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Fourth Session - The Natural Disasters

After the usual prayers and address of the Almighty Allah, the Imam (as)said, "O Mufaddhal! I have given you in detail the arguments and observations in regard to the exact planning and design as regards human beings, the animal and the vegetable kingdom. They should suffice by way of instruction for all who desire instruction.

I now give you a detailed account of the calamities and catastrophes which occur at times and which these ignorant people marshal as argument for their denial of creation and purposeful Design of the Creator.

I shall also give in detail, the rationale of the troubles and miseries which the atheistic and Manichean Sect deny and shall also make mention of death and destruction which these sects have called into question, and what the naturalists of old have said.

The Natural Disasters

Those people have said that the universe has come into being by sheer chance, so that this account may serve to repudiate their arguments. May Allah (swt) destroy them – how they are being led astray. Some ignorant people have construed these events which occur from time to time, for example epidemics, jaundice, the absence of chlorophyll of the trees, hail storms, locusts, as an argument for the denial of Purposeful creation of the Creator.

The answer to this is that if there is no Designer of the universe, why are they not more severe catastrophes, as for example the complete disorder in the universe, the rending of the earth, the cessation of sunrise, the drying up of river beds so as to leave no drop of water to moisten the lips, the air becoming stationary leading to the disorganisation of all matter, the advance of oceanic water to the earth submerging it. Who guards all these events? Whose planning is behind the scenes?

When you say that if there had been a Designer and Creator, such swarms of locusts would not have visited us to cause such heavy damage, such virulent epidemics would not have taken toll c>l' millions of

lives, hail storms would not have been so severe as to destroy our corn fields. If all these are real facts, why does not this universe get disorganised leading to the destruction of the whole world? Why does not the ocean submerge the earth with gushing water? Why does not the air become stationary to stifle all living beings? Why does not all this occur?

This shows that the Designer is there, Who prevents such occurrence in order that the universe may not be disorganised, nor the species become extinct, nor total annihilation takes place. What takes place is by way of the natural consequences of man's action, a warning and a preventive taking place now and then in the form of epidemics, locusts, ravages of crops and gardens, hail storms etc. 'this is a negation of the argument against purposeful creation. I ask of them why these epidemics and locust swarms do not continue for ever so as to destroy the universe? They visit occasionally, and after a stay, they leave.

Do you not see that this world is protected against these horrible calamities and catastrophes? If any of these events occurred in this world, it would be completely annihilated. These calamities befall occasionally, in diluted severity, just to warn men and to ameliorate their conduct. They do not perpetuate but get removed as and when men get dismayed in regard to their safety. These calamities befall as warning; and they get removed through Divine Grace.

Trouble Free Life

Just as the Manichean Sect has questioned the suitability of these calamities and troubles which befall men, in the same way the atheists have failed to realise their true nature anti dubbed them as meaningless. Both say that if this universe were governed by a Compassionate and Merciful Creator, these obnoxious occurrences would not have taken place. lie who marshals this argument tries to conclude that it would have been appropriate if man's life in this world had been trouble free.

Had it been so, man's conceit and selfishness would have led him to the conduct which would not have been in consonance with religion or his religious life. Just as you find persons nurtured in luxury and comfort who mostly forget their manhood and their state of having been brought up by somebody. They forget that they can receive some injury or sorrow or that some calamity may befall them. They even forget whether they have to sympathise with some weak person or to pity some needy person. They are not amenable to feeling sorrow at another person's trouble or feeling compassion on the weakling or showing kindness towards troubled souls.

When, however, trouble befalls them, they feel its pinch and are then open to reason. They are awakened more than in proportion to their ignorance and folly. They begin to act in a' way which was incumbent on them all along. If this trouble had not befallen them, the would have continued to look upon themselves as gods, to spend their lives in conceit, to have no pity or sympathy with anybody else. Would such conduct have been in the interests of their religion and this world?

Certainly not! Along with defective religion, they would have suffered worldly harm. People would have

hated them and condemned them. Such selfish persons would have created disorder in this universe in all affairs, industry, commerce, knowledge and mutual conduct etc. People who deny these matters, looking upon them as meaningless, are like those children who condemn bitter and unpalatable medicine and get offended at the precautions against harmful foods.

