

Islam on the Human Being

What is the reality underlying mankind according to Islam in social life, in relation to himself and in relation to the world?

The integrity of matter and meaning in Islam is the major factor that has guaranteed this religion's perenniality. Most of the thinkers who deeply deal with human beings and their affairs and properties concede that the best anthropological point of departure is the one which sufficiently addresses both the material and the spiritual aspects of human existence.

If someone delves deep into Islamic beliefs, rules and obligations in an impartial spirit, he will find that Islam has seriously addressed both material and spiritual aspects. Even in one sense, we can say that for someone who has a pure inside, i.e. someone who has purified himself through acting upon the rules of religion, reason and conscience, the world is not a meaningless chunk of matter, but it is in fact certainly built upon a meaning.

For a devoted Moslem who has dyed himself with the ethics and etiquettes of Allah, the whole world is the temple. For a blacksmith who toils in his smithy to serve his family and the society, the workshop is not merely a site of ironwork, but a place of worship, although the means used for praying are iron scraps. This also the case with a farmer who works on his land day and night to provide food for the servants of God, as he is surely serving his Lord.

By the same token, universities, laboratories and wherever knowledge is promoted and people, whether as professors, teachers or students, work together to discover the reality are pantheons of God if the people's intention is public welfare and God's pleasure. In some Islamic sources, this process has been described as "jihad [which means a 'divine campaign']" as whoever struggles to feed his family through legitimate ways is regarded as a "warrior of God". Is there any service higher than *jihad*?

This is also the case with the tradesman who runs his business according to the principles of Islamic economy, which is essentially collective and based on consultation rather than physiocracy.¹ In an Islamic economy, ownership is not the end but it is a limited means for the regulation of everyday life affairs. It is needless to argue that such men or women are always serving their Lord.

On the other hand, a mosque is a place for worship where man finds himself closer to Divinity, although this sense of closeness could be found in one's own house too, where

1- The economic system that favors free enterprise and views land as the basis of all wealth. (Translator).

human beings can also worship their Lord.

Thus, one can say that the material aspect not only is not in contradiction with the spiritual aspect in Islam, but as a matter of fact, as Imam Ali's words suggest, the whole world is a place of worship for man. Of course this notion of the world is only sensible for those who have an enlightened vision. The world is a place for earning an evolved essence that qualifies one to enter the kingdom of eternity. As the Holy Quran says:

Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for Allah, the lord of the worlds.

(The Cattle 6:162)

Therefore, Islam regards all human relationships as belonging to God.

To say that my life belongs to God implies that my life is a life all moments, aspects, motions and relations of which are divine. This requires one to presume that one is part of the universal cosmic movement that heads toward Supreme Perfection and that one is always in the presence of God and thus one must never sin. Whatever man takes, be it a manual affair or an intellectual task, is aimed at an aspect of life which in turn belongs to God.

Establishing the reality of eternity and resurrection, thus, Islam gets human life flourished and makes it interpretable. No single ancient or scholastic school of thought could ever make all aspects of human life dependent on Divine Essence in this way. Having said these, today we see in many industrialized countries around the globe that people are pleased with a life which is unfortunately hollowed of spirituality. This reminds me the appalling remarks of Dr. Klaus, whom I met in 1954:

Today, many people live their life with utmost satisfaction without finding themselves obliged to answer these four questions (of whence, whereunto, why and whether) both theoretically and practically.

Let me repeat here the answer that I gave to my German interlocutor:

Since God has endowed man with a powerful life, he can adapt himself with all conditions. Man is able to while away his life with narcotization, inebriety, unconsciousness and selfishness, without knowing what is good and bad in this world, or what is lawful and unlawful. To state the matter differently, the engine of human life has been so rigorously devised by the transcendent wisdom of divinity that man can adjust himself with various artificial conditions that are not in harmony with his nature, and in theoretical physics' parlance, he can consider himself as a reliable beholder of knowledge while man is not merely a beholder; in fact, he has also a role to play.

We come across figures in the course of history who have slaughtered hundreds of thousand or even millions of innocent peoples in a systematic fashion and then held feasts without waiting for the vultures to eat the carrions and wipe the signs of crime off the earth. However, man can be otherwise, as we have also had people who toiled for the betterment of human life.

Man has an undeniable power for the creation of artificial illegal life. We all know that the so-called age of "slavery" continued for a very long time and man was completely

satisfied with such a mean life; slavery was then a well-authorized social institution insofar as no one ever could cast any doubt about it. However, today we raise sharp criticisms of the brutal conditions of human life in those times.

Then let us not consider human carnal satisfaction the ultimate truth. Moreover, the natural form of life where man lives with the material alone should not be confused with true life. Can twenty-first century man manage to survive and continue life? This is the very issue that was discussed at a conference held in Vancouver in 1989, as is reflected in the title of its final declaration: *The Vancouver Declaration on Human Survival in the 21st Century*.¹

Such a declaration would imply that the human oblivion of spirituality, which is a vital element of human life, will result in collective suicide. This declaration calls up the intellectuals and scholars of all human societies to reinstate the spiritual, cultural, religious and moral aspects of human life that was lost through the monopolization of the material.

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1- In 1989, a conference was held in Vancouver to study the question whether man would be able to survive the twenty-first century or not? Muhammad Taghi Ja'fari has provided a critique of the declaration issued at the end of the conference in Vancouver in his book *The Human Genome Project*, which has also been translated into English. (Editor).