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Lesson Five: Man's Essential Nature as Evidence for Resurrection

If we look at religion from the viewpoint of the history of human society, we will see that at every stage of human thought, in the mists of prehistory as well as throughout the broad expanse of recorded history of this changing world, man has always firmly believed in a life after death.

When we follow archeologists in their excavations, we find material traces of primitive men who all believed in a life after the life of this world. The tools and implements they buried with their dead bear witness to the distinctive conceptions they held of the life that exists behind the gate of death. They knew that death is not the end of all life, but because of their erroneous concepts they imagined that man would need the tools of life in the next world just as he does in this, and that he would be able to use the implements buried with him.

In whatever land and age he has lived, man has always had a hidden perception, a kind of inspiration, that permits him to hope for a tomorrow after today. Some mono-dimensional sociologists fail to grasp this truth, with their purely rationalistic interpretations, and they discuss the matter purely in the light of social and economic factors. Concentrating on the fantastic and superstitious aspects of certain religions, they overlook the positive dimensions of belief in the hereafter.

These profound and well-rooted beliefs cannot be taken simply as the result of auto-persuasion or habit, for habit and custom cannot resist for ever time and the changes that it brings in human society.

Although the peoples of the world differ in their national and social customs because of ethnic and natural variation, so that each people has its own special customs and habits of thought, all men hold in common a certain set of instincts and attributes.

Whatever country or continent they inhabit, all men even semi-barbaric, backward, and prehistoric peoples respect and value precious concepts such as justice, equity and trustworthiness, just as they shun and abhor treachery, cruelty and anarchic behavior.

So although destructive changes and revolutions may overturn and obliterate many of the habits and customs that have ruled for centuries over a given society, so that not even a trace is left of them today, the attachment and respect that men of the past nurtured for virtues such as justice, generosity, and trustworthiness remains exactly the same today in every human society. It can even be said that the flame of men's love for these concepts burns more brightly today and that their attachment to them is more profound than ever before.

Purely social conventions must be learned by children when their intellect and powers of discernment begin to blossom; by contrast, instinctual and natural urges emerge from the inner being of the child without any need for a teacher or master.

Being inherent to man and firmly rooted in his nature, belief in eternal truths and the awareness of creation and resurrection have proven immune to all the changes that human societies have undergone in history; they are permanent and stable.

Those who bury their heads in the sand of fantasy are merely trying to cover up one of the most profound perceptions of man with their baseless and often incomprehensible imaginings.

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Some form of belief in the hereafter existed among the Romans, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Babylonians the Chaldaeans, and the other peoples of the ancient world, although the belief was often superficial, tainted with superstition, and far removed from the logic of a true faith in God's unity.

The same is true of the beliefs of certain primitive peoples. For example, it was customary among some tribes on the Congo that when one of their kings died, twelve virgins would present themselves at his grave and then begin fighting and arguing for the privilege of being joined with the deceased, often with fatal results! The people of the Fiji Islands believed that the dead engage in all the same activities as the living fighting battles, procreating children, tilling the land, and so on.

A scholar writes:

“One of the customs of the people of Fiji is that they bury their mothers and fathers when they reach the age of forty. The reason for selecting this age as the age of burial is that it is the approximate middle of life, the most desirable of ages, so that when the deceased is resurrected, he will find himself in possession of the physical strength he had when he was forty years old.” (*Mushadati Ilmi*, p.98)

Samuel King, the well-known sociologist, says:

“Religion not only exists today throughout the world; careful research also shows that the most primitive tribes also possessed a form of religion. Neanderthal man the ancestor of present-day humanity clearly had some form of religion because we know that he used to bury his dead in a certain way, placing their tools and implements beside them and thus demonstrating belief in a future world.” (*Jami Shinasi*, p.

The people of Mexico used to bury the court jester together with the king, so that he might amuse the dead sovereign in the grave and dispel his sorrow with his antics and jokes!

The Greeks of three thousand years ago believed that man does not disappear when he dies; he continues living like the people of this world with exactly the same needs. They therefore placed food next to their graves. (*Milal Sharq va Yunan*, p. 167)

Although certain beliefs concerning the nature of the afterlife may then be tainted with superstition or form a mixture of truth and falsehood, the persistence of the belief itself throughout time confirms that it has an inner core which is inherent to man's nature. It is nurtured by inspiration and inward perception and is embedded in the structure of man's being.

It is also beyond doubt that the knowledge of man is based on certain self-evident first premises; if these are subjected to doubt, the authority to which all of man's knowledge goes back will be shaken, and no reliance can be placed on any knowledge at all. The witness borne by man's innermost, primordial nature constitutes, in fact, the highest form of evidence, and no logic can contest it.

