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The Islamic World View

The concept upon which the Prophet of Islam founded his religion is that all of existence has been created by the One God, and that every one of the parts of existence is directed by God towards the perfection and happiness peculiar to that part. Man also, who possesses eternal life, is directed towards the happiness and welfare peculiar to his nature; and this he gains by following the path shown to him by God.

The Holy Prophet addressed his message to natural man, that is, man endowed with human nature and God-given intelligence and will who is not tainted by superstition and blind belief. Such an individual with his God-given primordial nature has the innate capacity and ability to apprehend the above-described world view.

With the slightest reminder he naturally understands that the world in its vastness and grandeur and its perfect arrangement and order is the creation of a transcendent Creator whose infinite Being is the source of every beauty and perfection and who is above all ugliness and evil. Such an individual understands that the creation of the world and its inhabitants was not without meaning and purpose; that the life of this world will be followed by another life, and that the good and bad actions of this world will not go unanswered for.

And as a result he understands that there must be a way of life peculiarly suited to the needs of man which will enable him to live according to his own real nature.

Islam's choice of natural and primordial man as the object of the religious message has several basic results:

1. The Principle of Equality

The Islamic teachings apply to all. There is no distinction between black and white, man and woman, noble and humble, rich and poor, king and beggar, strong and weak, eastern and western, learned and ignorant, old and young, or between those who are present and those who will come in the future, for all

of these share human nature and that which it implies in common.

Equality of this sort is limited to Islam; other ways, each in its own measure, have certain discriminatory principles. For example, Hinduism distinguishes fundamentally between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and between man and woman; in Judaism a distinction is made between the children of Israel and the Gentiles, and in Christianity between man and woman.

As for secular social systems, in these there is a distinction between subjects of a country and foreigners. It is only Islam which considers humanity as one and has uprooted completely the principle of distinction and discrimination.

"O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct." (Qur'an 49: 13)

"Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one from another." (Qur'an 3: 195)

That is, male or female, you are all of the same human status.

2. The Principle of Realism

In view of the fact that man is provided with the instinct of seeking reality and of discerning between the real and the unreal, the laws and injunctions laid down by Islam are based upon a correspondingly realistic view of things.

This can be explained as follows: Although man in his natural activity is stimulated towards his vital goals by feelings and emotions, he in fact sets out after real goals, not illusion and fantasy. The newly born baby who cries in his hunger and reaches for his mother's breast in search of milk desires that which is milk in reality, not the illusion of milk; he cries from real hunger, not from fantasy and imagination.

Every individual who strives in the way of achieving his own interests seeks his own real interests, not their mental concept. In the same manner when feelings and emotions present certain desires to man, and without being able to take into account his true best-interest stimulate him toward certain goals, it is the faculty of discrimination or reason which harnesses and modifies these emotions and shows to man that which is in reality the good and the evil and the rightness and the wrongness of his action.

It is reason, moreover, which forbids the sick person from eating harmful foods although he wishes to eat them; it is reason which prevents man from entering upon dangerous activities, hence depriving him of a large part of his freedom of action; it is reason which is man's single superiority over other animals, and his most important faculty for distinguishing the real from the illusory.

The laws and injunctions brought by the Prophet of Islam are based upon a realistic view of things, not upon the whims and fancies of men. That is to say that man must perform that action which is really and truly in his best interest even if it is against his fancy; and he must avoid that action which he feels like performing but which is not in conformity with his real interests.

The case of the religious community is the same: it must accomplish what is truly in its best interest and what is in conformity with its felicity, even though this act may be contrary to its wishes; it must not perform that action which is the wish of the majority of its members but which is contrary to its true interest.

In the language of the Holy Qur'an that which is in conformity with reality or with man's true best interest is called "The Truth" (*al-Haqq*). It is the single goal towards which man must direct his endeavor and after which he must strive.

"After the Truth what is there saving error?" (Qur'an 10: 33)

"And if the Truth had followed their desires, verily the heavens and the earth and whosoever is therein had been corrupted" (Qur'an 23: 71).

An almond nut which is placed in the ground under the necessary conditions will after a few days break its skin, and a green shoot will come forth from its kernel as well as a number of roots which are put forth in various directions; by way of the roots the shoot will take continuous nourishment from the ground and will constantly grow and develop until ultimately it becomes a fully grown almond tree with trunk, branches, leaves blossoms and fruit.