They dislike work, and like only to play freely, indulge in absurdities, to eat and drink without let or hindrance. They do not know that such license and idleness would deteriorate their mental, moral and physical growth, that these palatable but harmful edibles would lead to different ailments and diseases. Their betterment lies in acquiring knowledge, and medicines hold many benefits for them despite a little unpalatableness.

They say as to why men have not been given sinless conduct so that the Almighty Allah may not have needed to pinch them with troubles. The answer to them will be that in that case man would not have been worthy of any credit for goodness nor entitled to reward therefore.

If they further say that being allowed every sort of pleasure and comfort, where did any harm lie if he did not win credit or reward by virtue of his goodness? The answer will be to present this proposition to a rational and healthy person telling him to sit on idly, assuring him of the fulfilment of all his needs without any efforts. Then see if his mind agrees to it. You will find him far better pleased and satisfied with the little he gets by his own effort rather than a great lot which comes to him unearned, without effort. Similarly the blessings of the Hereafter will be congenial to them only when they are earned through effort.

Man is therefore allowed a two-fold boon. Firstly, he gets a great reward for his effort in this world. Secondly, he has been shown the way to seek it by his own effort so as to get the maximum satisfaction for achievement. It is quite natural for a man to allow no worth to anything obtained without effort or title. On the contrary, whatever he gets as a result of effort and little, he sets great store by it.

As such, the blessings of the Almighty Allah which will be bestowed on him by virtue of his self-control within prescribed limits will be far more worthwhile to him in comparison, with a state of mind where he did not have to control his lusts and every unlawful thing had ceased to have any attraction for him. In that case, the blessings of the Hereafter allowed by the Almighty Allah would not have been so precious to him. The reward that he will get as a result of his intense effort and earning will be very much valuable to him.

If they now say whether it does not so happen that some persons are very much pleased to get a boon without any right, therefore, what argument is to be advanced on the same lines for people who will feel gratified at getting the blessings of the hereafter?

The answer to them will be that this is a subject, if people get convinced thereof, that they will get the blessings of the Hereafter without effort, it will lead to all sorts of mischief, sinfulness and moral degradation and turpitude. Who would then have held himself back from moral turpitude or put in efforts

is for virtuous conduct when he had known himself as a sure recipient of the blessings of the hereafter?

Who could have been sure of the stage of **life**, **honour and property** of himself and of his family about the harm people would do in case there was no fear of punishment and retribution? The damage thereof would have been caused in this very life to the people before the Doomsday.

Justice and ingenuity would both be repudiated. It would have been questionable, if such irregularity and disorder had entered the Design. They also speak of the troubles and inconveniences which sometimes have a general application affecting the righteous and leading the mischievous unharmed. They say, how can it be an appropriated design of the Omniscient, what ground do you advance?

The answer to this will be that such troubles do befall the righteous and the mischievous all, and there are benefits for both categories ordained by the Almighty Allah. The righteous suffer troubles and inconveniences and a restitution of the blessings to them causes gratitude and perseverance in them. As for the mischievous, their trouble breaks from evil conduct.

There is a benefit of the betterment for all those who are spared from the impact of these troubles. Besides these two categories, for the righteous the state of goodness is a source of happiness and a further inducement and discernment for still better conduct. For the evil-doers also, the protection against harm is a special boon from the Almighty Allah's Grace shown to them without them deserving it. This induces them to act kindly and to forgive those who do them harm. A critic may say that such troubles befall their properties, yet sometimes their physical bodies suffer even to destruction, like being burnt, being drowned, being; washed off by floods or being buried alive.

The answer to them will be that the Almighty Allah has ordained therein the good of both categories. For the virtuous because of the departure from this world and its troubles and miseries, and for the mischievous in that their capacity to sin is thereby cut off.

To sum up, the Almighty Allah diverts the consequences of all such actions by His Omniscience and Omnipotence towards betterment just as, when a tree is broken down by wind, a good carpenter turns it to beneficial uses.

