

Human Nature: A Proof

The human nature offers one of the most important ways to demonstrate the existence of God. When we say that human nature is disposed toward the knowledge of Divine, we mean to say that every human being's nature and disposition is so constituted that it is naturally disposed to acquire Divine gnosis or knowledge.

In other words, in the same way as all living creatures are driven by urges of hunger and thirst, or craving for love, likewise all human beings are by instinct inclined to seek the knowledge of God. As the presence of those instincts does not need any explanation, in the same way no reasoning is required to prove man's inclination to know God.

A bird, without any prior learning, knows by instinct how to make a nest and how to feed its young and how to take care of them and love them, likewise man also, without any acquisition of prior knowledge, is attracted towards the omnipotent and omniscient Being by way of his heart and conscience. Rumi describes this similitude in a beautiful verse:

همچو میل کودکان با مادران سرّ میل خود نداند در لبان

همچو میل مفرط هر نو مرید سوی آن بیر جوانبخت مجید

جزء عقل این از عقل آن کل است جنبش این سایه زان شاخ گل است

سایه اش فانی شود آخر در او بس بداند سرّ میل و جستجو

***Like an infant unaware of its craving for the mother's milk,
Like the novice's unthought respect for the adept sage,
Like a thinking particle of the universal intellect,
Like the swaying shadow of the flower bough,
Decreases as it merges with the tree trunk,
Effacing itself, discovers the secret of its love.***

It has already been mentioned that human beings possess a prior knowledge of God. The presence of this unacquired, pre-existent inclination towards God is also attested by several psychologists. They have counted this inherent quality of human nature among the sublime tendencies of the human mind for the following reasons:

1. Search for truth, or inclination to fathom the reality of being, which is the fountainhead and source of love, wisdom, and philosophy. In the words of Aristotle, a philosopher first falls into a state of wonder and perplexity, and afterwards, in order to overcome this condition he goes in search of reality by the means of speculation and philosophizing.

This tendency exists much before intellectual maturity—even during early childhood—sometimes making a child to pose so many questions as to exhaust the answering elders. Sometimes the child's questions are concerned with such problems as have still remained unsolved for humanity, and are apparently likely to remain so. However, with a little variation of degrees, this tendency is present in all human individuals to a greater or lesser extent, and is regarded as natural.

2. Inclination towards moral perfection and human virtues such as benevolence and kindness to others, truthfulness, sincerity, self-sacrifice, solidarity, etc.

3. Attraction towards beauty in all its forms and shapes, from the beauties of nature, such as flowers, gardens, mountains, to values of spiritual beauty and moral grace.

4. Inclination towards absolute perfection, or towards the One Being, who is the origin and source of all things. Presence of this insight and un-acquired vision is posited by religious philosophers, in the sense that man possesses a direct knowledge which is not gained through the senses. This type of knowledge is 'knowledge by presence' (*'ilm huduri*) and stands against 'acquired knowledge' (*'ilm husuli*).

As already explained above, 'knowledge by presence' is the self-knowledge of the self of its own states and causes of its acts and deeds, through immediate experience, such as consciousness of one's own feelings of love, fear, hope, etc. Knowledge by presence also includes the immediate recognition that man himself is an effect of a cause and that his being originates from a divine source and absolute perfection on which his being depends.

Now, it has to be seen that when we say that man is naturally disposed towards God, whether we mean that man is naturally inclined to seek God, or if man has a natural insight and vision of God, or if both these senses are meant. With reference to what we have said, it must be stated that both these senses are included.

That is, both of them are natural: inclination towards God as well as intuitive and immediate knowledge of His sacred Essence. It means that within the profound depths of his being, man fully realizes, without any prior instruction, his dependence and reliance on the Supreme, Perfect and Self-existing Being. Man also realizes that only under the guidance of such a Being can he attain perfection and enlightenment, and that the instinctive attraction towards that Sublime, Perfect and Self-existing Being is ingrained in his nature and temperament.

However, how can one demonstrate that such a natural inclination underlies human nature? In truth it does not stand in need of any rational demonstration, because the truthfulness of it is obvious for every individual by direct and intuitive knowledge of his own self and also from the indications and signs he observes in others which attest to this directly experienced fact.

