

Session 12: The Different Views of Islam and the West on Values

The best law according to Islam and the danger of eclecticism

The reason behind the emphasis on this subject and the discussion in this regard is the deviation among different levels of people as a result of intellectual eclecticism. To cite an example, if a scientist formulates a theory in the field of physics, only someone occupying a high station in the said field, like Albert Einstein, can express his opinion about the theory. However, the same scientist (Einstein) will not express his opinion on a theory in psychology.

If he ever wants to affirm or reject the said theory, he will refer to an authority in psychology because the field of science in question is beyond his expertise. Similarly, other scientists affirm and endorse a theory outside their expertise based on the affirmation of concerned authorities. There are times, however, when after studying the views of scientists in various fields a person accepts some views and inclines toward them without assessing them as being harmonious together or not.

Will his views and opinions constitute a coherent set of human values? He has neither thought about this approach nor has any intention of doing so. He merely says that in his opinion, so-and-so psychologist, sociologist, or lawyer has a better view, and this attitude leads to intellectual eclecticism.

The people of insight and research, however, collect all the views and analyze whether they are compatible or not. If they want to accept the theory of a certain psychologist, they compare it with another theory in sociology in order to know whether they are compatible or not. They also carry out the same comparison regarding other views in other fields and subjects.

The ground for eclecticism is more fertile in the lower academic levels where people study a book in any field without investigating the credibility of the author and the consistency of his ideas with other ideas and views in other subjects tend to be influenced by it. The result is intellectual eclecticism.

Intellectual eclecticism in realm of religious thought

Unfortunately, in our Islamic society, particularly during the last fifty years, many eclectic ideas have emerged. In a certain stage of their lives, people accept certain doctrines of Islam through their parents, environment and religious leaders. Then in the next stage, on entering high school and university they become acquainted with other views and beliefs from different sciences and subjects and also accept them without considering whether these views and beliefs are consistent or not; for example, whether a philosophical theory they have accepted is compatible with a certain religious theory or theory in biology, physics, or mathematics. When observed carefully, we find out that in some cases these views are incompatible and they do not constitute a coherent set. This form of thinking is called eclectic thinking.

Nowadays, many individuals in our religious society are afflicted with eclectic thinking because on the one hand, they have inherited family beliefs of the Islamic society which they do not want to abandon. On the other hand, ideas from different fields of social sciences are presented to them which they also accept and attach to the religious beliefs without knowing that these different ideas and views are incompatible with each other and that we have to accept either the religious beliefs or those ideas which are incompatible with religion.

Therefore, if we want to accept ideas and views in the fields of sociology, law, political science, and the like which are compatible with our religious beliefs, we have to set aside the schools of thought presented to us through the translation of foreign books and their propaganda, and advance new ideas in social sciences which are scientifically, foundationally and essentially compatible with our religious beliefs. Otherwise, we will either have to abandon our religious beliefs or set aside those ideas and views which are incompatible with our religious beliefs. The two cannot be combined together just as one cannot accept that it is day and night at the same time!

Without paying attention to the fundamental point we have mentioned, one cannot deal with all ideas and views and take something from each of them and adopt intellectual and religious eclecticism because in this case, the extremist idea of pluralism in knowledge and understanding will emerge in us which believes that whatever a person says is correct; nothing is absolutely false; every person tells a part of the truth; and every school of thought has part of the truth.

With the support of agnosticism in philosophy, which is also very popular today in the West, this approach ends up in skepticism. This approach asserts that the views of different sciences possess a portion of the truth. We cannot say that we have a definite and certain belief in something. So, it is better for us to have no definite and absolute belief in anything and only consider as probable the correctness and incorrectness of a theory. With regard to religion also, we have to accept religious pluralism, according to which we have to accept as correct the viewpoints of both the Muslims who believe in the Oneness of God and the beliefs of someone whom the Muslims regard deserves eternal damnation.

We have to equally accept as correct the faith of Christians who believe in the Trinity and the

Zoroastrians who believe in the god of good and the god of evil, because none of these beliefs is definite and certain. Possibly, each of them is correct or incorrect and we are not supposed to confront any of them because all of them can be good and correct.

Tolerance of all beliefs and different conflicting views is anchored in the foundation of skepticism, agnosticism and pluralism, which reject the absoluteness of any belief. Social indulgence and negligence gain strength in the absence of prejudice, partisanship and violence, and they say, it is better not to be prejudiced but assume whatever another person says as possibly correct. This approach successfully creates a sense of indifference to religious, philosophical and scientific beliefs in a person.

