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The Outward Life And The Life Of Meaning

Man has, within his outward, animal existence, a spiritual life. Man's spiritual life, the preparedness for which is in every individual, originates in the growth and perfection of his actions and aims. The perfection and felicity of man, and hence his descent and wickedness, are dependent on his spiritual life which is related to his actions and intentions and goals and to what aim and purpose he progresses by the vehicle of his deeds.

Our attention to the precepts of Islam is only from the direction related to individual and social mundane existence. However, there is no doubt that Islamic precepts are saturated with a philosophy of life covering all matters. Islam never despises the problems of life or deems them of no significance.

From the point of view of Islam, spirituality has no separate existence from life in this world. Just as, if the spirit became separate from the body it would no longer belong to this world and another world would have to determine its destiny, spirituality separate from life also does not belong to this world, and talk of spirituality subtracted from life in this world is absurd.

But it must not be thought that the philosophy of Islamic precepts is confined to questions of this life; not at all. At any rate, the application of these precepts is the means of travelling the path of servitude and journeying on the way of nearness and of perfecting existence.

Man has a movement towards inward perfection which is outside the limits of the body and matter and individual and social life, and has its source in a chain of spiritual stations. Man, by his submission and sincerity, takes part in that movement. He witnesses, sometimes in this world, and, if not, in the next world where the veils have been removed, all the stations which he passes through, which are these stations and degrees of nearness, and in the end of wilayah.

Prophethood and Wilayah

Al-`Allamah at-Tabataba'i has written:

The commands and principles of the din, one section of which are these social regulations, form, exoterically, a series of social concepts, and the connection of these with felicity and wretchedness in the next world , or, in simple religious terminology, with the blessings of Paradise and the afflictions of Hell, depends on realities which come into existence by means of the practice of these principles and regulations or the non-practice of them by man, and which are stored behind the curtains of perceptions, and become manifest and revealed after his transition to the second coming forth (the life of the next world) and the tearing of the curtains of heedlessness and the veil of egoism. So underneath the veil, the social life which man spends in the observance of religious principles is a living event and a spiritual life, in which the blessings of the next world and its everlasting felicities originate.

Or, expressed in another way, they are its phenomena. This is a fact and reality which has been given the name wilayah. Nubuwwah (prophethood) is a reality which gains access to the religious commandments and Divine precepts related to life, and imparts them to people, and wilayah is a reality which comes into existence as the result of the putting into practice in man of what was caused to descend through the Prophet and the Divine precepts.

Imam, The Bearer of Wilayah

Concerning the testimony relating to wilayah and its bearer, the Imam, and the fact that the human world is never without a man who is the bearer of wilayah (the Perfect Man), al-`Allamah at-Tabataba' i has written, in proving and making certain the way of wilayah in which man travels through the degrees of inward perfection, and becomes a dweller in the station of Divine nearness, there can be no doubt, because the exoteric aspects of the din cannot be conceived of without an inward reality; and the scheme of the Creator, Who provided man with the exoteric aspects of the din (practical, ethical and social precepts) and Who summoned him to His side, will necessarily make ready this inward reality which is the link between the exoteric aspects of the din and the station of the spirit; and the evidence which gives instruction in the human world through the witness and perpetuity of prophet hood (the shari`ahs and the commandments) and establishes the regulations of the din also gives guidance through the evidence, perpetuity and actuality of the establishment of wilayah.

So how is it conceivable that one of the levels of tawhid, or one of the commandments of the din actually has a living mandate as long as the inward reality which it necessitates does not exist, or as long as the link between the world of man and that level is severed? Someone who is the holder of the degrees of nearness, and is the leader of the caravan of the people of wilayah, and preserves the link between humanity and that reality is called, in the language of the Qur'an, Imam."

The Imam is someone who has authority on behalf of Allah (al- Haqq), may He be praised,for leadership in the way of wilayah, and who has taken the reins of spiritual guidance into his hands W ilayah, which makes the hearts of the slaves of Allah shine, is the rays and beams of light from the centre of light which is with Him, and strewn blessings particles from the shoreless sea which is near to Him.

In Usul al-Kafi, in the chapter, "The Imams are the Light of Allah", it is narrated from Abu Khalid al-Kabuli that he said: "I asked al-Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) about this ayah:

فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالنُّورِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلْنَا

"Therefore believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Light which We have revealed;" (***64:8***)

The Imam then expounded on the meaning of this ayah and said: `By Allah, O Abu Khalid, the Light of the Imam in the hearts of the people of Iman (who are under the influence of his sovereignty) is brighter than the light of the sun during the day.' "

The meaning is that it is a great mistake to restrict the purpose, the intention, the inward and outward aspects of the precepts of the din only to the results that ensue according to the perspective of this life; and to interpret nearness to Allah, which is the direct result of the true practice of these actions, as a derived or figurative matter of the same kind of nearness to the "Lords of wealth and power" in this world, without there being an active design in the spiritual, real life of man, and without it raising him, in reality, up the ladder of existence.

Those who really become close to the center of being, naturally enjoy its benefits, and these are the ones who are fully conversant with the world of man and who take within their authority the spirits and hearts of others, and are the witnesses of the deeds of others.

Fundamentally, every existent that takes a step forward on the path of the completion of his own destiny, and travels through one of the stages in the perfection of his self walks the road of approach to al-Haqq. Man is also an existent in this world, and the way to his perfection is not only that he should progress, so to speak, in what is today called civilization that is, a series of sciences and technical skills which are effective and useful in the amelioration of this life, or a series of customs and traditions which are requisites of the improved life of society.

If we envisage man only on this level, then this really is what it is all about, but man has another way, another future, which is obtained through the refinement of the soul and through acquaintance with the ultimate goal, that is to say, with the Most Purified Essence of Unity.

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