

Chapter 8: Realistic Conception of the World

Islam is a realistic religion. The word "Islam" means submission. This indicates that the first condition of being a Muslim is to submit to the realities and truths. Islam rejects every kind of obduracy, stubbornness, prejudice, blind imitation, bias and selfishness, and regards all of them as contrary to realism and realistic approach to truth. From the point of view of Islam a man who seeks truth, but fails in his efforts may be excused, but the acceptance of truth by virtue of imitation or heredity by a man who is otherwise stubborn and arrogant has no value.

A true Muslim, whether a male or a female, eagerly accepts truth wherever he or she may find it. As far as the acquisition of knowledge is concerned, a Muslim shows no bias. He may go even to the farthest corner of the world for acquiring knowledge. His efforts to gain knowledge and to find truth are not confined to any particular period of his life nor to any territorial region. Nor does he insist to acquire knowledge from any particular person. The Holy Prophet has said that to seek knowledge is the duty of every Muslim, whether a man or a woman. He has also asked the Muslims to receive it even from an idolater.

There is another saying of the Holy Prophet which exhorts the Muslims to seek it even if they have to go to China for that purpose. He is also reported to have said: "*Continue to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave*". Superficial and partial notions of the problems, blind imitation of the forefathers and submission to the absurd hereditary traditions, being contrary to the spirit of submission to truth, are censured by Islam and regarded as misleading.

Allah is Absolute Reality and Source of Life

Man is a realistic being. A new-born human child from the very first moments of its life, while looking for its mother's breast, seeks it as a reality. Gradually the body and the mind of the infant develop to the extent that it can distinguish between itself and other things. Though the new-born child's contact with other things is established through a series of its thoughts, it knows that the reality of the things is distinct from that of the thoughts which it entertains and uses as a medium only.

Integral Characteristics of the World

The realities which man can perceive through his senses and which we call the world, have the following integral characteristics:

(i) Limitation

Everything perceptible, from the smallest particle to the biggest star has spatial and temporal limitations. Nothing can exist outside a particular space and a particular period of time.

Certain things occupy a bigger space and last longer while some others occupy a smaller space and last comparatively for a shorter time. But in the final analysis they are all limited to a particular portion of place and a particular period of time.

(ii) Change

Everything is subject to a change and is indurable. Nothing perceptible in the world is in a standstill state. It is either growing or decaying. A material and perceptible being throughout the period of its existence passes through a constant course of change as a part of its reality. It either gives something or takes something or gives as well as takes. In other words, it either takes something out of the reality of other things and adds it to its own reality or gives something out of its reality or performs both the actions. In any case, there is nothing that remains static. This characteristic also is common to all things existing in this world.

(iii) Attachment

Another characteristic of the perceptible things is their attachment. We find that they all are conditional. In other words the existence of each one of them is attached to and , conditional on the existence of one or more other things. None of them can exist if those other things do not exist. If we look deeply into the reality of the material and perceptible things, we will find that many 'ifs' are attached to their existence. We do not find a single perceptible thing which may be existing unconditionally and independently. The existence of everything is conditional on the existence of something else, and the existence of that something else in its turn is also conditional on the existence of something else, and so on.

(iv) Dependence

The existence of all our perceptible things depends on the fulfilment of the numerous conditions attached to it. The existence of each of these conditions again depends on the fulfilment of a series of some other conditions. There is no perceptible thing which may exist independently, i.e. in the absence of the conditions on which its existence depends. Thus dependence pervades all existing things.

(v) Relativeness

All perceptible things are relative as regards to their existence as well as to their qualities. When we attribute to them greatness, power, beauty, antiquity and even existence, we say so in comparison to other things. When we say, for example, that the sun is very large, we mean that it is larger than the earth and other planets of our solar system. Otherwise this very sun is smaller than many other stars. Similarly when we say that such and such ship or such and such animal is powerful, we compare it with man or something weaker than man.

Even the existence of a thing is comparative. Whenever we speak of any existence, perfection, wisdom, beauty, power or grandeur, we take into consideration a lower degree of that quality. We can always visualize a higher degree of it also and then a further higher degree. Each quality as compared to its higher degree is changed into its opposite. Existence becomes non-existence, perfection is changed into defectiveness. Similarly wisdom, beauty, greatness and grandeur are changed respectively into ignorance, ugliness and despicability.

The thinking power of man, the scope of which, contrary to that of the senses, is not confined to the exterior features, but also penetrates what is behind the screen of existence, tells us that existence is in no way confined to these perceptible things which are limited, changing, relative and dependent.

