to build better and stronger homes for themselves like those in the cities, earthquakes would not have such an effect upon them.

But when their houses are built of mud or stones or wood and very little stucco or cement is used in the building of their homes, and in a simple way, it is piled on top of each other, even a strong wind or a very slight earthquake makes the earth open up, we should not expect the situation to be better than this. But what does this have to do with God?

This criticism should be made against the unbalanced situation and erroneous system of society. We must arise and end these injustices to society. We must fight with abasement and poverty and give the deprived their rights so that such phenomena do not appear.

If all groups of society have sufficient nourishment health and treatment, they will be able to face

diseases and sicknesses with greater strength and perseverance.

But when an erroneous and false social system rules a society in the form of colonialism, one person is given so many possibilities that even their cats and dogs have a doctor, medicine and receive special medical care, but others do not have even the most basic necessities of life and health to care for their children, such unpleasant scenes are plentiful and are seen by all.

Instead of complaining about God in such situations, we should reproach ourselves.
We have to tell oppression not to be oppressive! And we have to tell the oppressed not to bear oppression!

We must make efforts so that all individuals of a society have at least the minimum amount of health facilities, food and housing, educational and cultural possibilities.

In summary, we should not place the blame for our sins on Creation. When did God ever impose a system like this upon us? Where has He ever recommended this?

Of course, He created us free because our being free is the key to our development and progress. But it is we who misuse our freedom and oppress each other and this oppression then shows itself as unevenness in society. But unfortunately, this error has come to include a great many people.

The Holy Qur'an says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَٰكِنَّ النَّاسَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

"Verily God will not deal unjustly with man in aught: it is man that wrongs his own soul." (***10:44***)

And now we end the discussion of signs and catastrophes here even though there is still a great deal which could be said, but this brief discussion is sufficient for us in this short study.

Think and Answer

1. Why did the discussion on signs and catastrophes continue for three lessons?

2. What ill effects does a uniform and monotonous life have? Have you ever seen a person who has a high life style, suffer?

3. What can we surmise from the light and darkness in the world of creation?

4. Do all of the difficulties which exist in society relate to Creation or are we also responsible?

5. To do away with social inequalities, does a correct way exist? What duty do we have towards the deprived?

Lesson 6: The Issue of Predestination and Free-Will

One of the issues which is directly related to the issue of the justice of the Creator, is the question of predestination or free will.

According to the fatalists (those who believe in predestination), a human being has no choice whatever in his or her acts, behavior or words and the movements of his organs are just like the pre-destined movements of the parts of a machine.

Thus, this question arises, how does this opinion relate to Divine Justice? And perhaps because of this, the group of the Asharites the group we previously mentioned, who deny intellectual good and evil have accepted predestination and deny justice. Why? Because when one accepts predestination, justice makes no sense.

In order to further clarify this point, we are obliged to study several subjects with care:

1. The Roots of belief in Predestination

All people within their being sense that they are free to make decisions. For example, whether or not to give a loan to such and such a friend or that one drinks a glass of water placed before one, if one so desires or does not drink it or if another person commits an error in relation to this person, this second person can forgive or not forgive the error or that everyone distinguishes a hand which shakes because of illness or old age from a hand which one purposefully causes to shake.

In spite of the fact that the issue of free will is a general human sense, why do some people follow the school of the fatalists?

Of course, there are several important reasons which we shall recall here and they are that a human being sees that an environment has an effect upon another person, education is another, and propaganda and social culture also, without doubt, affect the thoughts and spirit of a person. Sometimes, even, one's economic position can provide a motive for movement in a human being and one cannot deny a factor.

The totality of these cause one to assume that a person does not have free will, but rather that the external and internal factors join hands and force us to make a decision and that if these factors did not exist, we would not be faced with these problems.

These are things which can be called 'the environmental determinants', 'economic determinants',

'educational determinants' and predestination are among the factors considered to be important by the school of fatalists .

2. The main Error of the Fatalists

But those who think this way have forgotten an important point and that is that the discussion is not about motives and defective causes, the discussion is about complete causes.

In other words, no one can deny the role played by the environment, culture and economics in the thoughts and acts of a human being. The discussion is that with all of these motives, the final decision still remains with us.

Because we clearly sense that even in an erroneous system, one which rebels against God's Commands like the monarchial system of the past, which had laid the ground work for deviation, we were not obliged to deviate and to go to the centers of corruption.