Today this agnosticism of the Western world is also offered to us. There is an endeavor to make our society negligent and insensitive to religious, philosophical and scientific beliefs, and become skeptical about every viewpoint and theory, and believe that it could possibly be correct and so could its contradiction. Sometimes, it is also said that we should not regard our understanding as absolute and say that it is totally correct and there is no correct but this. We should not have such certainty. We should have our own beliefs and hold them respectable. Others should have also their own beliefs.

This culture adopted by the Western world for itself today, is being promoted so that the whole world should come under the influence of this culture. This culture negates the certainty of beliefs, negates the religion of truth, negates the belief that the true *madhhab* and correct theory are one, and inculcates the idea that the correct theory may be multiple so no one should have certainty of belief in anything. There should be no fanaticism in discussion. Religious zeal and sectarian fanaticism should be eliminated.

The people's inclination to one religion, one *madhhab* and one idea should be eliminated so that all could live together and have no conflict over religious issues because these very religious disputes are the source of wars and mass murder. All sects, religions and ideas should be considered correct and truthful in order to pave the ground for peace, security and happiness.

Concept of religious pluralism

We do not intend to deal with the issue of pluralism in particular, but let us clearly say that we actually believe that we should deal respectfully, calmly and properly with followers of different religions and authorities in different philosophies and sciences. They should be allowed to express and defend their views and participate in dialogues, discussions and investigations in various spheres.

In today's world we can witness Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians living together in peace, there being no room for conflict, dispute, fratricide, and genocide in their midst. This is something which receives more attention in Islam than in any religious, sectarian or political group, and followers of religions have not been accorded as cordial a treatment as offered by Islam. In Islam the cornerstone of beliefs is monotheism [*tawhid*] and struggle against the Trinity and polytheism [*shirk*] is regarded necessary in propagating and fortifying *tawhid*, yet in Islam, Christianity and Judaism are officially recognized

religions.

Followers of these religions are under the protection of Islam. Their lives, property and honor are protected, and no one has the right to commit the least act of harassment and aggression against them.

This kind of treatment and attitude toward the followers of other religions is inspired by the conduct of the *awliya'* of religion including the Commander of the Faithful ('a). In one of his sermons recorded in *Nahj al-Balaghah*, the Commander of the Faithful ('a) says: "I have come to know that every one of them entered upon... women under the protection of Islam and took away ornaments from their legs, arms, necks, and ears... If any Muslim dies of grief after all this he is not to be blamed but rather there is justification for him before me."¹

This is because in the Islamic territory and under the protection of the Islamic state a non-Muslim woman has been oppressed. Such an attitude toward followers of other religions is among the merits and sources of pride of Islam and according to an explicit text of the Qur'an:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ...﴾

"Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allah..."²

Also, another verse invites us to the best manner of disputation:

﴿وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ...﴾

"Do not dispute with the People of the Book except in a manner which is best."³

If that is the meaning of pluralism, then we have to say that it is one of Islam's sources of pride. However, if pluralism means that we say to ourselves that Christianity is also like Islam; Judaism is also like Islam; there is no difference between being a Muslim and a Jew because each of them has a segment of the truth; neither Islam nor Judaism is the absolute truth; or both of them are the truth, like two ways that end up in a single point of destination whichever way one treads, undoubtedly, such a notion and understanding is inconsistent with the spirit of every religion and the dictates of reason. Can it be claimed that belief in *tawhid* is identical with the belief in Trinity? In other words, is there no difference between the belief in the Oneness of God and the belief in Trinity and many gods? The religion of Islam says:

﴿وَلَا تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةً انْتَهُوا خَيْرًا لَكُمْ﴾

“And do not say, [God is] a trinity.’ Relinquish [such a creed]! That is better for you.”⁴

In dealing with the untoward attributes given to God such as His having a child, the Qur’an says:

﴿تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْهُ وَتَنْشَقُّ الْأَرْضُ وَتَخِرُّ الْجِبَالُ هَدًّا﴾

“The heavens are about to be rent apart at it, the earth to split open, and the mountains to collapse into bits!”⁵

Now, when Islam has such a firm approach toward polytheistic beliefs, how can we say that if you like you can be a Muslim and if you don’t, then worship idols, and these two faiths have no differences and are among the “straight paths” leading to the same goal! I think it is improbable for a rational person to accept this. In any case, intellectual eclecticism is one of the plagues and predicaments of our age which must be given attention to and the ways of purging the mind and acquiring a pure and pristine mentality must be identified and acted upon.

