

The Relevance of Islamic Values to the Present Age

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This disquisition must begin with an emphatic premise. While considering the spiritual and moral values which determine the movement of life in a particular space-time context, the compartmentalization of time into the past and the present is invalid and untenable from the Islamic point of view. The alterations and developments that life experiences with the passage of serial time have nothing to do with the fundamental and unchanging principles and values but concern only the changing phenomena. Looking at life from this angle we identify two distinct aspects of it: the physico- technical and the spirituo-moral. In actual practice the physico- technical aspect is always subservient to the driving and directive spirituo-moral force while life moves on as an indivisible unity like an organism with spirit and body. The changes that occur in life affect the physico- technical aspect only; the spirituo-moral aspect remains intact and unaltered amid the panorama of changing phenomena. It is in this way that change and permanence are reconciled in Islam. The basic tenets and values, primarily spirituo- moral in nature, act as a permanent pivot around which the ever changing phenomena revolve and these perennial values save life from anarchy and misdirection. The application of the permanent principles seems to take on a new form with every new development or with the change of circumstances and this, sometimes, deludes a superficial vision but the fact is that the essence always remains unchanged.

The two aspects mentioned above can be seen intertwined in all manifestations of life like soul and body. Look at a trader's profession. How best to improve the quality of the things he deals in? Wherefrom to procure the goods and in what quantity? How best to promote the sales? Questions like these relate to the technical aspect of his profession whereas

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questions relating to the principles that govern his calling relate to the moral side, such questions as, what is fair and what foul, what to do with the surplus money, in what way is a trader responsible to his clientele and his society and how can the right balance be struck between his rights and those of his society? The technical aspect of a farmer's profession concerns such questions as how to increase the per acre yield and which technology to employ for this purpose whereas its moral aspect relates to the questions of surplus produce, conditions governing its sale and matters relating to ecology etc. Similarly the technical aspect of the calling of a scholar or a scientist is to try to know the hitherto unexplored facts and extend the frontiers of human knowledge by fresh discoveries and inventions whereas the moral side of this calling concerns such questions as how to utilize the fruits of knowledge and the prodigious power that science places in the hands of man as well as the question of the social obligation and moral responsibility of a scientist and scholar as a member of human race.

To deal with the physico - technical aspect of his life man has been sufficiently provided for in the form of mind and the faculties of reasoning and thinking. Having equipped man with these powers, God has left him free in a universe brimming with plenty of everything that he requires for his physical, psychological and mental sustenance and growth. This is essentially a material domain and man does not require any suprasensible aids to come to terms with it. On the other hand the spirituo-moral aspect involves questions of more fundamental nature questions which have ultimately metaphysical bearings such, for instance, as: What should be the directive force to regulate human behaviour? How can human nature be trained, disciplined and prepared to willingly submit to moral dos and don'ts? How can we balance the rights and duties of individual and the society? And which system of reward and punishment can best ensure righteous human action and the establishment of a just, peaceful and prosperous society? Human reason by itself is not capable enough to find answers to these questions because their answers lie beyond its pale and involve metaphysical and arational realms. They require a thorough understanding of the

complexities of the boundless universe in which man (himself a complex being) is placed and where everything is mysteriously interrelated in an immensely complex organic unity. They require a complete knowledge of history including pre-history. And above all they require the grasp of the truth that values cannot arise from physical facts, that morality cannot be derived from a body of knowledge acquired through senses and reason alone, else what, for instance, is wrong with 'might is right' if physical facts are the ultimate referent. Nor can man afford experimentation in this domain as he does in those domains which require the exercise of his mind and senses alone as experimenting in this sensitive area is fraught with extremely fatal consequences. It is, therefore, a path in which man cannot take a single step without the guidance of Divine Revelation and it was for this purpose that Allah (*Subhanahu wa taala*) raised numerous prophets, at all times and among all communities, right from the day when man was created. This arrangement of communicating Divine guidance to mankind was ordained for the simple reason that without this man would always stumble and consequently it would be unjust to subject him to any kind of accountability and with this arrangement in place he can have no valid excuse for his erroneous behaviour. Allah's messengers, says the Qur'an, were raised for this purpose:

رُسُلًا مُّبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى اللَّهِ حُجَّةٌ بَعْدَ الرُّسُلِ (النساء ١٦٥)

Messengers with good tidings and as warners so that mankind shall have no excuse with Allah after this. (4:165)