The scenery of existence which we observe appears on the whole to be self-existing and self-dependent. Hence there must be an everlasting, unconditional and ever-present absolute and infinite truth behind it on which everything must depend. Otherwise this scenery of existence could not stand so firmly. In other words nothing would have existed at all.

The Holy Qur'an describes Allah as Self-existing and Self-dependent, and thus reminds us that all existing things, being conditional and relative, are in need of a Self-existing truth to support and sustain them. Allah is Self-dependent because everything else depends on Him. He is Perfect, for everything else is hollow from within and needs a Truth which may fill it with existence.

The Holy Qur'an describes the perceptible things as 'signs'. In other words everything in its turn is a sign of an Infinite Being and His knowledge, power and will. From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an the world is like a book composed by a wise and sagacious being, every line and every word of which is a sign of the wisdom and sagacity of its author. From the point of view of the Holy Qur'an, the more a man comes to know the reality of the things, the more he gets acquainted with Divine wisdom, power and blessings.

From one angle every natural science is a branch of cosmology. From another angle and from a deeper way of looking at things, it is a branch of the knowledge (recognition) of Allah.

To elucidate the Qur'anic point of view in this respect we quote here just one verse of the Holy Qur'an out of so many similar verses: ***"Surely in the creation of the heavens and the alternation of night and day, the ships which sail on the sea with (cargoes) beneficial to man, the water that Allah***

sends down from heaven with which He revives the earth after it is dead and replenishes it with all kinds of animal life, in the movement of the winds and in the clouds held between the sky and the earth, there are signs for the people who have sense." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 164)

In this verse the Holy Qur'an invites the attention of the people to general cosmology, to the ship-building industry, to tourism and its financial advantages, to meteorology, to the

origin of winds and rain, to the movement of clouds, to biology and zoology. It regards the pondering on the philosophy of these sciences as something leading to the recognition of Allah.

Attributes of Allah

The Holy Qur'an says that Allah has all the attributes and characteristics of a perfect being.

"He has the most beautiful names." (Surah al-Hashr, 59:24).

"His is the sublime similitude in the heavens and in the earth" (Surah ar-Rum, 30:27)

As such Allah is Living, Almighty, All-Knowing, Master of His Will, Merciful, Guide, Creator, Wise, Forgiving and Just. There is no sublime quality which He does not possess.

On the other hand He is not a body nor a compound. He is neither weak nor cruel.

The first group of the sublime attributes of Allah, denoting His perfection is called His affirmative attributes and the second group of His attributes denoting His freedom from every kind of defect and imperfection is called His negative attributes. We both praise and glorify Allah. When we praise Him we mention His affirmative attributes and when glorify Him, we say that He is free from all that is not worthy of Him. In both the cases we affirm His Knowledge to our own benefit and thus uplift ourselves.

Monotheism

Allah has no associate or partner. There is none like Him. It is basically impossible that there should be anyone like Him, for in that case we shall have two or more Gods instead of one. To be two, three or more is a characteristic of the limited and relative things. Plurality has no meaning in regard to an absolute and infinite being.

For example, we can have one child. We can also have two or more children. Similarly we can have one friend. We can also have two or more friends. A friend or a child is a limited being, and a limited being can have a like of him and can be multiplicable. But an infinite being is not multiplicable at all. The following example, though not adequate may be found useful for the purpose of elucidating the point.

In respect of the dimensions of the material world, that is the world which we can see and perceive, the scientists have two theories. Some of them maintain that the dimensions of the world are limited. In

other words this perceivable world reaches a point where it ends. But some others are of the opinion that the dimensions of the material world have no middle, no beginning and no end. If we accept the theory that the material world is limited, a question arises as to whether it is one world or more than one? But if we maintain that this world has no limits, the question of the existence of another world becomes absurd. Whatever we may presume to be another world, it will either be identical with this world or a part of it.

This examples applies to the material world as well as the material beings which are limited, conditional and created. The reality of none of them is absolute, independent and self-existing. The material world, though limitless from the viewpoint of its dimensions, is limited from the viewpoint of its reality. But as its dimensions are limitless, we cannot presume the existence of another world.

Almighty Allah has an infinite existence. He is an absolute reality, and He pervades everything. No space or time is devoid of Him. He is closer to us than our jugular vein. Hence it is impossible that He should have a like of Him. We cannot even suppose the existence of another being like Him.

Furthermore, we see the signs of His wisdom and attention prevailing everywhere and pervading everything. We observe that one single will and one single system govern the entire world. That shows that our world is uncentred, not multcentred.