Similarly, the Almighty Designer diverts the consequences of these calamities which befall their properties and their physical bodies to their benefit and betterment. It' someone asks as to why these calamities befall men, the answer will be, lest they become inclined to sinfulness because of along; lease of safety, lest the mischievous indulge in sinfulness altogether while the virtuous men become slack in doing good.

Both these modes of conduct over-power men when they are allowed a long lease of ease and comfort. Such occurrences keep them warned and deter them from such conduct – and therein lies their good. If they were altogether relieved of trouble, they would transgress the limits of sinfulness just as the people of bygone ages did, so that they had to be destroyed by deluges to clear the earth of them.

Death

There is one point fixed in the mind for these deniers of Design and Purpose, to wit, death and annihilation. They think that it would have been proper it men had been given everlasting lives without any trouble or harm.

It is necessary to carry the argument to its logical conclusion to see the consequences it leads to. Just see that if all men had lived everlasting lives, this earth would have become too narrow for them; they would not have had room enough for their dwellings, their agriculture and the provision of requirements for leading their lives. Notwithstanding the constant axe of death working all the time, while there are quarrels in regard to the dwellings and the cropping fields; even wars are fought with blood–shed on this account. What would have been their condition if no one had died while reproduction of new individuals continued? Now even when deaths continue, we have such difficulties.

What would have been the stakes if none had ever died? People would have been over-powered by greed, lust and hardheartedness. If they had been assured of everlasting lives, no one would have been contented with his possessions. No one would have liked to part with anything to the needy, nor would there have been any solace after a misfortune. They would have been tired of life and of all the mundane matters. The man with a long life gets tired of it, yearns for death to supervene and provide relief.

They said that it should have been so ordained that all troubles and ailments would have been removed from among them, so that they should not have longed for death nor should have been desirous of it. The reply to this is that they would have fallen into evil ways and disobedience.

If they say that to obviate the perplexity due to shortage of housing and living conditions their reproduction could have been stopped, the reply will be that in that case untold numbers of creatures would have been denied entry into this world and thus deprived of the blessings of the Almighty Allah in this life and the Hereafter, in case but one generation were allowed admittance without the capacity for further reproduction.

And then they may say that He (swt) should have created all men, those born and those to be born in the future, in one lot.

The answer to them will be, as stated already, that the contingency will arise as to the shortage of housing and husbanding facilities. Where could room enough have been found for houses to be built, agriculture to be carried on, communications to be established. In that case in the absence of sexual relationships, there would be no community interests among the kith and kin, no mutual help in times of hardship and distress. Whence would have been obtained the enjoyment of parentage in rearing up the offspring?

This shows clearly that whatever direction the fancy moves away from the Purposeful Design, it proves to be untenable, absurd and preposterous.

Injustice

A critic may, perhaps, raise an objection from another point of view and say as to how can it be ascertained that there is a Creator and Designer, when we see in life the strong man usurping everything, the strong oppressing the weak, while the weak is oppressed and is insulted. The virtuous is a prey to adversity and troubles while a reprobate is healthy and wealthy. He who dishonours principles is not punished speedily.

As such it is concluded that if there had been a Design permeating the universe, all business would have been conducted regularly. The virtuous would have been well fed and the scoundrels would have suffered depravation. The strong would have been prevented from oppressing the weak. The evil-doer would have received speedy retribution.

The answer to this will be that in that case virtue, the special merit of man would have lost its value. The rest of the Creation does not possess the merit of conviction in the promises of rewards of the Almighty Allah, and there under submitting their libido to the discipline of righteous conduct. They, in that case would have been like quadrupeds, who are kept in under control by the rod and the appeal to stomach, to whom constantly either a dagger is shown, or fodder is offered to keep them in order. No one would have acted in accordance with a conviction for eternal bliss or perdition.

They would have been degraded from the level of humanity to that of animalism. No one would have cared for the spiritual blessings. Man would have laboured for the immediately of the moment. A righteous person would have acted for mere pittance and worldly possessions, while a reprobate would have abstained from oppressions and tyranny just for the fear of sudden chastisement, so that all the action of men would have centred round the immediacy of the moment.