Since the Divine revelation is primarily meant to guide man in the moral- spiritual domain, scriptures revealed from time to time did not concern themselves with the technical dimension of human life. They would not, for instance, teach the way of promoting trade, producing machines and augmenting industrial or agricultural produce. Nor are the scriptures books of astronomy, biology, geography or trade and commerce. They may drop hints, as the Qur'an often does, here and there in the context

of arguing for the Unity of God or advancing evidence for the life Hereafter, about the creation of the universe, the growth of man from the embryonic stage and human psychology and biology, but these things do not, by any stretch of imagination, form the main subject of the Divine books. If the Torah is spoken of in the Qu'ran as *تَفْصِيلًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ* (analysis and detail of every thing)¹ and if the Qur'an describes itself as *تَفْصِيلٌ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ*² and *بَيِّنَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ* (detailed account of everything),³ it has to be read in its proper context as complete moral and spiritual guidance in all aspects of life. This can amply be illustrated from the holy life of the Prophet (sal Allahu alihi wasallam). After his migration to Madinah the Prophet (Sal Allahu alihi wassallam) observed that the Ansar (helpers) of Madinah used to practise grafting with their date-palm trees. The Prophet wondered why the trees were not left alone to their natural growth and fruition. The Ansar, always submissive to whatever the Prophet wished, gave up the practice of grafting. This naturally led to a decrease in produce. When the Ansar reported it to the Prophet, he made it clear that the matter in question related to the craft of farming and not to the moral-spiritual domain⁴. In this context the Prophet's general instruction was:

أَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِأُمُورِ دُنْيَاكُمْ

You know your worldly matters better.

Matters like these which concern craft and technique have been left by Allah to human reason which is adequately equipped for the job. Similarly in the area of warfare the Prophet consulted his companions and acted upon their advice. In the Battle of Trenches he had a trench dug around the city of Madinah on the advice of Salman al-Farisi, a practice unknown to the Arabs until then. Once the holy companions were properly trained and educated by the Prophet, they would ask him on occasion about a commandment whether he was issuing it as a messenger of Allah or was it merely a suggestion for consideration.

This means that Islamic commandments are essentially meant for the spiritual and moral life of the individual and the society. Technology

belongs to the domain of human reason and is in itself neither good nor bad. It all depends upon the moral behaviour of the user whether technology turns out to be a blessing or a curse in the end. If his moral behaviour is properly guided and regulated technology can always prove to be a blessing and never take such a destructive turn as nuclear energy, for example, has taken in the modern age.

It also implies that the values which Islam provides us with are not relative but absolute and universal in nature. The concept of the relativity of values may be tenable in relation to non-Islamic values which are determined by the political, social and the economic environment of a particular age and whose validity and practicability is therefore linked with this environment but it is patently untenable with regard to Islamic⁵ values, which concern themselves with that fundamental aspect of human life which persists amidst all changes, and emanate from Divine guidance which is not determined but determinative. From this timeless angle of vision all change appears to be ephemeral. As Iqbal wrote:

زمانہ ایک، حیات ایک، کائنات بھی ایک
دلیل کم نظری قصہ جدید و قدیم (ضرب کلیم)

Time, life and Universe are all one: it is
A circumscribed vision, to see things as new and old. ⁶

The moral- spiritual problems which man faced in the initial phase of his civilized life continue to pose their challenge even now. Life has undoubtedly grown in complexity and the world has experienced extraordinary changes but the moral questions remain the same as ever.

Even if man inhabits a new planet tomorrow, his social and civilized life will always create the same issues and problems for him and he will require guidance in this sphere in the same way as he requires here.

After this necessary clarification I will now proceed to a brief mention of the fundamental Islamic values. This description has got to be very brief as a detailed discussion would require a whole volume.

In the Islamic system of values, the pride of place goes, as it ought to go, to an absolute commitment to the pleasure of Allah (Subhanahu wa taala). This is the principle of principles, the foundation of all Islamic values and commandments. Islam projects it as the final criterion to determine the value of every intention and action. If this serves as the motive and driving force of our thought and action, they acquire meaning, purpose and sanctity. In its absence every thought and action is soulless, meaningless, profane and absurd. If this does not serve as the sole motive, even the apparently most adorable deeds of piety, *dawah* (calling others to the way of Allah), missionary works, charity, migration (*hijrah*) and even martyrdom lose all value and, far from earning any recompense, earn the displeasure and wrath of Allah (SWT). As the Prophet said:

فمن كانت هجرته الى الله ورسوله فهجرته الى الله ورسوله ومن كانت هجرته الى دنيا يصيبها أو امرأة يتزوجها فهجرته الى ما هاجر اليه. (بخارى ومسلم عن عمر ابن الخطاب)
Whoever migrates towards Allah and his Prophet, migrates towards them but one who migrates to secure worldly pelf or to marry a certain woman, would be adjudged to have migrated for these ends.

