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Discourse Ten: Alcoholic Beverages, Cause of Humanity's Decline

As opposed to other religions—the teachings of which are either based upon withdrawal from the society such as Christianity, Brahmanism, and Buddhism, or fix upon the development of a specific tribe or race such as Judaism—Islam has elected its system of enlightenment as a global social system.

It ensures human happiness in the setting of civilization—something that humans can never do without—by inspiring complete harmony among people. Islam intends to set up an organization whose elements consist of superior and pure humans who attain perfect human beatitude by developing and evolving themselves.

On this base, in order to form its intended society, Islam elects the fitr® human or the natural human; that is, the human originated by the system of creation, equipped with the blessing of sound reason by which it is differentiated from other animals, and free of the taint of delusions, superstitions, and other futile imitative thoughts. This has been made very clear throughout the Noble Qur'an.

Islam is aware that the human created by the system of creation and equipped with sound reason understands through its healthy mind, perceptions, and God-given fitrah that even though it and all other creations desire and seek their own happiness in the course of their lives, they are in no way independent in their origination or subsistence, in attaining happiness or resolving their own needs—they are in need of other persons in all aspects.

Moreover, no being in the world of creation has created itself or has sovereignty in managing its existence or maintaining it. The whole of creation, which incorporates humanity and all other phenomena in the cosmos, is dependent upon a point above and beyond nature. An indomitable and unseen will governs and sustains existence in accordance with the general laws of causality.

Intellectual development, the most important type of worship

This understanding guides us to the conclusion that we must surrender to the One God—the supernatural Life, Knowledge, and Power—and advance toward the destination anticipated in our existential make—up which has been entrusted to reason.

The Noble Qur'an stresses that:

"Indeed, Religion is surrender to Allah..."1

It also underscores that religion is a series of teachings that are harmonious with the special make-up of humans and provides for their existential needs in an absolutely balanced manner:

"So set thy face toward the pure religion; it is in accordance with the nature [fitrah] of God upon which He has formed the nature of humankind. There is no alteration in the creation of God. This is the enduring (and true) religion; however, most humans do not know."2

After little thought, a person who understands the general and decisive view of Islam—that humans must live collectively in a way harmonious with the human make-up—will conclude that Islam considers preservation of a sound mind the most important of duties and does not give permission for its defilement even for a moment. This is a correct assumption.

Islam entrusts management of the individual and social affairs of humans to sound reason and does not sanction the interference of false sentiments except to the extent that is reasonably acceptable.

Hence, with all its might it prevents anything that unbalances the natural activity of this God-given blessing or neutralizes the efforts of the intellect. Consequently, it forbids gambling (which is based upon blind luck), lying, calumny, dissimulation, fraud, and things of this sort that unbalance social reason and neutralize thought and judgment.

Included in this range of forbidden acts is consuming alcoholic beverages, which is strictly forbidden in Islam such that for drinking even one drop of intoxicant a penalty of eighty lashes has been determined.

The corrupting effects of freedom of the use of alcoholic beverages

Among acts that cause interference with reason and contemplation, drinking alcoholic beverages is the only one that works directly on the mind and rationality and is solely performed to kill thought and fortify emotions that deny an overseer.

Accordingly, the evil moral, mental, religious, and health-related effects it spreads in individuals and the society are undeniably clear. Due to this act, for every year that passes in the history of humanity, millions are hospitalized with various diseases related to the gullet, lungs, liver, mind, and so on.

No year passes without multitudes of the alcoholic insane being transferred to psychiatric hospitals or millions of people losing their moral control and becoming afflicted with mental deviations and intellectual disorders.

Nor does a year pass that this deadly poison does not lead humanity to innumerable instances of murder, suicide, crime, theft, treachery, pimping, scandal, defamation, betrayal of secrets, vilification, use of indecent language, and harassment. A moment does not pass that it does not enslave noble human individuals such that they are no longer bound by any rules and regulations.

