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## ISLAM AND HUMAN NATURE

DR. MOHAMMAD RAFI-UD-DIN

Islam is the name of an ideology that has been taught by the prophets from the earliest known times. Innumerable prophets have appeared from time to time in all parts of the world to teach this ideology to all sections of the human race, consistently with the conditions of their times, the circumstances of their mental and moral evolution.

And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them (35 : 24).

We sent messengers before thee—of them are those we have mentioned to thee and of them are those we have not mentioned to thee (40 : 78).

The number of these prophets is estimated to be more than a hundred thousands. Since the message of all these prophets is fundamentally the same, every prophet has testified to the truth of his predecessors and prophesied the advent of his successor. However, since the message of the prophets acquired its theoretical completeness and practical application to all the important aspects (including the social, economic, educational, political and military aspects) of natural human activity in the precept and the life-example of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) he has become the last of the prophets and the term "Islam" has come to be applied exclusively to his teachings embodied in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. It is on account of the fundamental unity and oneness of the source—the divine source—of the teachings of all the prophets that the Qur'an declares that no one who disbelieves in any of the prophets of the past can be a true Muslim.

And those who believe in the Revelation sent to thee and sent before thy time (2 : 4).

Say ye : We believe in God and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes and that given to Moses and Jesus and that given to all Prophets from their Lord : we make no difference between one and another of them and we bow to Him (God) (2 : 136).

If the essence of the prophet's teachings were required to be stated in one word, then that word is love. Islam calls upon all human beings

to love and to see to it that their love is as pure, sincere and wholehearted as possible and that it goes on developing towards an ever greater and greater perfection, purity and sincerity without dwindling or suffering disappointment or frustration for a single moment.

The question arises : Does the phenomenon of prophethood really fulfil a purpose in nature ? Does man really need to be taught the art of sincere and wholehearted, perfect and permanent love such as the prophets have been preaching to him ? The answer to this question is that the desire to love sincerely and wholeheartedly, perfectly and permanently is the most powerful and the most dominant desire of all the inborn desires of man, nay, it is virtually the sole desire of his nature, and prophethood is the only agency that provides for its proper satisfaction. Prophethood, therefore, has not only a purpose in nature but is also indispensable to the order of things in nature.

So see thy face steadily and truly to the Faith. This is God's handiwork, the pattern on which He has made mankind. No change can there be in the work wrought by God : that is the standard religion, but most among mankind understand not (30 : 30).

A study of the nature of man reveals that there are two levels of the natural human desires. Firstly, those desires (known as instincts) which result from man's nature as an animal, e.g. feeding, sex, pugnacity, etc. They are common to man and the animals below him in the scale of evolution. They have an internal biological compulsion of their own on account of which the animal is compelled to seek their satisfaction. Their satisfaction is accompanied by a special kind of pleasure or relief. Their satisfaction enables the animal to maintain the health and growth of its body and to preserve its life and race. Secondly, those desires which result from man's nature as a human being. They include the desire for an ideal, the desire for moral action, the desire for knowledge and the desire for artistic creation or art.

They are the special privileges of man which are not shared by other animals. There is no biological compulsion attached to them. They are free desires belonging exclusively to the psychological plane, as the course of their satisfaction is not biologically or instinctively fixed. The satisfaction of each of them yields a special kind of pleasure which at its best and highest is far superior in quality and intensity to the pleasure derived from the satisfaction of any of the instinctive desires. They are pursued and satisfied at their best and highest for their own sake and not for any ulterior motive. Their object is the search for beauty. For what is an

“ideal” but an idea to which a person ascribes the highest beauty or perfection known to him? And what is “moral action” or goodness but the expression of beauty in one’s deeds, and what is the “desire for knowledge” if not a desire for truth which we love and admire and which is, therefore, an aspect of beauty? And what is “art” but the expression of beauty through a medium?

Man’s desire for an ideal dominates all his desires on the purely psychological level. For whenever the pursuit of these desires for their own sake does not serve the—ideal and this happens always when the ideal is wrong—it is twisted, consciously or unconsciously, to make it serve the ideal. The reason is that man attributes to his ideal all the beauty that he desires. This explains why there is a different moral law, a different philosophy, a different view and use of science and a different art for every ideal.