There would have been not the remotest thought for the rewards and punishments ordained by the Almighty Allah, nor would they have been entitled to the eternal blessings of the Hereafter. All this would have led to a serious situation.

Despite all this, the penury and opulence mentioned by the critic is not altogether wide off the mark. It is a fact that, as people recognise, the righteous do get of this world's resources of wealth, so as not to let people imagine that only the nonbelievers are favoured with, while the virtuous are denied the amenities of this life, lest men in general might take to villainous conduct.

You also see that the villains are chastised in this world also, when their villainies exceed alt abounds and people are harmed excessively by them, as the Pharaoh was drowned, Nebuchadnezzar was disfigured and Bilbis was murdered.

If on account of some Profound Purpose, beyond the ken of men, some evil-doers are allowed a respite or some virtuous people have their guerdon postponed to a later day, it does not falsify the Design, as such affairs take place even in the rulers of the world.

This however, does not vitiate the policy. In fact the affairs wherein they procrastinate, are found to be more in consonance with statesmanship and far–sightedness. And when overwhelming evidence and the conclusions thereof force to the belief that there must be the Creator and Designer of the assortment of the universe, what can hinder Him from planning the good of is creatures?

No human reason can imagine that the Creator would leave His creation at large, except that it be through incapacity, ignorance, or willfulness all of which are foreign to the Almighty Allah's Design. Allah (swt) is neither incapacitated for the betterment of His Creation, nor is He unaware of their situation, nor, Allah (swt) forbid. He is wilfully inclined.

The failure to ameliorate because of incapacity, ignorance and willfulness, is understandable in as much as the incapable is unable to create such wonderfully magnificent creatures, the ignorant has no percipience of the methods of rectitude and ingenuity while the wilful cannot turn to the creation of such magnificent Handiwork.

And things being as they are, it follows that the Creator of the universe shall, as a matter of course, look to the betterment of His creation, though the profundity of the design may not be apparent to the people in general. Even the policies of the worldly sovereigns are inscrutable, which on scrutiny may be found quite sound when put to the test.

In case you are in doubt about the essence of a drug or nutriment, and after experimentation twice or thrice its properties become crystal clear, will you not cast off all doubts about its essence from your mind? Why do you not, then, subject this matter to experience? Why do you not realise that whatever is ordained by the Almighty Allah is in the best interests of His creatures?

What about these ignorant people then, who in the face of such overwhelming evidence, which cannot even be calculated, cannot be convinced of the Creator and Designer of the universe?

Even if half the universe and what it contains were found to be disordered and disorganised, it would ill become reason and knowledge to regard it as without Purpose and Design, since the second half is in a state of perfection and order, which obviates at once such a postulate. How can such a postulate be admitted seeing that everything in the universe is found on scrutiny and observation, to be in the most organized orderliness, so much so that nothing can be imagined which has not a superior counterpart among the actual Divine Creation.

Know that the universe is called by the name of 'Cosmos', which means embellishment in the Greek language, by the philosophers and the claimants to wisdom. It is named because of the perfection of organisation. Why did they not then call it Divine Ordinance? The name Cosmos shows that the orderly

dispensation is based on exquisite gracefulness. I wonder at those people who overlook the errors in medical knowledge, which is so faulty, but call in to question the universal order, which is flawless.

I wonder at the conduct of the claimants of philosophy, who have no knowledge of the sublimity of creation and yet question the grandeur of the almighty Allah. I particularly wonder at the wretch, Mani, who claims an understanding of the mysteries of knowledge while he is quite ignorant of the argument of the profundity of creation, and he thus calls into question the Omniscience of the Almighty Allah in the matter of creation.

Existence of God

Above all them, are the atheists to be pitied, who demand to see with their physical eyes One Who is inscrutable even to the intellect. This being impossible, they took to flat denial of His Existence. They demanded, why He cannot be encompassed within the intellect? He transcends intellect just as things beyond the visual field cannot be perceived by the eyes.

As an example, if you see a piece of stone flying up in the air, the logical conclusion you draw is that someone has hurled it above. The eye may not have seen it and yet the intellect realises it because of its discerning capacity, in that the piece of stone cannot go up by itself. You see that the eye stopped at a point and could not advance further. Similarly the intellect stops short at its prescribed limit in the matter of the Divine Immanence. It cannot advance further.