Thus, one must distinguish between and separate out bases and complete causes. Because of this, a great many people who live in comfort or have been nurtured in a deviated culture or they inherited unsuitabilities, at any rate, have separated their way from that of others, and have either arisen or revolted against that environment, if every human being was supposed to be the child of his or her environment, culture and propagation of the times, no real or basic revolution would ever take place in the world, everyone would have to adapt to his or her environment, and never build a new one.

All of these show that the above mentioned factors do not make one's destiny, they are only bases; one's principle or main fate is determined by one's own will power. This is exactly as if we were to decide· on a very hot summer day to fast according to God's Commands, all of our body needs water while it is possible that in order to obey God, we ignore all of this whereas it is possible others follow this request and not fast. Thus, all motives which cause one's destiny exist within the human being's free will.

3. The Social and Political Factors of the School of Fatalism

The truth is that the issue of predestination and free will throughout history has been misused. A series of predestined factors have increased the belief in fatalism and the denial of free will of the human being. Among them:

A. Political Factors: Many of the despotic and selfish politicians in order to extinguish the fire of revolution among the deprived, in order to assure the continuation of their illegal rule (for every rule or regime which oppresses the people and denies people their rights is illegal from the point of view of Islam), convince the people through all the means available to them, that they have no free will, that predestination and predetermination of history holds our destiny in its hands. If one group rules and another is ruled, this is a rule of fate and destiny of history!

It is clear how this kind of thinking can narcotize people and aid the policies of colonialism whereas according to our intellect and our Divine Law, our destiny and fate lies in our own hands and fate and destiny in the sense of predestination and predetermination does not exist. Divine fate and destiny is determined through our movements, desires, willpower, faith, efforts and endeavors we make.

B. Psychological Factors: Lazy and indifferent and lethargic individuals exist who most often meet up with defeat in life and they never desire to admit this bitter truth that their laziness or errors have caused their defeat.

Thus, in order to avoid confronting themselves with the deficiencies and developing themselves into better people, they turn to fatalism and they think that their sin is a result of coercive fate so that in this way they can find a false 'sense of security'. They say, "What can be done? We were blackened from the beginning. It will not be whitened even with the water of zamzam or Kawthar. We are extremely talented and make great efforts, but unfortunately, we have no luck"

C. Social Factors: Some people want to be free to be able to follow their carnal desires and every sin which is to their liking they want to commit and, at the same time, somehow convince themselves that they are not sinners and deceive society that they are sinless!

It is here that they turn to fatalism and their carnal desires with the justification that we have no free will to choose not to do these things. But they well know that all of these are lies and even those who make such claims and raise such issues know that they are baseless but their pleasures and passing fantasies do not allow them to admit this truth.

Thus, in order to build a healthy society, we must struggle against this fatalist way of thinking, belief in one's coercive destiny which are tools used in the hands of colonialism and exploitation and an instrument to deceitfully justify defeat and the factor which causes corruption to progress in a society.

Think and Answer

1. What is the difference between the schools of fatalism and free will?

2. What causes one to choose fatalism?

3. What answer can you give to the effects of environment, culture and heritage?

4. What are the political, psychological and social

5. Factors which cause an extension in the beliefs of fatalism?

6. What position should we take when confronted by these factors?

Lesson 7: The Clearest Reason for Free-Will

1. The general conscience of human beings denies pre destination

Even if philosophers and divine scholars give different reasons for free will of the human being, here we will take a short cut and give the clearest reason given by the supporters of free will and this is the 'universal' or 'collective' conscience of human beings.

That is, no matter what we deny, we cannot deny this reality that in all human societies, including both the worshippers of God and the materialists, East and West, ancient and modern, wealthy and poor, developed or undeveloped, of whatever culture, all without exception, agree that a law should rule human beings and that human beings are responsible before the law and people who disobey the law must be punished.

In other words, the rule of law, the responsibility of individuals before it and the punishment of those who disobey the law are things which all intelligent people agree with and it was only savage, primitive tribes who did not officially recognize these three things.

The fact that we explain this as the general conscience of human beings of the world is the clearest proof of the existence of free will in human beings and the fact that they have free choice.

How can it be accepted that a human being be obliged in his or her actions and that he or she have no freedom of choice but he or she is responsible before the law? And that when a law is broken, that person must be tried and asked why he or she did this or that or did not do this or that.

And if proven guilty, that person is sent to prison or even, depending upon the crime, executed, this is exactly as if we were to punish stones which slide down a mountain causing a landslide on a mountain road which results in the death of one or more human beings.