That is not all. Man’s desire for an ideal dominates and controls all his desires on the biological level as well. The animal cannot check the biological compulsion of its instincts, can have its satisfaction without the sanction of the ideal and it can have its satisfaction only up to the extent to which this sanction is given and no more. When the ideal of an individual demands the continuation of his life, he exerts himself to the utmost for the proper satisfaction of his instincts, but when the demands of the ideal are otherwise, he ignores his instincts and even becomes ready to sacrifice his life. This explains the innumerable instances that come to our notice of men willingly ignoring or suppressing their animal instincts, undergoing extreme hardships and privations, endangering their lives, dying on the scaffold or bleeding to death on the battlefield for the sake of their ideals. -

“Thus virtually man has only one desire and that is the desire for an ideal”. It is the real, the ultimate and the sole motivating force of all his activities. The obstruction or frustration of this desire causes a weak and cramped personality, unhappiness, grief and nervous disorders and its complete and constant satisfaction causes joy and elation. The greater the love of a man for his ideal, the more unified, more highly evolved, more powerful and loftier and nobler is his personality and the greater and fuller is his joy, happiness or satisfaction.

Hence ever since man has become conscious of himself, he is searching for an ideal which he may be able to love, serve, adore and admire “constantly” and “wholeheartedly” and the love of which may never dwindle, deteriorate or suffer frustration, i.e. an ideal of the highest and

the most permanent beauty and perfection. Very often the search for such an ideal involves him in serious troubles, brings him face to face with huge calamities and takes from him a toll of heavy sacrifices including the sacrifice of his life itself. Yet he does not give it up because the relentless urge of his nature impels him to continue it at all costs. The entire history of our race in all its aspects and phases, political, moral, legal, intellectual or economic, from the earliest times till the present day, interspersed so often with bloody scenes and tortures and miseries of large masses of humanity, is nothing but a record of man's difficult and arduous quest for his ideal.

The question arises : What are the actual qualities that man expects his ideal to possess ? The answer to this question is contained in the very nature of his urge for an ideal which can be satisfied only by an ideal of the highest beauty and perfection, that is, an ideal which is free from every defect or blemish that we can possibly think of and which possesses up to the highest perfection all the qualities and attributes that we can by our nature look upon as lovable, admirable and beautiful.

Defect is the enemy of love. Hence the awareness of the "presence" of the slightest defect or of the "absence" of the smallest element of beauty in a man's ideal turns the whole of his love for it into hatred. A man can love a low, ugly or imperfect ideal too but only as long as he can attribute to it all the imaginable quantities of beauty and perfection and can deceive himself that it does possess all these qualities in actual fact.

From these general premises we can deduce the specific qualities of the ideal of a human being very easily. We can know, for example, "that the beauty of his ideal must be unlimited and eternal". For, if he knows that its beauty has a limit beyond which it cannot go, he must believe that a part or an aspect of it is ugly. If, again, he knows that its beauty will come to an end after some time, he must consider it to be ugly even now.

"His ideal must be alive". He cannot take for his ideal, consciously and deliberately, the idea of anything that he believes to be dead or lifeless. He is himself alive and cannot, therefore, love, admire, adore or serve with self-sacrifice the idea of anything that appears to him to be lifeless and, therefore, inferior to himself. Moreover, "the life of his ideal, like its beauty, must be eternal," for, if he is convinced that it must die sometime in future, he must feel that it is potentially dead even today.

"His ideal must possess, up to the highest degree, all the attributes of life with which he is familiar in his own case". This means that it must hear, see, understand, feel, love and respond, must have a purpose to be achieved in the human world and have the power to act for and succeed

in the realisation of that purpose. In other words, it must have certain likes and dislikes and possess the power to encourage and support what it likes and discourage and destroy what it dislikes, to reward its lovers and helpers and to punish its enemies and opponents. In brief, it must have all the qualities of love and hatred and must exercise them for the achievement of its purpose. If a man's ideal lacks any of these qualities and he becomes aware of it, it becomes impossible for him to love and serve his ideal any more.

Love always demands action in the service of the beloved and the object of such action is to please the beloved and to have the satisfaction of winning the favour of the nearness of the beloved. Having an ideal or loving an ideal has no other meaning except striving after it, serving it, and thereby approaching it more and more. But if the ideal that a man loves has no likes and dislikes, no criterion of discrimination between right and wrong, i.e. no purpose to be achieved in the human world, no purpose in which its lover can co-operate with it, how can the lover know what he should do, and what he should not do, in order to serve it? Man wants to act and to know how to act, in the service of his ideal. He cannot be satisfied with a love that is incapable of being translated into action. If he thinks that his ideal cannot hear, see, feel, know, understand or respond to what he does in its service, he will derive no satisfaction from his actions and will have no incentive to continue them. What a man regards as virtue, is, strictly speaking, never its own reward. It is always rewarded by the pleasing conviction that is approved by his ideal which he always imagines to be a "person" or a "personality".