Magnificence of servitude to God and its conflict with absolute freedom

Consistent with our discussion is the fact that there are those who, by taking inspiration from Western culture, accept the principle of freedom as the greatest of human values for man. They claim adherence to Islam and its traditions and commandments and consider themselves religious, but they are so passionate in advocating Western values that they become more Western than the Westerners. Undoubtedly, this is a kind of eclecticism. If we were to logically discuss with this group, we would say that the foundation of Islam is the worship of God:

﴿وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ...﴾

“Certainly We raised an apostle in every nation [to preach:] ‘Worship Allah, and keep away from the Rebel’...”⁶

The pillar of every religion with heavenly origin is sincere servitude to God, and a Muslim, Jew or Christian does not understand religion as other than this. We believe that Islam is similar to other monotheistic religions in the general principles of belief, but different in laws that have been promulgated

in consonance with the exigencies of time and space. The differences observed in this regard, are the result of distortions that have taken place in other religions with heavenly origin. The loftiest value of Islam is that man should be a sincere servant of God. It is a truth which has been expressed by God in many verses of the Qur'an such as the following:

﴿وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ...﴾

“Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allah, dedicating their faith to Him...”⁷

﴿أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ...﴾

“[Only] exclusive faith is worthy of Allah...”⁸

﴿وَمَنْ يُسَلِّمْ وَجْهَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى...﴾

“Whoever surrenders his heart to Allah and is virtuous has certainly held fast to the firmest handle...”⁹

Once man recognizes himself as a servant of God and regards servitude to God as the greatest value and considers himself totally at the disposal of God, can he believe in absolute freedom and regard as valuable whatever he likes? Are these two compatible and concordant? If I really believe that Islam is the true religion of God which must be accepted, and that I have to worship God, surrender everything and submit to His will, how can I believe that I can be absolutely free to do whatever I want? How can these two ways of thinking be concordant?

Those who claim this is possible have unconsciously succumbed to eclecticism, have actually no belief in Islam in their hearts, make this claim in order to deceive others, or, are incapable of realizing that these ways of thinking are not concordant. Otherwise, how could man, on the one hand, say that he is totally subservient to the will of God and, on the other hand, believe that he has absolute freedom and can do whatever he wants?!

This way of thinking, i.e. belief in the absolute freedom of man is a product of Western thought. In the West a group of believers of Christianity, while keeping their religion—perhaps because of their innate inclinations or the environment and type of their religious upbringing could not abandon their religion—inclined toward ideas like the absolute freedom of man as the result of certain arguments,

reasons or doubts.

Undoubtedly, one who makes such a claim does not do so without any proof and justification. In fact, he starts with a point and speaks eloquently on it. For example, his opening salvo is this: “Is it better to place a bird inside a cage and place the cage inside another iron cage, or to open the cages so that the bird can fly and go wherever it likes?” It is obvious that the flying and freedom of a bird is far better and desirable. Then, he says: “This is exactly the freedom we are talking about!”

In our society, a complete set of laws based on religion has been codified. Embedded in it is a set of laws related to the *wilayah al-faqih*, within which are the statutory laws of the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the Expediency Council. Finally, the Council of Guardians reviews the ratified laws. Such a structure is actually placing a cage inside a cage! The best law is that which gives permission to people to do and say whatever they like, and as a whole, gives absolute freedom. Evidently, the first law is a cage while the second one is freedom!

In dealing with beliefs, ideas and views derived from other cultures, we should try to trace their roots and see whether they are compatible with Islamic thought or not. If they are compatible, well and good, and if not, we need to discard them. We should refer to the rudimentary principles of our religion and take them as the foundation and basis of our thoughts, beliefs and culture.

The West and elimination of alleged contradiction between science and religion

In a bid to eliminate the alleged contradiction between science and religion, Western religious figures, doubtful of their religion, said that the real jurisdiction of religion is distinct from that of science and philosophy. A philosophical, moral, or human value is compatible or incompatible depending on whether they both meet at a certain point, because when we assume one line to be inclined toward another line, the two lines will meet at a certain point. However, if the two lines are parallel, they will never meet nor oppose each other because each of them ends up at a point which is distinct from that of the other.