It is true that a human being differs from a stone, but if we deny free will and choice in a human being, this external difference between them will not be relevant and both will be the victims of fate.

A stone, following the law of gravity, falls upon the roadside and a human being who murders another, is the victim of another factor of fate. Thus, the logic of those who believe in predetermination allows for no distinction to be made between a stone and a human being from the point of view of result and neither acted according to their own free will. Why should one be tried and not the other?

We are at a crossroads. We either have to deny the existence of the common conscience of all of the people of the world and consider the courts, punishment of those who disobey the law to be ridiculous

and useless and even oppressive or deny the beliefs of the fatalists. Obviously the latter is preferable.

It is interesting to note that those who believe in the school of fatalism, and give reasons for their belief, when they are faced with a real life situation, they act according to free will!

For instance, if a person aggresses against them, or annoys or bothers them, they take this person to court and do not rest at ease until that person is punished.

Well, if it is really true that a person has no choice or free will, what is all of this commotion and court and trial about?

At any rate, this common conscience of the intelligent of the world is a living idea for the reality that human beings have accepted the existence of free will in the depths of their being and has always been loyal to that and cannot live without the belief for even one day and have the wheels of social and individual programs progress.

A great Iranian philosopher, Khawjeh Nasir al-din Tusi, in discussing predestination and free will says in one short sentence in his book Kitab Tajrubah bin al-'Aqa'id, "Our necessary understanding and conscience tells us that we are responsible for all of our deeds."

2. The Contradiction between the Logic of Predestination and Free-Will

That which we have said above was about the contradiction between the school of predestination and the common conscience of the intelligence of the world, both from the point of view of supporters of religion and people who do not at all accept religion.

But from the point of view of religious thought, there is another sure reason for recognizing the falsity of the school of fatalism.

As religious belief can never agree with fatalism, religious programs, as well, are all altered by accepting this school of thought.

How can we reconcile the justice of God which we proved in previous lessons with the school of fatalism? How is it possible that God oblige someone to do an evil deed? Then punish him because he did it. This does not agree with any kind of logic!

Thus, by accepting the school of fatalism, spiritual rewards, punishments, heaven and hell are meaningless as well as 'scroll of deeds', 'questioning', 'Divine reckoning', 'reprimanding the evil doers in the Quran', 'encouragement and praise for those who do good', all of these lose their meaning. Because according to this school, neither do the good doers or the evil doers have a choice.

In addition, in religion, one of the first issues we encounter is 'duty' or 'responsibility' but does 'duty' or 'responsibility' make any sense if a person has no choice?

Can we tell a person whose hands involuntarily shake, not to shake their hands? Or tell a person who is falling down a steep mountain to standstill?

It is because of this that Imam 'Ali, peace be upon him, says in a famous tradition recorded in the Usul Kafi, vol. I, p. 119, that the school of fatalism is a school of idol worship whose followers are members of Iblis' party: 'These words of idol worshipping brothers, enemies of God, and members of Iblis' party."

Think and Answer

1. What is the clearest reason for the falsity of fatalism

2. Describe the general or common conscience of people of the world which believes in the principle of free will.

3. Do the followers of the school of fatalism act according to their beliefs?

4. Does fatalism agree with the principle of Divine justice? If not, why?

5. Why is free will the basis for accepting any kind of duty or responsibility?

Lesson 8: What Is The Middle Way?

1. Conferring as opposed to Fatalism

Of course, opposing the belief in fatalism, which is one kind of an extreme, is the school of 'conferring', which is at the other extreme.

Those who accept this school believe that God created us and then put everything at our disposal and that, in general, He is not responsible for anything that we do and in this way, we are completely independent in choosing what we do.

Doubtlessly, this belief does not agree with monotheism because monotheism has taught us that God rules the entire world and nothing is beyond His control. Even our free will and free choice cannot be beyond His realm, otherwise multitheism would, of necessity, result.

In other words, we cannot believe in two gods, one, the great Creator of the universe and the other, a

small one who is the human being who is free to do whatever he or she wishes, completely free and independent and even God cannot affect what he or she wishes to do.

This is multitheism. This is duality and polytheism. What is important is that we know human beings have freedom of choice and free will at the same time that we know God to be the Ruler over all persons and deeds.

2. The School of the Middle Way

The fine point to recognize is here, that we not imagine that there is a contradiction between the two. The fact is that we both accept God's justice as well as the freedom and responsibility of His servants as well as unity and His rule over the entire universe of existence and this is that very thing which is known as the 'middle way' (something which is between two extremes).