The sperm of an animal placed in the womb of the female of the species under particular circumstances will assume the form and shape peculiar to itself and by means of the activity peculiar to its species will day by day become larger and more complete until it reaches the limit of its perfection.

If we investigate in the same manner all of the creatures of the world one by one it will become perfectly obvious that for each of them there is a way peculiar to itself through which it reaches the limit of its own perfection, and that from the first day of its coming into being it is attracted towards its end.

In its development it never goes astray nor does it change its direction, as if, for example, an almond shoot could develop into a horse or a horse could go to sleep one night and wake up the next morning an almond tree. Rather every creature is guided toward its final goal by means of creation itself, and in traversing this path of development it never falls into error.

The path which has been laid out for each creature leading to its final goal is one which is in conformity with the means and potentialities with which it was provided by its own nature. These means allow it to attract what is of benefit and repel what is harmful and threatens its existence. Chickens eat grain, sheep and cattle feed upon forage, and wolves, leopards and hawks hunt for game, for each is equipped with

particular digestive systems which are proper only for particular nutritive substances.

In the same way, birds defend themselves with their beaks, sheep and cattle with their horns, scorpions and bees with their stings, lions and leopards with their teeth and claws, and deer by flight, for the defensive equipment of each of them is just this. In summary, each of these creatures moves in its life towards a particular goal and end. It performs actions in which the equipment provided by its very existence guides it, and the nature of which this equipment determines.

This guidance and determination is the same general guidance and determination which the Qur'an has referred to and attributed to the Creator:

"Our Lord is He who gave unto everything its nature, then guided it aright." (Qur'an 20: 50)

"Who createth, then disposeth; who measureth [i.e., determineth], then guideth." (Qur'an 87: 2-3).

Obviously, man also, who is one of the species of creation, is not an exception to this general rule. His natural disposition and character show to him the path which he should take in life, and point out and distinguish the duties and responsibilities which he must fulfill.

"From what thing does he create him (man)? From a drop of seed. He createth him and proportioneth him, then maketh the way easy for him." (Qur'an 80: 18-20).

Meditation upon this and upon our previous discussion will show that the result of both of these discussions is the same, that is, that correct actions and deeds (those which are in conformity with man's true best interest)– which man must choose by means of his instinct of discerning between the real and the illusory–are the very same actions towards which the nature of man guides him, endowed as it is with its own peculiar equipment.

It is thus that the way towards which the Holy Qur'an invites man, which it has named "the Religion of the Truth", which it also refers to as the natural and primordial religion, and attributes it to creation itself.

"So set they purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright–the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion." (Qur'an 30: 30).

"By a soul and Him who perfected it, and inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it. He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow, and he is indeed a failure who stunteth it." (Qur'an 91: 7-10).

From another point of view, since creation is the work of God and since every sort of beauty and appropriateness which is observable in it is the result of His Mercy, that which is appropriate to human nature inasmuch as it determines the actions which man must perform is called "the Will of God".

(This is of course the Will of God in as much as it ordains laws, guides men in his actions, and holds him responsible for these actions; it is not the same as the Will of God inasmuch as it creates—which can never be disobeyed or violated.)

Likewise the duties and rules which result from that which is appropriate to man's nature are called the commands and prohibitions of God.

"The Lord bringeth to pass what He willeth and chooseth. They (men) have never any choice."
(Qur'an 28: 68).

Since the religion of Islam consists of duties and commands from God, the Creator, and since the person who follows its doctrinal and practical injunctions has submitted himself to the Will of God, in the language of the Holy Qur'an this religion is called "Islam" ("submission" or "surrender").

"Lo! religion with Allah (is) the Surrender. (Qur'an 3: 19).

"And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allah) it will not be accepted from him." (Qur'an 3: 85).

3. The Principle of Equilibrium between the Material and the Spiritual

The third result of Islam's message being directed at natural man, a result which is indeed one of the great achievements of this religion, is that a middle way is taken between materiality and spirituality.

This is in contrast to Judaism, which, as can be observed in its Holy Book, the Torah, is not concerned with spiritual matters, and with Christianity, which on the contrary—according to the explicit sayings of Jesus—is not concerned with the material life of this world.

Other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism and even Zoroastrianism, Manicheanism and Sabeanism, which to one degree or another are concerned with spiritual things, have separated the spiritual way from material life, to the extent that the connection between the two has been totally severed.