In explaining and justifying the relationship between science and religion, they say that there should be reconciliation between religion and science, religion and philosophy, religion and reason, religion and moral values, and two distinct realms created for them. That is, separating the realm of religion from other subjects. The realm of religion is man’s connection with God such as, praising God, prayer, supplication, and a set of issues which are totally personal and have nothing to do with others.

In this realm, there is no room for science, philosophy or any other subject; it is only related to the heart. If there is anything associated with religion in this realm, it is mysticism [*irfan*], because religion and mysticism are of the same class and share the same goal. Thus, science, philosophy and rationality have no place in the realm of religion. In fact, the realm of each of them is distinct, each having its specific function.

Ethics, values, praying, and do's and don'ts related to God, is related to religion, and in this realm it does not conflict with science. However, if these dos and don'ts are related to man's social life, like the proper treatment of a thief, traitor or any other criminal—to punish him or not—they say that whoever commits a crime or offence is sick, and thus, he must be cured. He should be nursed and treated with kindness and understanding in a suitable place so that he desists from committing crime!

We do not know any country or place in the world where a criminal or offender is treated like a patient and not punished. But in presenting a theory, they say: “The criminal should not be punished because punishment is neither appropriate for man nor consistent with human dignity.” As a general principle, they advance the proposition that man, even if he commits the most horrendous of crimes, should not be punished at all because this kind of approach is repugnant to the dignity and station of man. Contrary to this idea, we Muslims believe that religion has jurisdiction over all aspects and dimensions of life and has promulgated relevant laws. Regarding the thief, for example, it says:

﴿وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا...﴾

“As for the thief, man and woman, cut off their hands...”¹⁰

Those who have separated social matters from the realm of religion say that religion has no right to interfere in such domains. Religion can only urge you to pray or teach you how to praise God. But treating a criminal has nothing to do with religion. Certainly, empirical science has also nothing to do with such cases because empirical science describes the laws that govern phenomena.

In other words, science expresses “being” and it cannot determine the “dos and don'ts”. Moral laws cannot be derived from science. So, in the context of moral and social values, including legal, civil and penal laws and purely ethical issues in which moral dos and don'ts are involved, religion and “empirical science” cannot interfere.

Station of people's will in liberalism and Islam

As neither religion nor science can get involved in the realm of moral issues and dos and don'ts, the question arises: Which reference authority should get involved in these domains? The reply given by Western culture today is that values and dos and don'ts are a set of extrinsic affairs which are not real and essential truths and should depend upon the will of the people. Thus, in their opinion the value-oriented dos and don'ts are extrinsic concepts; that is, they are not based on objective and external truths and are only dependent on the people's tastes. In order to know what to do and what not to do, we should not refer to religion, science, or philosophy. Instead, we should consult the people only and see what the people want.

The foundation of Western democracy in the context of legislation is that there is no reality separate from the will of the people on the basis of which dos and don'ts should be discovered. In worldly affairs, dos and don'ts which belong to empirical affairs and are related to the empirical sciences must be proved in the laboratory. But in relation to God, dos and don'ts belong to the realm of religion, so religious orders must be followed. Do's and don'ts related to social life are related to people themselves. Neither God nor science has any right to interfere therein.

In Western culture the emphasis is on people's will and public vote. Now, if a person believes that religion encompasses all aspects of human life; all dos and don'ts related to our social behavior come from God, and we cannot follow the will of the people, then who should be obeyed if God enjoins a thing which the people oppose?

In all societies, more or less, there is this contradiction between what the people want and what is enjoined by religion. But we have nothing to do with other religions which have been distorted. In fact, our subject of discussion is a country whose majority of people are Muslims who have accepted a religion which has explicit and specific laws on all aspects of individual and social lives including family affairs like choosing a spouse and child upbringing, as well as social and international affairs, which have been presented in most verses of the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah (s), and the traditions and conduct of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a).

Those who are people of insight, are not merely blind followers and want to consciously make a choice, have to settle their stand regarding the religion which claims to have programs for all aspects of man's life, civil, legal and international. They cannot accept the said religion and at the same time claim the people's vote as the criterion of credibility of law, especially in cases where there is contradiction between them?

Today, unfortunately, all the things highlighted in the West are published in our periodicals. Religion regards homosexuality as the worst and filthiest practice, can people's will takes precedence over God if people voted in favor of its permissibility?! Can these two be reconciled?