The natural vision of the Divine Being is obtained through `knowledge by presence' (*'ilm huduri*), and like awareness about such feelings as love, fear, anxiety and hatred, does not require any reasoned demonstration whatsoever.

The Quran and Natural Knowledge of God

There are several verses in the Quran which prove that the knowledge of God and inclination toward the Divine are part of natural tendencies of mankind. Two verses are often cited in this regard. We shall discuss them now.

First Verse

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۖ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ
اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set thy face to the religion, a man of pure faith—God's nature upon which He originated mankind. There is no changing God's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know it not. (30:30)

Now, we shall see what this `religion' is, turning towards which is regarded as a natural human inclination. `Religion' may be interpreted in one of the two following ways:

a) Agreement and harmony of human nature with the principal and basic tenets of religion. Religious instructions such as the command to eat pure and good things and to abstain from impure and corrupt things, to be kind and benevolent to others, especially one's father, mother and other relatives, to lead a wholesome married life, to act with justice, to refrain from tyranny and repression, to refrain from taking into possession any property belonging to orphans, to refrain from doing harm to anybody, especially the weak, to be humble before the creator and to worship Him, to refrain from jealousy, malice and hypocrisy, and to cultivate a purity of heart and sincerity of mind—all these things, specially the worship of God, are among the most important tenets of religion that are in complete conformity and harmony with our nature. We are constantly attracted towards its doctrines and teachings consciously or unconsciously, even though it may appear that we do not show any considerable interest in them.

b) The state of absolute obedience and submission before God is named by the Quran as 'Islam' and one committed to it is called a 'muslim'. Ibrahim ('a) is reported to have said:

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا
إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

Our Lord, make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a nation submissive to Thee (2:128)

Ya'qub ('a) is quoted as addressing his sons:

وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبُ يَا بَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمُ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا
وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

...God has chosen for you the religion; see that you die not save in [a state of] surrender [to Him]. (2:132)

Even the most implacable Pharaoh, as he is engulfed by waves in the sea, says:

وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتَبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ وَجُنُودُهُ بَغْيًا وَعَدُوًّا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَدْرَكَهُ
الْغَرَقُ قَالَ آمَنْتُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذِي آمَنْتُ بِهِ بَنُو إِسْرَائِيلَ وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

...I believe that there is no god but He in whom the Children of Israel believe; I am of those that surrender [to Him]. (10:90)

There are many instances like these in the Quran, and everywhere it means the same state of absolute submission, veneration, and humbleness before God Almighty. The religion of Islam (lit. submission) has its name because it stands for absolute submission and resignation towards God's command and will—something which has been a characteristic of all the prophets of God from the first to the last.

This call for submission to Divine will has underlain all prophetic missions, although it has received its most articulate and pronounced form in the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (S).

If we consider the two above-mentioned interpretations of the term 'religion', there are two meanings which can be attributed to the statement that 'religion' constitutes a natural tendency ingrained in the nature of every human being. It may mean that inclination to worship the Almighty and to obey His commands is ingrained in the human nature.

It may also mean that the human being, by nature, has a prior knowledge of God. Now, the question arises whether, in addition to the above-mentioned tendencies, the knowledge of God is, also, a natural attribute? Our answer to this question is in the affirmative; because the existence of every kind of tendency implies some kind of awareness of the object of attraction.

Attraction can take place between two objects devoid of consciousness—such as between a magnet and a piece of iron—or between a conscious being and something which may be either a being endowed with consciousness and awareness or something devoid of it. In the second condition, it is not possible that the attraction should occur without some kind of awareness and knowledge about the source of attraction.

So, on this basis, when we accept that affinity to God is natural to man, we must also admit that the knowledge of God, which it necessitates by the presence of that affinity should, also be natural. Because it is not acceptable that an inclination towards something should be natural, while its knowledge and awareness, which is its necessary counterpart, should be unnatural and an acquired one.