It is only Islam which chooses the middle way and bases itself upon the foundation of primordial human nature. towards his God, and include expressions of servitude in the face of His Lordship, poverty and need in the face of His Wealth and Independence, lowness in the face of His Grandeur, insignificance in the face of His Majesty and Glory, ignorance in the face of His Knowledge, incapacity in the face of His Power, and submission in the face of His Will.

Moreover, to the extent possible these expressions have been given a social character, such as in the case of the groups which gather for the daily congregational prayers, the larger groups which meet for

Friday prayers, and the still larger gathering which takes place at the time of the pilgrimage to Mecca.

A second portion of these injunctions concern duties which man has in social surroundings and in relation with his fellow man. Of course in these duties, which are the Islamic laws, the sense of responsibility towards God has been taken into account, for man must surrender only to His Will (that is, the requirements of His creation). In other words, all actions must be performed in the shadow of the three basic principles of Islam: Divine Unity, Prophecy, and the Last Day.

"Say: O People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians]! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partners unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him)." (Qur'an 3: 64).

From the previous discussion it has become clear that in the religion of Islam the path to be followed in life has been ordered and arranged in such a way that man's social and material life resembles a cradle in which the spiritual life is nurtured.

The inner spiritual light of the practicing Muslim is such that all of his individual and social actions contribute to purifying his soul and strengthening its radiance. Although outwardly he is with people, inwardly he is with God, and although he is in the midst of a crowd, he dwells in the spiritual retreat of the divine secret.

At the same time that he is running here and there in pursuit of material goals, and is undergoing a series of events both bitter and sweet, pleasant and unpleasant, beautiful and ugly, and in general is involved in the events of the tumultuous external world, his heart is free and exists in a world of tranquility in which he sees the Face of God wherever he looks.

"And whither so ever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance". (Qur'an 2: 115).

A pious Muslim extends his spiritual life into every aspect of his material life. Wherever he is and whatever he is doing he is in contact with God. Everything with which he occupies himself in the material world is a mirror in which he sees God reflected.

On the other hand, non-Muslims who turn towards the spiritual life imagine that their natural and every-day life is a veil between themselves and the Truth they are seeking. As a result they are forced to abandon normal life and to assume an unaccustomed manner of living in their quest after spiritual perfection.

Whatever the advantages of such a way, from the point of view of a person who lives a normal life it is a difficult road to follow and one in which to persevere requires an extreme degree of will power. However, the person who follows the spiritual life according to the directives of Islam knows full well that such a way is easier than that of Islam, for such people, by abandoning every-day life, have taken the easy way

out and have fled from the difficulty of continual vigil and effort.

They have set a barrier in the road towards perfection which creation itself and the means it has put at man's disposal have prepared. Such men have set out on a path of their own fancy, and it is questionable whether they will ever reach the goal which creation has determined for them.

In addition, given that the world and all it contains are the creation of God and that the phenomena of the world, each according to the measure of its own existence, are signs of the Truth and mirrors displaying God, and given that man along with the various conditions which mark his primordial nature is one of these signs, then it is necessary that in the spiritual life (the way of knowledge of self and of God) God be recognized in every situation.

All of these mirrors must be utilized in the acquisition of divine knowledge and in the contemplation of God's Beauty, for if this is not the case man will gain nothing more from his labors than an imperfect knowledge or a perfect ignorance.

4. Knowledge and Wisdom from the Point of view of Islam

The person who has made a cursory study of the religions and creeds of the world will have no doubt that the dignity and honor which Islam has accorded to knowledge and wisdom and the extent to which it has encouraged their acquisition is unparalleled in any other religion or ideology, whether revealed or non-revealed. It is the Holy Qur'an which asks,

"Are those who know equal to those who do not?" (Qur'an 39: 9),

and which praises the exalted station of knowledge in the most eloquent manner. And it is the Holy Prophet who has said:

- *"The pursuit of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim,*
- *"Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave"*
- *"Seek knowledge, even unto China."*

Again, it is the Holy Qur'an which commands its followers never to stray from the way of knowledge nor to follow what is only supposed or assumed, and never to accept without deliberation what passes before their sight or crosses their minds, for they will be responsible for their beliefs.