The pure reason that is lost from society everyday due to the consumption of millions of liters of alcoholic beverages is a deplorable and irredeemable waste. In addition, from the intellectual aspect, one cannot have much hope of general goodness and happiness from a human society that leaves behind the greater part of its identifier as human beings—i.e. correct and pure reason.

The first time the Noble Qur'an prohibits alcohol consumption, it briefly indicates its individual and social evils and names this act ithm (sin), an evil act that entails undesirable consequences and various deprivations.

"Say: My Lord has forbidden all indecencies in public and private and sin [ithm] and unjust persecution..."3

Then, the last time it forbids this act—with utmost stress—it specifically indicates two of its iniquities, the diffusion of which weakens the pillars of society and ultimately collapses the structure of public happiness.

Elsewhere, the Qur'an states:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَن يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاء فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصدُدَّكُمْ عَن ذِكْرِ اللّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلاَةِ فَهَلْ ﴿ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَن يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاء فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصدُدَّكُمْ عَن ذِكْرِ اللّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلاَةِ فَهَلْ ﴿

"Satan seeks to precipitate enmity and hatred among you through intoxicants and gambling, and to debar you from remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will you then forbear?"4

It is quite clear that the only aim of Islamic teachings is to create an upright society where friendship and conciliation reign. A society where all its members consider themselves responsible before God to carry out the human laws that guaranty their happiness and never forget God or disregard responsibilities.

This is what is briefly mentioned as law in the Noble Qur'an and that which is cited from the Prophet in this area is extensive and explicates all the physical and spiritual detriments of intoxicants.

Islam's crusade against alcohol

The day Islam banned alcoholic beverages the entire human world, excluding a small number of Jews, was afflicted with this deadly poison. It was common in all advanced and primitive societies of the time and drinking liquor had no legal prohibition. In those days, generation after generation, the people grew and multiplied with this unsavory way of thinking and practice.

To be sure, uprooting this practice by Islam was as hard as eradicating the belief of idolatry—if not harder.

This is why in order to carry out the interdiction of alcohol, Islam undertook a lenient and piecemeal method and implemented its aim over the course of several years—the span between revelation of the verse in Serat al-A'ref and the verse in Serat al-Me'idah. At first, the Qur'an vaguely proscribed use of alcohol in Serat al-A'ref introducing it as ithm and then relatively clearer in Serat al-Baqarah and finally plainly forbid it in Serat al-Me'idah.

"They ask you regarding intoxicants and gambling. Say: In both are great sin and some benefits for people; however, the sin of these two is greater than their usefulness..."5

At the start of the Prophet's appointment, it was proscribed in a simple manner but ultimately it was severely forbidden with "punishment by the lash".

Even though at first Islam had problems in imposing the ban and clearing the atmosphere of the love for alcohol, it was extremely successful in accomplishing this onerous decree and realizing its general acceptance, which is truly astounding.

The final verse banning alcohol, which is in Serat al-Me'idah, shows that even several years after the interdiction, people still had not completely given up their ancient practice. However, as historical evidence shows, after the definite prohibition of alcohol, the people promptly drove the desire of consuming alcohol out of their minds and broke all casks and decanters in the streets and poured their contents onto the earth.

There is no mention of the execution of the punishment for drinking alcohol at the time of the Prophet (S), i.e., from the time it was banned and its punishment was determined until the passing of the Prophet (S), even though many instances for the execution of punishments for murder, fornication, and similar sins have been cited.

In the fourteen century long history of Islam, it can be said about the Islamic society that hundreds of millions of Muslims have come and gone without tasting a drop of this deadly poison. In Islamic nations, where countless Muslims live, except for great cities that enjoy so-called modern civilization, where this poison proliferates in line with civilization, it is certain that millions of Muslims have never even seen the color of wine throughout their lives.6

- 1. Serat el 'Imren 3:19.
- 2. Srat al-Rm 30:30.
- 3. Srat al-A'rf 7:33.
- 4. Srat al-Midah 5:91.
- 5. Srat al-Baqarah 2:219.
- 6. Extracted from the yearbook, "Maktab-e Tashayyu".

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