

Preface

We observe very clearly that everything in this world is in a state of flux and change. The process of renewal in life is a principle underlying the law of creation. In the same way as we believe in the immutable and enduring character of the law of change, we are also forced to believe in certain immutable concepts and to consider them eternal and everlasting. Among these immutable principles are the laws of morality and human excellence which we are forced to observe of the judgements of sound reason and to lead our lives in accordance with them.

One of the most significant factors underlying the success and failure of societies, their triumph and defeat, is the moral factor, whose decisive role in the lives of nations is so evident and conspicuous that no one can deny it.

The real nature of the human being lies in its unlimited capacity for development and perfection. These capacities, faculties, and aspirations are embedded in man's very being and precede his consciousness of his own self. In the opinion of educationists and experts in training, the control of emotions and feelings and their confinement within certain moderate limits is the most fundamental problem of human life. Any kind of development in a person's spiritual faculties must be regarded as an enduring asset. Their growth and nurturing is far more important than the knowledge and information that persons gather at various levels, because they use their inner capacities at every moment of their lives.

Though the light of reason with its natural radiance illuminates the panorama of life, it is possible that man's innate and deep-rooted instincts, which are the vital sources of every activity in life and which should be obedient tools and means at the disposal of reason, may go out of its control. By getting disoriented from their true axis, they may obstruct reason's vision and restrict its influence in such a manner that the thoughtless person is compelled to follow such inclinations as are opposed to logic and his personal interests. It is here that we realise the important role of morality in life and the great responsibility that lies on the shoulders of experts in matters of guidance and training.

On the other hand, the practice of moral principles involves a certain amount of hardship and privation. Often there is a contradiction between these principles and certain human urges. As a result, the satisfaction of these urges becomes possible only by turning one's back on those principles. Hence a

training that does make spirituality its basis cannot resist the shattering blows of instinct. Those who lack the safeguards provided by spirituality are soon carried away by the winds of desires. Because such a training lacks a force that is durable and stable so as to be able to sustain a person in advancing against the pressure of desires in all circumstances.

Religious faith is the most important guarantee for the practice of human principles and the biggest support for ethical values in man's struggle against passions and instincts. Man can liberate himself from the clutches of harmful urges and motives through faith in a Creator Whose sovereignty extends over all creation and Who knows the secrets that lie hidden in every creature, and through faith in the reward and punishment of the Day of Judgement, as well as through pure and wholesome ideas.

The aim of the prophets, especially the Prophet of Islam, may God bless him and his Household, was to educate and train human beings to attain the higher goals and to purge their thoughts of pollution and impurities.

The ethical campaign of Islam, which was launched by the Noble Prophet, was a unique movement, without a parallel, from the viewpoint of its constructive ethos, depth and originality. It was unique in the sense that it encompassed all the subtleties of the human spirit and paid special attention to every movement of human thought and consciousness which has its origin in man's inner being.

The unprecedented impact that it made on the human psyche and the reality of life was to elevate a degenerate and barbaric people from the depths of abasement to the heights of human dignity and honour. When this degenerate society was given the lamp of faith and guidance, it laid the foundations of a new order in the world and advanced in such a manner on the road of progress and development that it became a model of morality and human merit, a model whose like history has not seen.

Even today when spiritual hollowness marks the character and spirit of the twentieth-century West, whenever persons grown up in its environment take refuge in the arms of Islam, there occurs a total change in their spirit and ethos. American scholars have admitted that when the Afro-Americans embrace Islam all aspects of their lives undergo a profound change. This is the case despite the fact that in many cases their knowledge of Islam is not free of certain inadequacies.

Professor Eric Lincoln, Chairman of the faculty of sociology of religion in an American university, in a speech delivered on the topic of the impact of Islam in America, remarked:

The impact of Islam on American Blacks has been extraordinary. Until before they embraced Islam, the erstwhile non-Muslim Blacks lived in worst conditions of life, whereas at present they have a much higher level of social and economic life. Among Black Muslim families there is nothing of the kind of deviations and addiction among youth that hold American society in a state of panic.

Even non-Muslim drug addicts who embrace Islam receive a training that enables them to give up addiction and become highly productive members of society. The American Black Muslims are not at all

troublesome for others. Only when they are intimidated or attacked do they defend themselves with all power and force at their command. In this matter they have always been successful. 1

The present laws and legal systems prevailing in the world can never penetrate to the depths of man's being, which is the source of his actions and efforts, and mobilise his energies for building a wholesome society and shaping human beings who possess sublime qualities and are endowed with a cosmic vision.

In the first place, man is constituted of two different principles, body and spirit. He has, therefore, two dimensions, a celestial as well as terrestrial one, an aspect that is eternal and enduring and another which is ephemeral and transitory. Those who possess a genuine scientific insight and experience know well that these two aspects are so closely linked that any kind of disorientation in one of the two affects the other.

Accordingly, any program that addresses solely one of the dimensions of his being will fail to achieve his all-round felicity and happiness, since it does not correspond to actual reality.

In present-day societies we do not find any balance in their systems of thought, and all of them incline towards one or the other of the extremes. They either incline totally towards the sensible and the material aspect or towards the intellectual and spiritual aspect.

Their attention is centred either on the universe or on man. But the Islamic system of education focuses its attention on man's eternal nature as it really is, and, more than any other school of ethical or educational thought, makes him conscious of his duties. Its comprehensive and original ethical system is a totality of general and specific laws framed for man's individual and social existence. With its material and spiritual dimensions, it ensures the salvation and success of humanity, and by following it individuals in a society can become worthy and happy human beings.

The improvement of one's environment must begin from oneself. Without doubt anyone who attempts to reform his own person as one of the cells of the social organism and endeavours to develop his higher qualities and spiritual faculties with courage and patience, will be one of those who strive for the betterment of humanity, because a reformed human society is the result of reformed and mature individuals.

It is hoped that the contents of this book, which draws its material from the rich Islamic sources and represents the ethos of religious teachings and, in addition, presents the views and opinions of Western scholars concerning the problems relating to education and psychology, will serve as a beneficial moral and social guide. It is hoped that it will make a contribution however humble, to highlighting the true goals of education. It will be a matter of great satisfaction for me if I succeed in elucidating in this book a part of the great truths communicated by the guides of humanity and teachers of morality.

It should be mentioned that a summary of this book (perhaps less than a third of its length) was

published in the valuable religious and scholarly journal Maktab-e Islam, and now it is offered to the honoured reader in a more complete and comprehensive form. I beseech God Almighty, Who is the source of all being and before Whose glory and splendour we are no more faded murals, to grant us success and welfare in the shelter of the blessed teaching of Islam.

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1. Persian daily Ittila'at, no. 14812, 26 Shahrivar, 1354 H. Sh. (1975).

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