"(O man), follow not that where of thou hast no knowledge. Lo! the hearing and the sight and the heart-of each of these it will be asked." (Qur'an 17: 36).

As has become clear Islam encourages its followers to acquire knowledge with all the powers at their disposal, and in this respect it has designated knowledge of religious jurisprudence or doctrinal sciences,

and the injunctions of the religious law (Shari'ah) as mandatory.

“And the believers should not all go out to fight [in the holy war]. Of every troop of them, a party should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion.” (Qur’an 9: 122).

A point which must be kept in mind is that the capacity of individuals for the comprehension of scientific and intellectual truth varies. There are people who have no talent for logical thought and who, with their simple minds, live in a surrounding of physical labor and on a level of purely material life, where there are others whose thought is logical and who by their very nature take a special joy in comprehending profound concepts and scientific theories.

Still others have cut their attention from both thought and physical labor and, having a special aversion for the dark world of matter and its deceiving beauty and fleeting pleasures, find in themselves a particular attraction towards the transcendent world and a peculiar fascination for its lasting and infinite beauty, of which the beauty of this world is only the reflected image. Such men easily comprehend the verities and mysteries of the transcendent world by means of inner illumination.

It is with a view to this diversity, which is clearly visible among men, that Islam instructs each of these three groups in its own terms and language. One group it has taught by means of the external and formal aspect of religion and a second group by way of intellectual demonstration, while the third group it has instructed to struggle against the carnal soul and to purify the heart. In the same way, in the Qur’an God has struck a similitude about His Own utterances and expressions:

“He sendeth down water from the sky, so that valleys flow according to their measure.” (Qur’an 13: 17).

The Holy Prophet has said:

“We prophets have been commanded to speak to men according to the measure of their understandings.”

Those among its followers who have not the taste for rational demonstration and who would face the danger of error and deviation if they were to attempt to traverse this path, Islam has charged with no more than the measure of their ability, and beyond the three principles of religion (Divine Unity, Prophecy and the Last Judgement) it only instills them with simple practical injunctions such as command to do good and prohibitions from committing evil; this type of formulation is found in a great number of Qur’anic verses and in saying of the Prophet and the Shi’ite Imams.

Of course in the case of the three principles of religion man in his primordial nature can engage in a simple form of rational demonstration, and hence he will have accepted nothing but definitely proven knowledge. And in fact this method provides him with rational proof of the remaining teachings and

injunctions which he has accepted without rational demonstration, for the truth of the principle of prophecy proves in a definitive manner the validity of all of the saying which have reached us from the Prophet.

The way of rational demonstration–Islam teaches those people who are endowed with sound minds and who have the capacity to comprehend scientific theories and intellectual and logical arguments through logical and rational demonstration. In other words, it guides them towards that which their uncorrupted and reality-seeking primordial nature immediately perceives. It does not first impose upon them its doctrines and beliefs and then defend these by reasoning and proofs.

The Book and the Tradition, that is, the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet and of the Shi'ite Imams—which make clear the meaning and purpose of the Qur'anic verses—are full of this type of rational demonstration. In them the Islamic beliefs and doctrines are explained in detail by means of the simplest forms of expression and the most convincing proofs, and likewise, mention is made in them of the general and universal benefits and advantages of the Islamic laws and injunctions.

Obviously, we must not overlook the fact that the meaning of discussion and demonstration of the benefits and advantages of the Islamic laws and injunctions is not that if an individual Muslim or Islamic society in general does not understand a particular injunction, that injunction should be rejected. For as we have already mentioned, these laws were promulgated by means of prophecy, and the proof of the validity of prophecy is a summary proof of the validity of these laws, even if we do not possess the detailed reason for this.

The way of purification of the soul–The third group of men are those who are ready and eager to sever all material attachments and to turn their attention away from the deceiving adornments and illusory desires of this world. Such men are prepared to forget all that is other than God and to close their eyes to every beauty and ugliness and every sweet and bitter experience of this transient and illusory existence.

Opening the eye of discernment towards the eternal world, they are prepared to contemplate without the veil of materiality the radiance of the Majesty and Grandeur of God, to traverse the stages of human perfection which must be crossed upon leaving this fleeting life, and to enter into the Proximity of the Divine. With such men Islam converses secretly of the divine mysteries in a language which they alone understand, and thus it guides them from the depths of ignorance to the pinnacle of knowledge and wisdom.

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