Without having any need for deduction and proof, we can understand, aided by our primordial disposition, that the order of being is based on justice and accountability. Whatever arises from our essence is part of our being and part of the order of creation, an order that admits of no error. It is the inward nature of man that makes it possible for him to arrive at the truth.

When our instinctive awareness and our nature inspire in us the knowledge that answerability, accounting, and law exist in the universe, when our primordial disposition issues a judgement to this effect, we have in fact acquired a decisive proof that is superior to empirically attained certainty, for we perceive the certainty and inevitability of resurrection with full clarity once we understand it by means of our inner nature.

We feel clearly that unaccountability and meaninglessness have no foundation in the objective world. Firm laws regulate all existing things, from the minute particles of the atom to the vast heavenly bodies. The birth and death of planets and stars, the transformation of the mass of the sun into luminous energy, all take place by way of an equation. The different forms of organic matter each have their own lines of attraction, and nothing goes to waste, even the energy of one part of an atom. In short, the entire order of creation follows an unvarying regularity; it is like a table of firm and unbending laws.

Why then does the behavior of men deviate from the normative orbit of all beings? Why is it not based on justice and regularity, and why do injustice, disorder, and lack of restraint, rage unchecked in the human realm?

The answer is obvious: that we are differentiated from all other creatures by being endowed with the

blessing of consciousness and free will.

The scope of our acts is extremely wide. If God had wished, He could have compelled us to obey natural law, but His far-reaching wisdom caused Him to make us His vice-regents on earth and to grant us freedom. To act unjustly or irresponsibly is, therefore, to misuse this freedom we have been given, to pervert it in the most irrational way.

Since this world is a place of trial and testing, enabling us to pass on to the stages of existence that yet await us, it cannot be thought that this passing life, full of cruelty, oppression, and the violation of rights, represents the entirety of life. In reality, it is a single chapter in a long story that continues until infinity.

Our innate feelings inform us that the oppressor who escapes worldly justice, the aggressor who tramples on the rights of men and is not caught in the trap of the law, the criminal who is able to ensure that the provisions of justice are not implemented in his case all such people will ultimately be prosecuted by the principle of justice that underlies the entire universe.

The necessity and inevitability of justice in the order of creation brings man to believe that one day a precise accounting will take place in utter justice.

Were true justice to be nothing but an imaginary ideal and our hearts' belief in it to lack all reality, why should we instinctively desire justice for ourselves and for others? Why should we be angered by the sight of rights being violated and even be ready to sacrifice our own beings for the sake of justice? Why should the love of justice be so deeply rooted in our hearts and why should we expect something that does not even exist? Is not our thirsting for justice in itself a proof that justice does in fact exist, just as our thirsting for water is an indication that water exists?

The Desire for Immortality

The desire for eternal life is also something fundamental to man, embedded in his essential nature. The concept of immortality is not an accidental or acquired desire; on the contrary, this profound longing proves in itself that man has the capacity and readiness for eternal life. Every natural inclination is satisfied in the appropriate way within the order of creation; to desire permanent life in this impermanent world is by contrast a desire that is unnatural and cannot therefore be satisfied.

Just as it is not possible for man totally to extinguish the flame of his inner nature and to forget utterly his innate inclination to the source of being, so that his mind instinctively turns towards that Unique Essence whenever he is assailed by the trials and hardships of life, so too those who deny the hereafter unconsciously acquire a desire for eternal life whenever they are faced with an impasse in their lives.

As soon as man gains some respite from the turmoil of material life and has the opportunity to reflect and turn inwards, he begins to think of life after death and to feel keenly the emptiness of this impermanent, transitory world.

Once animals satisfy all their material needs, they are at rest. By contrast, once man is satiated with material pleasures and bodily enjoyments, he begins to feel unease in himself. A mysterious pain troubles his soul. Many people who find themselves in this position have recourse to distractions and entertainment in order to flee from their inner disquiet and to obtain at least temporary relief from the grief that is caused by thoughts of the future.

Many, too, are those who find in suicide their only escape from this excruciating torment.

Great men and thinkers have always decried the life of this world, with its mixture of pleasure and pain, of joy and sadness. We cannot find a single person among the prophets, the saints, and the major figures of religion, who regarded the world as a suitable or ideal place for man to reside.

There are many people who verbally deny belief in resurrection and the day of judgement, but at the same they strive to leave a good name behind when they die. Why should someone who regards death as the end of all things be concerned for his good repute or for acts of charity that outlive him?

There is no point in expending such effort for something that has no reality; once life has come to an end, how can a scientific achievement, an act of charity, a work of art, benefit one who denies all form of life after death?

Such a person is acting, in reality, according to the desire of his innermost being; he is demonstrating that in fact he does believe in his own immortality.