Thus, it is evident that natural 'theophilia' in man requires and necessitates instinctive 'theology' as well, and both are ingrained in human nature. It should be remembered that this kind of 'knowledge' is distinct from knowledge in its usual sense and must not be confused with it; because it is something similar to animal instinct which fulfils its function without any prior training or learning.

Second Verse

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ
الْمُبْطِلُونَ

And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify' -lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this,' or lest you say, Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, wilt Thou destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?' (7:172-173)

There exists some diversity of opinion regarding the interpretation of these verses. The two most important among them are as follows:

a) God has created mankind in such a way that if they ponder over their own creation and their perpetual dependence on their Sustainer, and if they keenly observe and meditate about the manifestation and signs of His wisdom, power, and providence, they will confess and bear testimony to His existence as the One God, who creates them and sustains them.

In view of this statement, this verse is expressive of the human situation: like a thirsty animal after water, like a hungry human being or beast in search of food, or like the longing of one suffering from sickness for a healer, the situation of the human being is such that it speaks eloquently of his constant need for a Sustainer and reminds man of his Wise Creator.

His situation is such as if his Creator keeps on questioning him: 'Am I not your Sustainer, your Lord? Am I not the One God?' and man with his entire being replies to his Creator, 'Yes. I bear testimony that You are my God. Yes, You are the One God.' This bearing of testimony, this constant acknowledgement of a covenant between man and his Maker goes on throughout his life. And this is what represents the Divine testimony against man, so that on the Day of Judgment he may not excuse himself for lack of knowledge and justify his not being a monotheist because he inherited the religion of his ancestors who were idolaters or polytheists.

b) Every human being has an incorporeal and immaterial being as well, which is the cardinal reality of his being; his physical and corporeal existence is subsequent and subordinated to his real, spiritual existence, and is merely a shadow or an image of his spiritual being. In other words, every human being, and even every creature, follows a cyclic course with respect to God: *it originates from God and returns unto God* **إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ**.

However, this course and existential journey varies according to its merits and shortcomings. Prior to this worldly existence a human being has some kind of a more perfect, a more unrestricted and a sublime existence, which becomes imperfect, infirm and restricted after entering the material world; however, again when he leaves it, he returns to that prior state of perfection. The verse:

وَأِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ

Naught is there, but its treasures are with Us, and We send it not down but in an appointed measure. (15:21)

is cited as evidence that every being had a more extensive existence before its material stage, and becomes more confined as it enters the material world. The late `Allamah Tabataba'i commenting on the following verses of the Quran,

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (82) فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ
كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (83)

His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it Be', and it is. So glory be to Him, in whose hand is the dominion of everything, and unto whom you shall be returned. (36:82–83)

وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ

Our commandment is but one, as the twinkling of an eye. (54:50)

says that these, and several other verses like them, prove that the gradual emergence of all living beings, including man, is consequent to God's command ('Be'). It is with the utterance 'Be' that existence is conferred at once and without gradualness upon things.

On account of this, all existents have two visages: one is physical and this-worldly, associated with their gradual emergence from potentiality to actuality and from nothingness into being; the other visage is with respect to God and is non-gradual. According to the first visage, a thing is imperfect at its beginning, but involves during its passage through the world of matter, until, ultimately, it returns to God.

The second visage, which is with respect to God, is ungradual; it means that a thing has from its beginning everything it needs to acquire actuality. These two faces, though they are different aspects of the same thing, are nevertheless two different facets.

These verses imply that despite all its enormous vastness the universe possesses a unified, unitary existence before God, and every part of this whole is present simultaneously for God. In fact, it is not possible that a creation should not be present for its creator or an act for the doer. This is the thing referred to as 'kingdom' in the Quran:

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

So We were showing Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and earth, that he might be of those having sure faith. (6:75)

But the worldly visage that we behold of human life, a visage in which all things are different from one another in their conditions, circumstances and behavior, their varying situation in time and space, engages the senses and alienates human beings from their God.