"A man's ideal must be powerful", for if he thinks that his ideal is not powerful enough to reward its supporters and punish its enemies, he will feel that loving and serving it is a useless task. The reason is that, while he will do his utmost to change the world in accordance with the demand of his ideal, its opponents will undo his endeavours and unmake with ease and impunity what he has made. In such a case he will feel that his ideal is weak and helpless and unworthy of his love and devotion.

Again, "his ideal must possess all the moral qualities or the qualities of goodness up to the highest degree of perfection". For, we look upon these qualities as lovable, admirable and beautiful. Should he think that his ideal lacks any of them up to the highest degree, he must consider it to be a defect and must cease to love it.

His ideal, moreover, must be "unique" and without a peer or a partner in its qualities. For if he thinks that there is another idea which shares its qualities, he will be called upon to love two ideals at the same time and

this is something which his nature makes it impossible for him to do. On the other hand the nature of beauty or perfection is such that it can belong only to one ideal.

Finally, the whole creation of the world must be subservient to the purpose of his ideal. This is not possible unless his ideal is itself "the Creator as well as the Controller of the Universe" and possesses all the qualities implied in these two attributes. If this is not so, the laws operating in the Universe on the physical, biological and psychological planes—laws which will not be the creation of his ideal in such a case—will come into conflict with the common purpose of his ideal and his own and neither he himself nor his ideal will be able to achieve this purpose. Moreover, if he believes that the Universe, including his own person, has come into being of itself and is out of the control of his ideal, he will feel that his ideal is inferior to him or at the most equal to him and will not, therefore, feel the urge to love, admire, adore or serve it. These outstanding qualities of beauty and perfection imply innumerable other qualities which can be worked out in the same way.

Since these are the qualities that man likes his ideal to possess, no matter what his ideal may be (it may be a stone, an idol, a nation, a race, a country, an ideology, a religion or an ism), he always attributes all these qualities to it, some consciously and others unconsciously. Whether the ideal is a concrete object, an idea or a creed, its lover behaves towards it always as if it is a "person" endowed with all the qualities of life, power, beauty, goodness and truth. This is what makes it possible for him to love, admire, adore and serve it with the whole of his being.

Now on the one hand man has a powerful urge to love the idea of an all-powerful, moral personality which may be the Creator of the world and on the other hand there is no explanation of the Universe more convincing and more in accordance with all the known facts of physics, biology and psychology than this that the Reality of the Universe is an All-Powerful Creative Self-consciousness which possesses all the qualities of beauty and perfection. This means that the ideal which the human race is seeking through the process of History, i.e. the Right Ideal of man, is no other than the Reality of the Universe itself. It is this fact that the prophets emphasise. Every prophet began and ended his mission by addressing mankind in the following words :

There is no ideal (to be loved, served, adored and worshipped) except God.

The last of the prophets Muhammad (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) proclaimed :

O people, adore and serve your Lord Who created you and those who came before you (2 : 21).

According to the Qur'an it, does not matter whether we use the name God or Allah or any other name for the Creator. All that we have to remember is that it is He Who possesses all the qualities and attributes of beauty and excellence and no one else besides Him possesses them.

Call on Allah or call on the Beneficent. By whatever name you call on Him, He has the best attributes (17 : 110).

And Allah's are the best names, so call on Him thereby and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of His attributes. They will be recompensed for what they do (7 : 180).

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has enumerated about a hundred outstanding attributes of the Creator.

A prophet is a person who is gifted with a knowledge of the True and Ultimate Ideal of mankind by a direct apprehension of truth through an exceptional Divine revelation and passes on his knowledge to others. There is no innate desire of man but nature has its own arrangements to provide for its satisfaction and these arrangements are always indispensable to the proper satisfaction of that desire. Just as nature offers external assistance to man in his effort to satisfy his needs on the biological level, resulting from his urge to live, so it offers external assistance to him in his effort to satisfy his needs on the psychological level, resulting from his urge to love. As nature puts at the disposal of man some of its own agencies like the sun, the clouds, the air and the soil, so that he may produce food and satisfy his hunger, so it makes available to him the agency of prophethood which supplies him with the knowledge of the Right Ideal so that he may satisfy his desire for beauty. "Man can not more satisfy properly his desire for an ideal than he can satisfy his desire for food, by means of his own unaided efforts and without the external help of nature."

"The absolute importance of the prophet's teachings to mankind arises from the fact that man's urge for an ideal is irrepressible and irresistible." When a man cannot, owing to his folly or indifference, avail himself of the guidance of prophethood and cannot love the Right Ideal, he is bound to love a wrong ideal instead of it and, when he loves a wrong ideal, he has to suffer from all the dire consequences of his wrong love later on, as a man who cannot find healthy and nourishing food is bound to satisfy his hunger by taking unhealthy and injurious food and to suffer from the evil consequences of his wrong food later on.