We say, however, that the intellect which perceives that man possesses mind and soul, notwithstanding the fact that no one has seen the mind with the physical sense, the same intellect should be able to realise and admit the Existence of the Creator, without being able to perceive His Essence.

And if they now ask why He laid the obligation on the puny man to acquire cognisance of Him by his intellect seeing that he cannot recognise Him fully, the answer will be that the demand to recognise Him is conditioned by the extent to which human intellect can possibly do, by the powers it possesses. It is to believe in His Existence and to obey His Commandments and Prohibitions.

They are not required to encompass His Immanence and his Attributes. No ruler requires of his subjects to know the sovereigns stature or completion. All that is required is loyalty and obedience to the laws of the land.

Supposing a man approaches the door of a royal palace to demand the ruler to present himself to him so that he may know him fully, else he would not obey him, he lays himself open to accusation. Similarly he who conditions his belief in the Almighty Creator with a full knowledge of His Immanence, offends the Almighty Allah.

And if they ask as to why are they inadequate, the answer will be that the imagination cannot soar to the heights of His Magnificence and yet it tries to attain that height which is beyond its capacity, in fact, even

the cognition of inferior entities is beyond its compass.

The sun affords an illustration thereof. You see it shedding light on the whole world and yet no one knows the reality behind it. There are a number of postulates about it on that account and as such the difference of opinion among the scholars prevail about it.

Some say it is a hollow heavenly body full of fire radiating its rays from a particular orifice. Some say that it is a sort of nebula. Some say that it is like glass in form, capable of concentrating heat and then radiating it to the world. Some say that it is a fine clear body of congealed water. Others say that various sources of heat have come together. Yet others postulate that it is an additional element to the four elements.

These people have differed among themselves as to its form. Some say it is like a flat page. Others regard it as a rolling ball. Similarly there is difference as to its volume. Some regard it as equal in size to the earth. Others consider is as smaller in size that the earth. Some say it is bigger that this great island (earth). The geometricians say that it is one hundred and seventy times the size of the earth.

It is shown by the opposing statements of these people that they are ignorant of its essence. Intellect has been incapable of realising the essence of the sun which the eyes can see and the senses can recognise, how can then His Essence be comprehended Who is beyond the pale of senses and hidden from the imagination?

If they, then say why He is hidden from the imagination, the answer will be that He is not hidden by an artifice as one may behind the doors and curtains from the sight of other men. When we say that the Almighty Allah is invisible to the eyes we mean that His Immanence is too fine for the imagination and physical senses to be comprehended, just as the soul is so fine, although it too is one among the creation and yet is beyond the compass of the imagination.

If they now say as to why He is so fine a Being superior to everything, the question would be untenable, in as much as the Creator of everything has to be superior to everything; and distinct therefrom.

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If they ask as to why it has been known that He is superior to everything and distinct therefrom, the answer will be that there are four criteria of knowledge in this behalf.

- (1) To see if the existence of a thing is established.
- (2) The real nature and essence thereof.
- (3) What attributes are possessed by it?
- (4) The why and how of its existence.

No creature can know to apply these criteria in regard to the Creator, except to know that He exists. No one can know about His essence. To ask the why and wherefore about Him is altogether untenable, seeing that He is the Creator of everything, and nothing can stand as the cause of His Existence.

As men have learnt that He exists, it is not necessary that they should know His Essence as well, just as awareness of the soul does not entail a knowledge of the essence. Similar is the case of the other spiritual entities. If they say that you speak of Him as above cognition as He is an unknown Being, the answer will be that from one point of view it is so in fact, if the intellect seeks to attain the knowledge of His essence. From the other point of view, however, He is nearer that anything, seeing that effective arguments serve to prove His Existence.

From one point of view, therefore, He is Manifest, and hidden from none, from the other point of view He is hidden out of the reach of human senses. It is the same with intellect. It is known by argument and evidence but its essence is a mystery.