The Western world has solved such problems and cases of conflict between religion and popular will, maintaining that religion has no right to interfere in such affairs and disregard the will of people. Accordingly, religion is related to the church in which the sins of individuals are forgiven through confession and performance of a set of rituals and then the church sends them to heaven!

However, religion has no responsibility or jurisdiction in the realm of social issues in which the deciding factor is the will and vote of the people. In Canada a religious leader who had founded a new Christian sect was asked in a television program about his opinion about homosexuality. He said, "Presently, I cannot express a definite view, but I tell you that the Bible must be interpreted anew!"

Democracy and legislative authority in Islam and the West

By separating the realm of religion from that of social issues, the West found a self-satisfying way to solve the problem of the alleged contradiction between religion and the people's will. Are Muslims also looking for such a solution? The separation of religion from worldly life and affairs—social, legal, political, and familial is known as “secularism”. There are also some individuals who have written many articles and delivered numerous talks for the sake of “service to the Iranian culture”.

In order to advance the notion that the realm of religion is separate from politics and social, legal and economic issues, they are struggling and offering sacrifices day and night along this way. Do we also hold such a belief? As we do not have such a belief, then we should be careful not to be deceived and know that whatever they say and what we believe in are incompatible. We should be aware that in case of conflict between the will of God and that of the people, we should consider what the religion of God has promulgated above that of the people.

I do not intend to advance anything that will be misconstrued to mean opposition to freedom. The people are free in their choice, but they should see to it that they consciously and freely make a choice. They have to know what they are choosing. They should be aware that what is described today as “democracy in legislation” is the notion of superiority of the people's will over that of God. That is, setting religion and God's will aside. If the people are about to make a choice, they should be vigilant and not be deceived. They should be aware that the acceptance of Islam as a set of laws and rules governing society is in no way consistent with the acceptance of democracy in legislation.

Those who are busy deceiving people and promoting eclecticism in society and deviating from the subject matter are agitated by my words and examples because their intentions and conspiracies are exposed. Of course, some do not like these words due to political or partisan reasons. Whether these words are pleasant or unpleasant to them, I am willing to strive till my last breath to explain and defend the integrity of religion and to endure all the unpleasant consequences. Neither am I afraid of any threat nor will I fall into the snare of applause.

Here we do not intend to pass judgment but to remind the people to be careful not to be deceived by Western terminologies and concepts for them to abandon their religion. They have to identify the intellectual foundations of mentioned theories. For example, when it is said that the criterion of the acceptance of law is the will of the people and “democracy in legislation” is promoted, they have to think whether man is only physically constituted and only possesses a set of animalistic desires.

If this is the case, only the people have the right of legislation as the West asserts. Or, as perceived in Islamic thought, if man also has a lofty dimension and spiritual value, spiritual interests, in addition to observing material interests and social order and security, must also be considered in legislation. In this case the criterion of the law's credibility should be the will of God.

The presumption mentioned earlier will now be raised again. Does man really have a spiritual and metaphysical constitution? Does he have another dimension apart from the physical body and animal instincts? Is there really a life after death for man? Is there really a relationship between this material life and life after death? The reply to this question is clear for Muslims and followers of religions, but we have to bear in mind that our sociopolitical outlook should be consistent with our religious beliefs and there should be no trace of any form of eclecticism in our thoughts and deeds.

If we really believe in the existence of God, the Resurrection, reckoning, and book of account, we have to decide whether to act upon man-made laws or not—assuming that the people’s will is the basis of law—which really have a negative effect on our eternal life. This question demands a definite and specific answer and the problem cannot be solved by doubt, uncertainty, and skepticism.

In the West this problem is solved either through the negation of the spiritual world, or by inculcating doubts and uncertainties in minds by suggesting that values and dos and don’ts are not based on real, external truths which are certain, but are merely a set of conventions and contracts based on the will of the people and have nothing to do with religion.