Furthermore, had there been two or more Gods, evidently two or more wills would have applied to everything and two or more realities having a different centre would have existed in every existing thing. As a result everything would have become two or more things. This being an absurd proposition, in fact nothing would have existed at all. This is what the Holy Qur'an means when it says: ***"If there were therein (in the Universe) Gods besides Allah, then surely both the heavens and the earth had been discorded."*** (Surah al-Ambiya, 21:22)

Worship and Adoration

The acknowledgement of One Allah as the most perfect being, having the most sublime attributes and free from every defect and deficiency, and the recognition of His relation to the world consisting in His creatorship, guardianship, munificence, compassion and mercy, create a reaction in us which is called adoration and worship.

Worship is a kind of relationship which man establishes with his Creator. It consists of man's submission to Allah and extolling and thanking Him. It is a relationship which man can establish with his Creator only. The establishment of such a relationship with anyone else is neither conceivable nor permissible.

The acknowledgement of Allah as the only source of existence and the only Master and Lord of everything makes it incumbent on us not to associate any creature with Him in adoration. The Holy Qur'an insists that Allah alone should be worshipped. There is no sin more deadly than associating anyone or anything else with Him.

Now let us see what is worship and what kind of relationship is that which is peculiar to Allah and which cannot be established with any other being.

Definition of Worship

To make the meaning of worship clear and in order to define it correctly, it is necessary to mention two points as a prelude:

(i) Worship may consist either of words or of actions. The former kind consists of a series of words and sentences which we recite, such as praising Allah, the recitation of the Holy Qur'an or the recitation of the formulas normally recited while offering prayers, and pronouncing '*Labbayk*' during Hajj.

The worship which consists of actions is represented by such acts as standing, bowing and prostration in prayers, circum-ambulation of the Holy Ka'bah, and staying at Arafat and Mash'ar. Most of the acts of worship, such as prayers and pilgrimage (*Hajj*) comprise words and actions both.

(ii) Human acts are of two kinds. Some acts have no remote purpose. They are not performed as a symbol of something else, but they are performed for their own natural effects. For example, a farmer carries out the functions connected with farming in order to secure their natural results. He does not carry them out as a symbol or to express any feelings. The same is the case with a tailor when he is doing his tailoring. When we proceed to school, we have nothing in mind except reaching there. With this act we do not intend to convey any other purpose or meaning.

But there are acts which we perform as a symbol of a series of some other objects or in order to express our feelings. We lower our head as a sign of confirmation, we sit in the doorway as a sign of humility and bow to someone as a sign of reverence.

Most of the human acts are of the first kind and only a few of the second. Anyway, there are acts which are performed to express our feelings or to show some other objectives. These acts are used in place of words to express an intention.

Now keeping in mind the above two points, we may say that worship, whether it is performed by means of words or acts is a meaningful deed. Man by means of his devotion gives expression to a truth. Similarly by means of such acts as bowing, prostration, circumambulation etc. he wants to convey what he says when he pronounces devotionals and liturgy.

Spirit of Adoration and Worship

Through his worship, whether it is performed by means of words or acts, man conveys certain things:

(i) He praises Allah by pronouncing His peculiar attributes having a sense of absolute perfection, such as absolute knowledge, absolute power and absolute will. Absolute perfection means that His knowledge,

power and will are not limited by or conditional on anything else and are a corollary of His total and complete independence.

(ii) He glorifies Allah and declares Him free from every defect and deficiency such as death, limitation, ignorance, helplessness, stinginess, cruelty etc.

(iii) He thanks Allah, considering Him to be the real source of everything good and of all bounties, and believing that all favours are received from Him alone. Others are only intermediaries appointed by Him.

(iv) He expresses total submission to Him and acknowledges that unconditional obedience is due to Him. He, being the Absolute Master of all that exists, is entitled to issue orders and we being slaves, it is our duty to obey Him.

(iv) In regard to His above attributes Allah has no associate or partner. None other than Him is absolutely perfect and none other than Him is absolutely free from every defect. None other than Him is the true source of all bounties and none other than Him deserves to be thanked for all of them. None other than Him deserves total submission and to be obeyed unconditionally. Every other obedience like that of the Prophet, the Imam, the lawful Muslim ruler, the parents and the teachers must culminate in His obedience and be subject to His good pleasure to be lawful. That is the appropriate response which a man should show to his Almighty Lord. Except in the case of Allah this kind of response is neither applicable nor permissible.

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