The naturalists say that nature does nothing meaningless nor leaves anything undone which leads to the perfection of something, bears testimony to this. The answer to them will be, who has taught nature this ingenuity and knowledge of the limits of everything, not to transgress the perfect mean and to go beyond its capacity, whereas this is a mater which intellect does not learn even after repeated experiments?

If they say that nature possesses omniscience and omnipotence, they thereby admit what they have denied, for these are the attributes of the Creator, that He is Omniscient and Omnipotent. They name Him 'nature', we call Him Allah, Almighty, Omniscient, Omnipotent etc. It they deny it that, then this whole ingenious creation is calling aloud that this universe is necessarily the Handiwork of the Creator Who possesses great Omniscience.

Among the ancients there were some who denied Purpose and Design. They believed that the universe had come into being spontaneously by sheer chance.

Their argument was that sometimes infants are born contrary to the usual form just as they may be disfigured by the addition of a finger or by unusual ugliness. They argued that the universe came into being without purpose and plan; that they have come into being spontaneously and through sheer chance.

Aristotle repudiated their argument. His answer was that if anything occurs apparently by chance, it too has definite causes which deviate it from its regular activity. That chance is never on the level of natural activity which may continue for ever.

You see the different species of animals following a regular pattern and possessing identical forms. For instance, a human infant when born, possesses two hands, two feet with five fingers or toes each as is found generally among people.

Sometimes, however, things take place contrary-wise due to some cause affecting the generating material which gives rise to the foetus in the womb, just as it happens that due to some flaw in the tools, with which he is working an article which is being manufactured, does not square up with the design of the artisan. Similarly, certain causes creep in the young ones of the animals which lead to disfigurement, increase or decease in limits, but generally they are of the regularly right pattern without a flaw.

Just as flaws creep into certain affairs on account of definite causes without contradicting plan and without affording evidence that they are not the artifices for craftsmen; similarly certain affairs are affected by certain obstacles in the regular activity of nature, cannot serve as a reason in favour of spontaneity and chance. Any one therefore, who on the basis of a fact contrary to nature, says, that everything has come into being through sheer chance, is making an untenable and irrational statement.

If they say as to why certain things have a perfect form while other have an imperfect one, the answer will be that it is to show that assortment of the universe is not due to the compulsion of nature nor is it possible that if it were due to nature, all should have the same pattern just as these objectors say.

All this takes place under the Will and the Purpose of the Almighty Creator that, He laid down a certain pattern and regularity for the majority while allowing a deviation from the law on some account to show that nature too is under the control of a superior Plan and Ingenuity, that it too, is dependent upon the will of the Creator for its activity and perfection.

Glory be to the Almighty Allah, the Sustainer of the Universes.

The knowledge that I have bestowed upon you, should be learnt by heart. You should be grateful to the Almighty Allah and praise Him for His blessings. You should obey His devotees.

I have given a little of the sum-total of knowledge and evidence of the perfect Planning and Purpose as arguments for the creation of this universe. Consider and ponder over this and learn lessons therefrom."

I promised the Imam (as)to discern the profound meaning of all this.

The Imam (as)placed his hand on my chest and said, "Remember all this and you will not forget it."

I swooned. When I came to my senses, Imam (as)said, "O Mufaddhal! How do you find yourself now?"

I replied, "With the help of my Lord, I am independent of referring to this book which I have penned. Everything is in my memory as if I can make it all out from the palms of my hand. Glory be to my Almighty Allah, to whom is due all gratitude and praise as are deserved."

Imam (as)said, "O Mufaddhal! Be perfectly at ease in your mind, brain and reason. I shall, God willing, give you an account of the heavens and the earth and all things created by the Almighty Allah as His wonderful creation and the categories and hordes of angels right up to the highest zenith and their ranks, together with all the creatures including the genie and human to the lowest point of the nadir, so that you may know that what you have learnt by now is only an insignificant part of the whole.

You may go now. You have an honourable place near us and such respect in the hearts of the believers as is felt for water when one is thirsty. Do not ask me about what I have promised to you unless I myself feel inclined to speak to you thereof."

I returned from the Imam (as) with a gift as no one else had ever received.

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