With Allah's pleasure as the motive even a small amount of piety and good deeds acquires incalculable value. Allah (SWT) praises his beloved servants for this pious urge.

ويطعمون الطعام على حبه مسكينا وييتما وأسيرا. انما نطعمكم لوجه الله لا نريد منكم جزاء ولا شكورا (الحرر ٨-٩)

They feed for Allah's love the poor, the orphans and prisoners telling them, we feed you just for the sake of Allah and want no recompense or thanks in return.

When this value serves as the standard of good and evil, a cataclysm takes place in the life of the individual and the society. Selflessness, sincerity, love, charity and sympathy mark such a life and mankind experiences a moral bloom, a miraculous behavioural transformation, in which selfishness is replaced by love, sympathy, selflessness and sacrifice; in which every one prefers others to his own self so that a wounded soldier in a battlefield dying of thirst asks the water-carrier to first slake the thirst of another wounded person by his side and he in turn points to yet another one whose thirst he regards as greater than his own. This marvellous chain of preferring others to one's own self goes on extending until all thirsty men pass away without satisfying their thirst. It is a social ambience in

which the owner of a household, the affectionate father of a family, offers the whole of the available food to hungry guests on a particular evening so that he himself and his dear family spend the night starving :⁷

وَيُؤْتِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ (الحشر-٩)

They prefer others to their own selves although they are actually in dire need themselves.

This modern world of ours has turned its back on this value of values with the result that narrow selfish interest reigns supreme and sincerity, love and fellow-feeling have disappeared. Brotherly and filial feelings are growing weaker and weaker and the heart-rending sights of a brother in arms against a brother, a son pitted against a father and a husband at logger-heads with a wife in a mad rat-race of materialistic pursuits are quite frequent. Human blood has become the cheapest commodity- cheaper than the blood of the beasts and is shed regularly for paltry pecuniary interests.

Next in importance to the pleasure of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) in the Islamic value system is the ever-alert concern for the life Hereafter which Islam regards as the interminable extension of the present life. In other words the life of this world is the first phase of a life that continues beyond death. If the present life is lived with this consciousness its directions are right, if not it is sheer waste of time and energy. Taking the earthly existence as an end in itself is not only contrary to truth but, because of this reason it is the path that leads to disaster. In contrast to the life Hereafter this world's life is, therefore, described by the Qur'an in relative human terms as of no intrinsic value:

وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ (آل عمران-١٨٥)

And what is the life of this world but a deceiving sum of possessions.

وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ (العنكبوت-٦٤)

And what is the life of this world but an amusement and a play; the real life is the home Hereafter.

That is to say the value of the earthly life is determined by its orientation. If it is Akhirat-oriented it has worth and value, if not it is absurd and meaningless. A pious deed is pious only if it is done with the intention of procuring the pleasure of Allah and the good of the Hereafter otherwise it has no substance although it may appear to be pious:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَلِقَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ (الاعراف - ١٤٧)

And those who disbelieve in our signs and in the meeting of the Hereafter, their deeds are naught.

هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا. الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعِيَّهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا. أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ فَحَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ (الكهف: ١٠٣-١٠٥)

Say, shall I tell you of those whose deeds are most doomed? They are the ones whose efforts are wasted in this world's life and they think that they are doing so well; they are the ones who deny their Lord's signs and the meeting of the Hereafter and, in consequence, their deeds are naught.

The quintessence of the teachings of all messengers of Allah is to inculcate in men the spirit of living this life with *Akhirah* in mind:

بَلْ تُؤْتُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرًا وَأَبَىٰ إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَىٰ صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ (الاعلى: ١٦-١٩)

But you prefer the life of this world whereas the Hereafter is better and more lasting. This is the message in earlier scriptures (such as) those revealed to Abraham and Moses.

This is why one of the most frequent prayers of the Prophet according to the traditions used to be,

اللهم لا عيش الا عيش الآخرة

Allah, be witness that the real life is the life Hereafter.