Let us clarify this with an example as the issue is a very complicated one. Let us assume that you are traveling on an electric train and you are the driver of the train. A strong electric cable has been placed along the line of the train and the train is connected with a link to this electric cable and moves and moment after moment the electricity is passed to the locomotive in such a way that if for just one moment, the electricity to the locomotive stops, the whole train will stop.

Without doubt, you are free. You can stop wherever you want and you can move at your own speed. But in spite of all of this freedom, the person who is sending the electricity can, at any moment, make you stop because all of your power and strength is that very electricity and he holds the key.

When we note this example with care, we see that even though one has such freedom, choice and responsibility, one is completely at the disposal of the power of another and these two do not contradict each other.

Another example:

Assume that the hand muscles of a person as the result of illness or the occurring of an unforeseen event, do not work and he does not have the power to move his hand but if we connect that to a very small amount of electricity, the nerves will be warmed and become capable of movement.

Whenever such a person commits a crime with that hand, for instance, and in that very state, strikes another person in their face, strikes a knife in an innocent person, it is clear who the person responsible is because he both had the power and the choice and a person who has will power is responsible for what he does.

But at the same time, that person who gives his hand electricity and creates his power and strength, rules over him and while he is free and has a choice, he is in his grasp.

Now let us return to the main point. God has given us physical power or strength and from moment to moment, it continues and if it is cut, off for even a moment, and our connection with Him be cut off, we would be destroyed.

If we can do anything it is because we have strength which He has given us and it continues moment by moment and even our freedom and choice is also from Him. That is, He willed that we be free and by making use of this great Divine kindness, one can transform one's self.

Thus, at the same time that we have free choice and a free will, we are in His grasp and we will l1ever move beyond His realm. At the same time that we have: strength and power, we are dependent upon Him and without Him, we will be destroyed and this cis what 'the middle way' means because neither have we recognized any creature to be equal to God, which would bring multitheism nor do we believe creatures are obliged to act as they do which would bring oppression.

We have learned this lesson from our pure Imams, peace upon them. Whenever they were asked, "Does anything exist between fatalism and conferring?" They said, "Yea. More extensive than the distance between heaven and earth." (See Usul Kafi. vol. 1, p. 121)

3. The Holy Quran and fatalism and free choice

The Holy Quran states this issue directly and proves the free will of human beings and there are hundreds of verses which talk about free will.

● All of the verses which relate to commanding to virtue and preventing vice are all proof of the free will of human beings because if a person were obliged to do so, doing so would make no sense.

● All of the verses which speak of blame and reproach against the evil doers and praise for the good doers are proof of free will because if one was obliged to do whatever one did, blame or praise would make no sense.

● All of the verses which speak about the questioning on the Day of Judgment and the Judgment in that Court and then the rewards and punishments and heaven and hell are proof of free will because if one were to assume that everything was predestined then questioning, judging, rewards and punishments would all be oppressive.

● All of the verses which say that a human being is responsible for his or her deeds:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ

"Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds." (74:38)

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ

"(Yet) in each individual in pledge for his deeds." (***52:21***)

Verses like,

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

"We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will)."(76:3)

Think and Answer:

1. What is meant by 'conferring' and what error is hidden in it?

2. Describe, in a clear way, the 'middle way' which we learned from the Imams and give examples.

3. What does the Holy Quran say about free will and predestination?

4. If we accept the idea of fatalism, what happens to spiritual rewards and punishments and heaven and hell?

5. Is the verse, "But you will not except as God Wills... "(76:30), proof of fatalism?

Lesson 9: Guidance And Error Are In God's Hands

1. The parts of guidance and error

A traveler has an address in his hand. He meets you and asks you to help him find the address. You have two choices before you:

First, to go with him and complete your good deed by accompanying him to his destination and then say goodbye and leave him.

Second, indicate with your hand and giving various signs guide him towards his destination.

It is evident that in both cases, you have 'guided' him towards his destination but there is a difference between these two; the second one is just 'expressing the way' and the first, is taking one to one's

destination. The Holy Quran and Traditions of Islam mention both ways.

On the other hand, sometimes guidance only has a legal quality to it, that is, formed by means of laws and rules and sometimes it has an instinctive quality, that is, by means of facilities provided by creation like the guidance of a seed to becoming a complete human being and both of these ways are mentioned in the Holy Quran and the Traditions.

By clarifying the means of guidance (and, naturally, the point opposite it, leading astray or error), we return to the main discussion.