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The scope of man's desires and aspirations is unbounded so that if one day he comes to master the whole world, his unquiet spirit will still find no rest; he will then begin thinking of conquering the planets. If hypothetically he were to attain that goal also, some mysterious inward feeling would still rob him of peace and tranquillity.

Man also recognizes no boundary or limit in the acquisition of knowledge. In fact, with every step that he takes in increasing his knowledge, his desire to discover still more also increases. The whole universe cannot fully accommodate man's aspirations to explore, despite its seemingly boundless expanse, for the infinite spirit of man cannot be contained by the heavens and the earth. Man accepts no limit for his desires short of the fulfillment of his desire for immortality, enabling him to gain his true ultimate goal.

Thus a wise poet says, identifying himself with Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi:

My spirit is ascending to the throne of the Beloved;

“Rumi” and “Balkhi” are simply two skins in my view.

Although my body traveled from Khorasan to Rum,

My spirit cannot be contained by any land.

Do not imagine that I am some earthworm;

I am of the heavens, not of the earth.

In order for this natural impulse in man to be satisfied, the necessary means must exist; would it be possible, by way of analogy, for water not to exist in the external world to satisfy the instinct of thirst?

Certain conditions must exist for the satisfaction of this profound feeling in man, this ideal and aspiration for eternal life. Were the means and conditions needed to satisfy the inward inclinations and aspirations that are rooted in everyone not to exist, man would fall prey to bewilderment and confusion. All his hopes and aspirations would be based on illusion and vanity. We see, however, that in the whole orderly system of the universe not even a single phenomenon can be glimpsed that is irregular or misplaced.

We can assert, therefore, that no inclination or desire that is rooted in man's essential nature is vain and purposeless, and that this being the case the essence of man's being is not annihilated when he steps through the gateway of death. On the contrary, it is in the hereafter that his desire for eternal life is fulfilled.

Dr. Norman Vincent, a European (?) scholar, writes:

“I have never had the slightest doubt or hesitation concerning everlasting life; I believe in it and consider it irrefutable.”

Man's innate sentiment of everlasting life is one of the most important and positive proofs that guide us to an appreciation of this truth. When God Almighty wishes to guide man to a certain truth, He first sows the seed of it in his innermost consciousness. Man's thirst for eternity is so universal that it is inadmissible that it should remain unfulfilled.

“It is not through mathematical proofs that man comes to accept metaphysical truths; it is faith and inspiration that convince him of them. In fact, inspiration plays an important role even in the realm of scientific truths.” (*Danistan iha-yi Jahan-I `Ilm*, pp. 204–5)

A group of scholars reached the following conclusion after investigating men's beliefs in the hereafter:

“The truth of the matter is that faith and inward belief in life after death constitute the best and strongest proof for the reality of the hereafter.

“Whenever God wishes to convince the spirit of man of a certain matter, He inserts the causes and factors of the belief among man's own instincts. It is because of this wise act of the Creator that everyone perceives eternal existence and life everlasting in the depths of his own soul. Since such permanent life is not feasible under the present conditions of man's existence, a different set of

conditions is needed for this aspiration to be realized.

This universal consciousness of immortality is so profound and well rooted that its reality and remarkable effects on human life cannot be overlooked. From the most ancient times down to the present, it has caused belief in resurrection to remain alive and vigorous in the minds of men.” (*Ruh al Din al Islami*, p. 96)

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An emphatic belief in life everlasting is to be found on every page of the history of the major religions; it forms an inseparable part of every divinely inspired religion. This matter has occupied so important a place in the mission of the prophets that no messenger has ever arisen without preparing his followers for a future in which they will be rewarded or punished for their deeds.

In order to complete His favor and grace, God the Creator and Inspirer of all beings, Who looks upon His servants with infinite mercy and kindness, has not only placed within man a form of inward guidance and enlightenment; He has also sent prophets, equipped with books and proofs, whose duty it is to guide men to perceiving the reality of resurrection.

This is necessary because passionate desires and idiosyncrasies as well as material inclinations dull the luster of man's primordial nature, so that the guide within man's own being cannot ensure alone man's ascent to the lofty rank of true humanity and his deliverance from the barriers that stand in his way.

The Qur'an says:

“Never imagine that God will violate the promises made by His messengers. God is certainly empowered over all things and will take vengeance over oppressors. On the day when the earth and the heavens are transformed, so that all creatures will stand before the One God, Powerful and Invincible, you will see the evil doers and the rebellious chained by God's wrath, wearing shirts of molten brass, and their faces will be hidden by fire.

“This torment is so that God may punish men for their misdeeds, for God will make His reckoning in a single instant. This is a declaration to mankind, so that they should take heed and be aware recognizing their Lord as their only object of worship.” (14:47-52)

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