To bring home this truth to his companions and to implant in their minds its ever-present consciousness, the Prophet would use every possible occasion to return to it. Now he would exhort them to "live in the world as if

you are sojourning in an alien land or as if you are a wayfarer”

كن فى الدنيا كأنك غريب أو عابر سبيل (بخارى عن عبد الله ابن عمر)

And now he would warn them:

الدنيا سجن المؤمن وجنة الكافر (مسلم عن أبى هريرة)

For the believer this world is a prison-house and for the non-believer it is a heaven (of pleasure) On occasion he would use an analogy.

والله ما الدنيا فى الآخرة الا مثل ما يجعل أحدكم أصبعه فى اليم فلينظر بم يرجع (مسلم عن مستور ابن شداد)

By Allah this world's life compared with the life Hereafter amounts to the paltry amount of water that you can gather by dipping your finger in an ocean.

Once, while walking with his companions, the Prophet sees the rotting dead body of a kid and asks his companions, which of you would like to buy this young one of the goat for a *dirham*? “Who will take a dead rotten kid, o messenger of Allah, for any price?” “Then know”, says the Prophet, “the life of this world in comparison to the Next world, is more trivial and debased”.⁸ Wisdom is defined as self-control and living for the life Hereafter, and foolishness as the pursuit of lowly desire and dependence on false expectation:

الكيس من دان نفسه وعمل لما بعد الموت والعاجز من اتبع نفسه هواها
وتمنى على الله (ترمذى وابن ماجه عن شداد ابن اوس)

A wise man is one who controls his self and lives for the life- after-death and a fool is one who pursues his desires, pinning false hopes on Allah.

In the early phase of Islam this kind of upbringing had produced a set of people of exemplary character whose individual and social life was entirely determined by their concern for the after-life. This was not only a part of their conscious life but had seeped to the level of their un- conscious as well so that their planning and their day- to- day activities, their socialising and mutual relationships every thing turned on this pivot and this served as

the standard of value in all things . Consequently a ruler like Caliph 'Umar would keep awake at night to move around and see if all was well with his people whose servant he was according to the Prophetic direction. And this was the reason why an ordinary milkmaid would refuse to mix water with milk in the dead of night and tell her mother that this was disastrous. This is what made the truly Islamic rulers as caring and affectionate towards their people, regardless of their caste, creed and religion, as parents are towards their children.

For the modern man this world has become the sole end and every means is justified by this end corruption , dishonesty ,adulteration (even in medicines), murder and bloodshed. This has generated a fierce cut- throat competition in the present age which is the main cause of international tension and the source of most of our troubles. If this world-view is replaced by the Islamic world-view, mankind can once again experience a moral transformation ushering in an era of love, sympathy and justice because the superstructure of Islam's value system is grounded in the foundation that man is not bad by nature nor does he carry any unerasable blot of sin on his soul. He has been created with the best of potentialities and for the best of destinies. Says the Qur'an:

لقد خلقنا الانسان في أحسن تقويم (التين - ٤)

Verily We have created man in the best of conformations.

Man is not a mere animal or beast so that a coercive system of pounce-and-scratch may be required to establish social and economic justice. If his moral sense is awakened and he is properly humanized he can always set glorious examples of altruism, magnanimity and self- sacrifice. Coercion can make a beast of a man and not an ideal human being which is his real destiny according to the potential latent in him.

It is to be borne in mind that the Islamic value of preferring the next world to the present one does not imply escapism. Far from that, one of the defining traits of Islamic value system is its insistence on the full acceptance of the responsibilities of this life but it has to be lived as the

first phase of a life that continues beyond death. In other words this life is a preparatory phase for the perennial life after death. Thus Islam teaches us to use this world and not let ourselves be used by it. This world has been created for man and he has been created for higher ends the path to which lies through this world. This life and its responsibilities are necessary to enable man to realize his potential. He cannot bypass this life but has to remain on guard that it should not suck him up. The Qur'an says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ
عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ (البقرة- ١٦٨)

O mankind, eat of the lawful and the pure that has been provided for you on the earth and do not follow Satan's footsteps; verily he is an avowed enemy of yours

قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ (الاعراف- ٣٢)

Ask them who has forbidden the elegant (bounties) and pure means of subsistence that Allah has produced for His servants

From the Islamic point of view, therefore, this world is neither a penal settlement where man has been sent for penance and chastisement nor is it a place of merry-making and dissipation. In Islam entertainment is a part of life not the whole of life; it is an ingredient of culture, which ought to be determined by serious engagement with life, and not the pivot around which all culture revolves. In the present age it has become the whole of life and the pivot around which the whole of culture revolves. Hence a Stephen Hawking has to haggle for royalty for a timeless classic, *A Brief History of Time*, while a Michael Jackson and a Sachin Tendulkar are at a loss to know what to do with the fabulous amounts of money which they earn.