This material visage is a secondary derivative of the other and a by-product of the original visage. The relationship between these two is that between *Kun* ('Be') and *Fayakun* ('and it is'). The first represents *`alam al-amr*, the 'world of command', a world of incorporeal and abstract existence free of the fetters of space and time. The second, the *`alam al-khalq*, 'the world of creation', is the world of gradual physical birth, subject to the restrictions of space, time and matter. 1

This explanation is sufficient to show that this world (*alam al-khalq*) is preceded by another existence (*`alam al-amr*), which is similar to it, except that in the second there is no screen separating creatures from the Creator. In that world, the knowledge of God and testimony to His Divinity and Unity are not based on acquired knowledge (*`ilm husuli*), but on direct experience and knowledge by presence (*`ilm huduri*).

Now, if we study the verse 7:172 in the light of this discussion, we will see that there is a distinct allusion to the existence of *`alam al-amr* ('world of command'), a world prior to that of physical existence where mankind existed before taking birth in this world. There God had already made the human individuals distinct from one another, made them witnesses to His Divinity by asking them, 'Am I not your Lord?' to which they replied, 'Yes, we testify.'

In short, every human individual, before stepping into this physical world of change, transition, decay and motion in space and time, had a kind of immaterial existence, devoid of all the dimensions of material change and movement. It was a mode of existence immersed in knowledge, and awareness in which he experienced the Divinity and Unity of God.

In that mode of existence, he had experience of God, not through any acquired rational knowledge based on concepts and arguments, but on direct experience. God spoke to man, made him bear testimony to His Divinity and Unity, made His covenant with man, and did not leave any room for pretexts and excuses.

It is obvious that a claim is established only when there is no room for any denial, or for explaining away the claim. As mentioned, that claim has to be based on evidence experienced directly through *'ilm huduri*, not on evidence based on *`ilm husuli*. For acquired knowledge is based on general concepts and ideas which cannot establish the verity of a particular truth or fact.

On the other hand, the verity of a truth directly experienced by a knower is indubitable. Thus, in the above verse (7:172), the Divine address to man is one directly experienced by him, and man has attested to God's Divinity and Unity directly without any intermediary or mediator.

Therefore, there is no room for any denial of this primordial testimony. However, if God had taken this testimony through an intermediary (i.e. through acquired knowledge), there was room for him to deny or debate something which he had not directly experienced.

So, the purport of the verse is that there has taken place a certain kind of dialogue or encounter between every human being and God. As a result of that experience, man had direct knowledge of God's Divinity and His Unity.

During this dialogue or encounter, God has taken from him a confession to His Divinity and Unity, and man, too, confessed to it as an evident truth imbedded in his own nature. As a result, there is no room for any pretext or excuse for denying that once directly experienced truth.

However, it is possible that man's natural vision may be clouded by forgetfulness and negligence, which may engulf his being and obscure his natural sense of godliness. But once he removes the dust of forgetfulness from his heart, he is able to regain his vision, recollect his real self, and hear the echoes of that sacred dialogue in the depths of his being—the first dialogue between his Creator and himself, and his original covenant with God.

This natural voyage of the self or the heart was the 'path' used by various mystics and saints. When Hafiz says:

جناب عشق را در گه بسی والاتر از عقل است

Love has an abode higher than that of reason.

he is referring to a state of direct religious experience reached by means of self-purification and achievement of a beatific vision of Absolute Love, Beneficence, Power and Beauty, which surpasses the reach of rational understanding, conception and imagination.

Those who are not satiated by rational, philosophical arguments can quench their spiritual thirst and obtain the peace of mind and spirit through the way of nature. Even those who are not in quest of truth to this extent, and are not interested in purely rational pursuits, or those who are not capable of such endeavors, they approach God through this way of nature, as Rumi puts it:

ارتباط بی تکلیف بی قیاس هست رب الناس را با جان ناس

***A relationship free of categories and syllogisms,
exists between the Lord of Men and souls of men.***

1. Editor's note: The reader's attention is called here to Martyr_Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Beheshti's article "The Qur'an and the Theory of alam al-Khalq and alam al-'Amr", Al-Tawhid, vol. 1, No. 2, in which he rejects the entire theory of alam al-amr and alam al-khalq as a notion alien to the Qur'an and as a deviate transference of non-Qur'anic notion to it by the Mutakallimun.

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