We read in many of the verses of the Holy Quran that guidance and leading astray is God's work. Doubtlessly, the 'indication of the way' comes from God. Why? Because He sent the Prophet and sent the heavenly Book to show people the way.

But 'reaching the goal' through coercion or force clearly does not agree with free will and choice but because all power and strength which is necessary to reach one's goal God gives us and it is He Who gives us success upon this way, this sense of guidance is also from God, that is, preparation of the equipment and the preliminaries and providing them is at the disposal of humanity.

2. An important question:

Now, an important question arises and that is that we read in many verses of the Holy Quran,

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ ۖ فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

"God guides Whom He wills and misleads whom He wills." (***14:4***)

Some people, without considering other verses of the Holy Quran, and the interpretation which one verse has with others, immediately, upon seeing this verse, object and say, "If God guides whom He wills and misleads whom He wills, what are we supposed to do in the middle?"

The important point is that the verses of the Holy Quran must always be studied in relation to each other in order to understand them in truth. Here we will recall several other verses about guidance and leading astray so that you can study them in relation to the above verse,

يُثَبِّتُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِالْقَوْلِ الثَّابِتِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ الظَّالِمِينَ ۚ وَيَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ

"God will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm in this world and in the hereafter; but God will leave, to stray, those who do wrong: God does what He wills. (***14:27***)

الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَانٍ أَتَاهُمْ ۚ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَعِنْدَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ قَلْبِ مُتَكَبِّرٍ جَبَّارٍ

"Thus does God leave to stray such as transgress and live in doubt." (***40:34***)

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

"And those who strive in Our (***Cause***)***, we will certainly guide them to Our paths: for verily God is with those who do right."*** (***29:69***)

As we see, God's will is not unaccountable. He neither gives the success of guidance to a person nor does He deny a person success. Those who undertake the jihad upon God's Way, war with their difficulties and show strength and firmness of purpose, have been promised guidance and this is justice.

But those who create oppression and suppression and those who take steps towards extravagance, doubt, injustice and causing temptation in hearts, God takes away their possibility of guidance. Their hearts, as a result of these deeds, are darkened and they will not be able to succeed in reaching the station of wellbeing. This is how the Creator leaves the results of our deeds in our own hands and this ill justice.

3. Knowledge of the eternal is a cause to arise

The last point which we feel should be mentioned here in the discussion of predestination and free will is the excuse used by some fatalists as knowledge of the eternal of God.

They say, "Does God know that so and so at such and such an hour on such and such a day will kill someone or will drink an alcoholic beverage?" If we say, "He does not know," we have denied God's knowledge and if we say, "Yes, that person must do this, and otherwise God's knowledge will be imperfect."

Thus, in order to preserve God's knowledge, a person is obliged to sin and obey God!!

But the fact is, this excuse was fabricated in order to cover over the sins they wanted to commit but they have forgotten the fact that we say that God knew from eternity whether we would be inclined towards free will and choice and will obey or sin. That is, our will or choice was also part of God's knowledge. Thus, if we are obliged to sin, God's knowledge will become ignorant. (Pay careful attention here).

Allow us to put forth some questions on this point to clarify them. Assume that a teacher knows that a lazy student will fail at the end of the year and the teacher is one hundred per cent sure of this fact because of years of experience as a teacher.

When the student fails, can the student take the teacher to task and say, "Your knowledge and what you foresaw caused me to fail."

Or, let us assume that he is a sinless and pure person and he knew of a murder which would take place on such and such a day and interferes to prevent it, does the knowledge of this pure person take away the responsibility of the criminal, obliging the criminal to commit the crime?

Or, assume that a new machine has been invented which can predict the occurrence of an event several hours before it happens and it can say that so and so at such and such an hour in such and such a place will commit such and such an act. Does this oblige that person to do this?

In summary, God's knowledge never obliges anyone to do anything.

Think and Answer

1. How many kinds of guidance are there? Describe them.

2. Recite the verses of the Quran which describe God's guidance and leading astray.

3. What is the interpretation of God's guidance and leading astray?

4. What is meant by Gods eternal knowledge?

5. Does this knowledge withdraw our duty and responsibility? Give an example.

Lesson 10: God's Justice and the Issue of Eternity

We know that the Holy Quran directly speaks of the eternal punishment to be given to the kufar. That is, it speaks about eternity.