Then, our Westernized intellectuals reflect the same ideas in their books and present them to our dear youth, and the state of affairs reaches such a proportion that skepticism is sanctified and they are proud of it! According to religion, however, that is not the case. We have to desist from doubt, bewilderment and uncertainty. We should consciously and certainly make the correct selection just as the Qur’an emphasizes certainty [*yaqin*] in the beginning and says:

﴿وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ﴾

“And are certain of the Hereafter.”¹¹

God says that the God-wary [*muttaqin*] are those who are certain of the hereafter and it does not say, “They doubt it”. So, anyone who wants to benefit from the Qur’an should be certain of the hereafter. It says in another place:

﴿وَفِي الْأَرْضِ آيَاتٌ لِلْمُوقِنِينَ﴾

“In the earth are signs for those who have conviction.”¹²

On the other hand, in dealing with those who are influenced by Western culture and say that logically man cannot be certain of any matter especially whatever is beyond matter. The Qur’an describes the state of doubt and uncertainty as the worst state of downfall and disgrace for them:

﴿فَهُمْ فِي رَيْبِهِمْ يَتَرَدَّدُونَ﴾

“So they waver in their doubt.”¹³

The Qur’an also says:

﴿أَوُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا بَلْ هُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِنْ ذِكْرِي...﴾

“Has the reminder been sent down to him out of [all of] us? Rather they are in doubt concerning My reminder.”¹⁴

The Qur’an wants us to be people of certainty especially regarding the roots of religion, viz. belief in God, apostleship [*nabuwwah*] and the hereafter. Now, we have to choose one of these two options: Either we accept the school of thought which says that basically man cannot have certainty and will always be in doubt and uncertainty, or the school of thought which invites us to make a conscious choice, saying that unless you are people of certainty, you cannot benefit from the Book of Allah.

The difference between the two cultures is that Islam regards the state of doubt, uncertainty and bewilderment as the worst state and likens the person who is in doubt and uncertainty to the one who is situated in a frightening desert and everybody is inviting him toward a different direction and he is bewildered as to which direction to choose. On the contrary, Western culture considers doubt and uncertainty of great value, claiming that man is not a human being unless he doubts and is skeptical. We have to choose one of the two—Islam or skepticism. One cannot accept both of them because it cannot be admitted that it is day and night at the same time just as monotheism and trinity together cannot constitute a logical thought.

An admonition to the youth

I would like to advise our dear youth who are in pursuit of scientific knowledge to have a clear mind and solve these fundamental problems at the outset, and assess whether they should be among the people of doubt or the people of certainty, secular or religious, God-worshippers or free from the bondage of servitude to anyone, including God. We have to accept one of the two. We cannot incline to one sometimes and incline to another at other times. Such a course of action is dangerous and draws us to infidelity [*kufr*] and eternal damnation in hell.

If we really believe in the truthfulness of the Qur’an, can we accept the absolute freedom of man? Can we believe in religion, liberalism and secularism at the same time? For example, should we regard man as a mere physical being and find his happiness only in animalistic pleasures? By freedom, should we

only mean freedom in carnal desires? Or, is humanity essentially metaphysical and the spirit of God, while the body only an instrument for the soul's perfection, and our real life the eternal one?

﴿وَأِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ﴾

“But the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life!”¹⁵

﴿وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ...﴾

“The life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion...”¹⁶

Since our real life is in the hereafter, we should exert all our efforts and focus all our attention in this world to that which will draw us toward that great felicity. Contrary to the schools of thought which hold that otherworldly bliss and this world cannot be combined together and whoever wants felicity in the hereafter should seclude and isolate himself from all things worldly, Islam fortunately regards it possible for man, especially in the social dimension, to attain both prosperity and welfare in this world and eternal bliss in the hereafter.

1. Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 27. This refers to the attack of Sufyan ibn 'Awf (a commander of Mu'awiyah) on the city of Anbar that took place at the time of Imam 'Ali's ('a) rule. One of the soldiers stopped two women, one a Muslim and the other a dhimmi and robbed them of their anklets, bracelets and earrings. [Trans.]

2. Surah Al 'Imran 3:64.

3. Surah al-'Ankabut 29:46.

4. Surah an-Nisa' 4: 171.

5. Surah Maryam 19:90.

6. Surah an-Nahl 16:36.

7. Surah al-Bayyinah 98:5.

8. Surah az-Zumar 39:3.

9. Surah Luqman 31:22.

10. Surah al-Ma'idah 5:38.

11. Surah al-Baqarah 2:4.

12. Surah adh-Dhariyat 51:20.

13. Surah at-Tawbah (or, Bara'ah) 9:45.

14. Surah 'Ad 38:8.

15. Surah al-'Ankabut 29:65.

16. Surah Al 'Imran 3: 185.

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