Nor is, from the Islamic point of view, this world a mere puppet-show or somebody's frolicsome dance of pleasure. On the other hand, the life of this world is an indispensable medium for the spiritual evolution of man provided that he uses it for higher ideals and not devalue and debase it by falling to temptations.

To this whole-hearted affirmation of life and acceptance of its responsibilities is related yet another important article in the value system of Islam which I would describe as 'the worship of Allah through the service of mankind.' The various forms of worship prescribed by Islam

ideally embody the spirit of this worship through service and prepare the individual for the selfless service of mankind. While some of these forms purify the individual spiritually and make him so God-conscious that he is always sincere, sympathetic and honest in his dealings with others, the other forms of worship, even as they effect spiritual purification, make the service of others directly incumbent upon the believer so that service and worship merge together indistinguishably. *Zakah*, for instance, frees man, on one hand, from bondage to greed and covetousness leading to spiritual upliftment and on the other hand, it is the most effective means of helping the poor and the needy and ensuring the most dependable scheme of social security. Similarly the *Saduqah Al-fitr* and sacrifice are directly related to the service of the people in addition to being soul - enhancing acts of worship. The Qur'an declares even the formal acts of worship of those who lack the spirit of service as meaningless and doomed:

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْإِيمَانِ - فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ - وَلَا يَحِضُّ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ - قَوْلًا

لِلْمُضِلِّينَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ - الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ وَنَ يَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ (الماعون)

Did you observe him who belies the day of Recompense? He is the one who repels the orphan and does not urge on the feeding of the indigent. Then woe unto those worshippers who are heedless of their prayers; those who show off their good deeds and refuse small kindnesses.

The essence of this is summed up in the Prophetic saying

الخلق عيال الله فأحب الخلق الى الله من أحسن الى عياله (بيهقي كتاب الايمان)

The whole creation is Allah's family and Allah loves him the most who is the most good to his family.

This is exquisitely explained by a *hadith al-Qudsi* which says that on the day of judgment Allah (SWT) will ask a man: "I had taken ill but you did not come to see me." How come?" says the man, "you are the Almighty, how can you take ill?" Allah will say, "such and such person had fallen ill. Had you gone there to wish him well, you would have found me there." Then he will accost him again: "I had come asking for food at your

door but you did not feed me.” “ Almighty Allah, how can you feel hungry?” Says the man, “ such and such person had come to you in hunger”, says Allah , “ had you fed him you would have found that food stored with me”. Similarly Allah will say that He had asked for water to quench His thirst but was refused. The man will wonder again and will be told if he had quenched the thirst of a particular person he would have found it invested with God. (*Muslim*, reporting Abu Hurairah)

Respect for individuality and ensuring its maintenance is of key importance in the value system of Islam. The Islamic system ensures that the life, the property and the honour of the individual is safeguarded in every possible way. The Qur'an declares that the unlawful taking of one life amounts to the murder of all mankind and its protection likewise is protection of the lives of all mankind. The Qur'an and its most authentic exegesis, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW) , have prescribed strict safeguards against any kind of harm to the self- respect and dignity of the individual as the pivot of the society. That is why the scriptures address the individual and their main focus is on the spiritual purification and character formation of the individual as the foundation on which the social fabric is raised. Society and the laws that govern it are undoubtedly important but they can prove effective only when men of character handle them. Indeed law and other social mechanisms are meant to rectify deviation from the norm through penal and preventive measures. By themselves they can not bring about that inner transformation which is the only sure way to total revolution. That is the reason why in the Islamic system the whole emphasis falls on the individual who is solely made responsible for his deeds and their results:

وَلَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيْهَا وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ (الانعام - ١٦٤)

No soul earns but on its own account and no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of others.

In the Hereafter too every one will be called to account in his individual capacity.

وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا فُرَادَىٰ كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ (الانعام - ٩٤)

And now you have come unto Us all alone just as We created you the first time.