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْكُفَّارَ نَارَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ هِيَ حَسْبُهُمْ ۚ وَلَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُقِيمٌ

"God has promised the hypocrites, men and women and the kafirs, the fire of hell; therein shall they dwell; sufficient is it for them; for them is the curse of God, and an enduring punishment." (***9:68***)

Just as in the verse following that, the Quran promises the believing men and the believing women

gardens in Paradise forever.

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

"God has promised to believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God: that is the supreme felicity." (***9:72***)

This question then arises and that is how can one accept that in one's lifetime of eighty or one hundred years, one commits evil deeds and then for eternity – millions of years – is punished.

Of course, this is not important as to rewards because the ocean of God's Mercy is very great and however much greater is the reward, it shows greater virtue and mercy but as to evil deeds, they are punished for eternity because of limited sins. How can this be reconciled with God's justice? Should a balance not exist between punishment and reward?

Answer:

In order to reach a final solution to this discussion, several points need to be noted:

A. Punishments on the Day of Resurrection do not resemble punishments in this world. For instance, a person is found guilty of aggression and plunder and he spends some time in prison whereas the punishment at the Judgment takes the form of efforts of one's deeds and the particularities of a person's acts.

In clearer terms, the difficulties which one bears in the other world is the direct result of their deeds. The Holy Quran explains this very clearly where it says,

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

"Then on that Day, not a soul will be wronged in the least and you shall but be repaid the meeds of your past deeds." (***36:54***)

With one simple example, we can visualize this truth that a person who goes after narcotics and alcoholic drinks and no matter how much one explains that these things will ruin him, and sicken his heart and destroy his nerves, he does not listen.

He spends several weeks or months drowned in these killing pleasures and gradually develops ulcers, heart disease, nerve disease and then he spends tens of years until the end of his life suffering because of this and he groans night and day.

Can one object here why does a person who only sinned for several weeks or months have to suffer for tens of years?

It is readily stated in response that this is the result of his own actions. Even if he were to live longer than the Prophet Noah and were to live for tens of thousands of years and we were to continuously see him in pain and anguish, we would say that this is something he brought upon himself with his deeds.

Punishment on the Day of Judgment is like this. Thus, no one can object to the justice of the situation.

B. This is wrong that some people assume that the time limit of the punishment must be the same extent as the sin because the relation between a sin and punishment is not a temporal one. It depends upon the result and quality of the sin.

For instance, it is possible that a person in one second kill an innocent person and according to the laws of some countries, he is given life imprisonment. Here we see that the time of the sin was one quickly passing second whereas the punishment is for tens of years. No one con– siders this to be oppressive. Why? Because the question here is not one of days or weeks or months or years. It depends upon the quality of the sin and its result.

C. Eternity in hell and eternal punishment only belongs to those people who have closed all doors to salvation for themselves and they have drowned themselves in corruption, licentiousness, kufr and hypocrisy so that the darkness of sin takes over their entire being and, as a result, that person takes on the color of sin and kufr.

The Holy Quran says,

بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

"Nay, those who seek gain in evil and are girt round by their sins they are companions of the fire: therein shall they abide (***forever***)***."*** (***2:81***)

These kinds of individuals have completely cut off their connection with God and have closed all doors to their salvation and wellbeing.

These kinds of individuals are like birds who purposefully break their own wings, pullout their feathers, are obliged to walk forever upon the earth and are deprived of flying through the skies.

Noticing the three points given above clarifies the issue that eternal punishment which belongs to a particular group of hypocrites or kuffar does not oppose the principle of justice. This is the ominous result of their deeds themselves. The Divine Prophets had previously told them that their deeds would have these results.

It is clear that if individuals be ignorant and the invitation of the prophets not be known to them and if they commit evil deeds out of ignorance, they will not receive such a difficult punishment.

It is also necessary to point out that verses of the Holy Quran and Islamic Traditions are used because the ocean of Divine Mercy is so great and extensive that a large group of transgressors are included; some by means of intercession; some by means of forgiveness and some, because of small, good deeds which they performed. God, in His greatness, gives great reward for those small, good deeds.

And another group, after they have been punished for a time in hell: and have been purified, they will return because of Divine Mercy.

The only group remaining is the one which has enmity towards the truth and commit oppression, corruption and hypocrisy so that their whole being is covered in oppression, kufr and faithlessness.

Think and Answer

1. How is it that some people think that eternity does not conform to Divine Justice?

2. Are the punishments in the other world similar to the punishment in this world? If not, what are they like?

3. Does jus tice demand that there be a balance between the time of a sin and its punishment?

4. Who will receive eternal punishment?

5. Who will receive Divine Forgiveness?

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