In Islam this key importance of the individual determines the organisation of the society and the interrelationship of the individual and the society. Society has to be organised in a way as to promote keen competition in virtue and good deeds among its members and leave no space for sin and crime to grow. History has experienced this kind of ideal society under the tutelage of the Prophet of Islam and his rightly guided caliphs. In this social set-up the individual enjoys full freedom in all walks of life. Freedom of thought and expression is ensured as his birth right which no one can curtail or take away. In the political domain the individual has to obey the authority only as long as its commandments are in accord with the law of Islam. No obedience is incumbent on the individual which implies the disobedience of Allah (SWT):

لا طاعة لمخلوق في معصية الخالق

No obedience to the creature which implies the Creator's disobedience.

Every individual has been granted the right to criticize the ruler and prevent him from doing wrong. The non-Muslim subjects of an Islamic society have been granted full protection of their personal law. In the economic sphere, after outlawing the means of exploitation and corruption like usury (*riba*), gambling, lottery and hoarding, man has been left absolutely free to earn as much as he can through fair means on condition that he does his duty to the society and its deprived sections through *zakah* and other forms of charity. Similarly in the social sphere, after banning such things which corrupt the morals like drinking, immodesty and nudity, the individual has been granted full freedom. In Islam there is no room for a concept of social

good for which the individual is sacrificed for if there are no individuals, where is the society? If Islam places certain restrictions on individual freedom its purpose is to prevent such a social disorder which proves ultimately detrimental to the individual himself.

I will conclude this brief discussion with the mention of yet another distinctive value which Islam alone has prescribed and promoted. I designate it as the "agreement of the means and the end." In its theoretical formulation this value is quite known and there are many individuals and systems who profess their faith in it but, except Islam, no one has actually implemented it totally and comprehensively. The homogeneity of the means and the end implies that you can never achieve good ends through bad means and that no end, however holy, can ever justify unholy means. In no case and for no purpose does Islam ever allow deviation from the principles of truth and justice. In the early days of Islam, when persecution against its followers was at its peak, some of the companions of the holy Prophet migrated to Abyssinia to save their lives. Pursuing them, the disbelievers of Makkah, the enemies of Islam, reached Abyssinia and asked its Christian king, the Negus, to hand the migrants over to them, telling him, at the same time, that these 'miscreants' had not only turned against idol-worship, the beloved religion of the Makkans, but had also committed a grave sacrilege against Christianity calling Jesus a man and a Prophet. The king summons the migrants to his court. One cannot imagine a worse situation than the one in which the Muslim migrants find themselves. If they are banished they will be mercilessly butchered in Makkah and if they tell the truth, they are likely to incur the displeasure of the Negus which can have disastrous consequences. The Prophet's cousin, Jafar (the leader of the migrants) speaks out and, without mincing words, expounds the Islamic beliefs, including the one related to Jesus. Had Islam ever permitted any compromise with principles, this would have been the occasion. This kind of adherence to principles based on the harmonization of the ends and the means cannot be expected from a utilitarian ethical system where considerations of immediate worldly profit and loss determine all value. From Plato, Aristotle and Chanakya down to modern times, history

offers ample evidence to prove this. From the Renaissance onwards, however, there has been a radical change in the situation. A materialistic civilization with the inevitable utilitarian morality, holds the world in its grip. Thinkers like Machiavelli, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud have contributed in their different ways to the development of this materialistic outlook and ethical relativism. We are in the clutches of what Carlyle once described as the profit-and-loss civilization. Nothing can salvage us except a return to the perennial moral spiritual values of which Islam is the best embodiment.

Notes and References

1. *Al-Qur'an*, al-Anam, 154.
2. *Al-Qur'an*, Yousuf, 111.
3. *Al-Qur'an*, al-Nahl, 89.
4. *Muslim* reported by Rafe ibn Khadij.
5. Islamic in the sense that they derive from Revelation embodied in the Divine scriptures of which the final and authentic embodiment is now the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an all Prophets of God preached Islam (Submission to God).
6. The same Iqbal sang that change is the law of the world :

فریب نظر ہے سکون و ثبات
تڑپتا ہے ہر ذرہ کائنات

Rest and stagnation is an illusion:
Every atom in the universe is aster.

But that is when you look at the phenomena from the other angle of vision. These are two different but, by no means, contradictory perspectives the one temporal, the other eternal.

7. Reference in these and the previous lines is made to some well known events in the history of Islam.
8. Jabir reported by Muslim.