

The Basic Factors leading to the Public Fondness of Islam

The Definition of Religion in General ¹

There are disagreements over the definition of religion, like other truths focused on human intelligible values, which have their origin in the intellectual and cultural backgrounds of the definers. There is no room for further discussion of the roots of these disagreements. Therefore, we shall suffice here to mention the universally accepted notion of religion.

Religion is the belief in the existence of a Unique, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, All-Just God, the Totality of all perfect attributes who has created the world upon wisdom and justice and engaged man in a universal movement toward perfection. The point of departure and destination of this universal movement, as the human common sense attests, is depicted by the Holy Quran as:

Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall surely return. (The Cow 2: 156)

Reason, conscience and divine prophets are the leaders and regulators of this movement, and after prophets, this task is assigned to saint scholars to continue this divine journey.

The first prophet is Adam (PBUH), the father of mankind and the last prophet is Muhammad (PBUH). Muhammad's book is the Quran, which remains intact to this day.

It is indeed religion in this sense that can give a meaningful purpose to human life in this world.² In other words, regarding all existential aspects of human beings and the ideas that have been developed of the philosophy and purpose of man's life, no thinker

1- For more details see: Ja'fari, M. T., *A Translation and Interpretation of Nahjulbalaghah*, Vol. 22. (Originally in Persian).

2- Allameh Iqbal has described religion in the following words:

*What is religion? Rising up out of the soil
So that the soul becomes conscious of his/her own.*

or school of thought could ever determine an intelligible and convincing goal for human life without addressing the following basic quadruple issues:

1. Man's relationship with himself,
2. Man's relationship with God,
3. Man's relationship with the universe, and
4. Man's relationship with his fellow men.

In our [i.e., Moslems'] definition of religion, the boundaries of these four existential relationships have been intelligently delineated and the telos and philosophy of human life has been convincingly determined.

The Basic Factors leading to the Public Fondness of Islam

Various factors have caused a number of societies around the globe to convert to Islam. These factors can be divided into two general groups:

- 1- The disturbing factors of a desirable life like social, political and cultural corruption, the oppression of cruel dictators, economic inequalities and so on and so forth.¹

1- In *The Political History of Islam* by Dr. Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, Vol. 1, some examples of social, moral, cultural and economic corruption have been indicated as the reasons for Bedouins' conversion to Islam. Some of these examples are as follow:

- The abduction of women: One of the hideous customs of Arabs in the pre-Islamic age of pagandom was that when a man confronted a stranger from a non-allied tribe who had a woman in his company, he would combat the stranger to win the woman. If the stranger defeated him, his woman was taken away from him and the winner declared her his own wife.
- Burying girls alive: Bedouins believed that a woman is a useless creature whose upbringing yields no reward. In his magnum opus *The Muqaddimah* (Franz Rosenthal's edition), Ibn Khaldun has stated, "The reason for this is that (the Arabs) are a savage nation, fully accustomed to savagery and whatever causes savagery. Savagery has become their character and nature. They enjoy it, because it means freedom from authority and no subservience to leadership. Such a natural disposition is the negation and antithesis of civilization... They recognizes no limit when it comes to taking the possessions of other people. Whenever their eyes fall upon some property, furnishings, or utensils, they take it. When they acquire superiority and royal authority, they have complete power to plunder (as they please). There no longer exists any political (power) to protect property, and civilization is ruined... they use force to make craftsmen and professional workers do their work, whereas they do not see any value in it and do not pay them for it. Now, as we shall mention, labor is the real basis of profit. When labor is not appreciated and work is done for nothing, the hope for profit vanishes, and no (productive) work is done. The sedentary population disperses, and civilization decays... (the Arabs) are not concerned ⇨

Many societies indeed, having been grappled with these disturbing factors, became fond of conversion to Islam. For example, the widespread bloody quarrels and hostilities in pre-Islamic communities, particularly among Arabs and the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula,¹ as well as the imposed long and wearying wars turned peoples' hearts toward Islam. This inhuman and continuous violence not only had deprived people from a purposeful life, but in fact blood had blurred life in their eyes to the extent that an inherent antagonism was cultured inside individuals toward natural course of life.

It is needless to say that sequential battles left no room for the society's cultural, social, legal, religious and economic flourishing, since these matters are all based on respect for life, human dignity and intelligible freedom. Such corruptions as the abduction of women, burying girls alive, plundering other nations and slavery are examples of disturbance in the desirable course of life. This is why people so warmly embraced Islam, as it introduced them into their basic rights of life, dignity and intelligible

with laws. (They are not concerned) about deterring people from misdeeds or protecting some against the others."

This does not mean, however, that Arabs had no moral advantages at all. In fact, we are not concerned with these advantages here; rather, we are to inform the reader of the Bedouin Arabs' habits.

1- Durayd Ibn Semmah, one of the renowned pagan poets, describes these conflicts as follows:

*And verily we are the sword's meat, and this is undeniable
and we engage in war now and then, and it is not a matter of surprise.
Sometimes our enemies attack us to retaliate their loss;
if they defeat us, this will redress their wounds.
And sometimes, we fall upon the enemy for revenge;
then we have share our life with the enemy.
Our life is thus plunged in struggle, either against ourselves or against the enemy.*

(Shoqi Zeif, The History of Arabic Literature)

In the same book, Dr. Zeif argues that the most significant featuring characteristic of Arab life in the age of pagandom had been this very martial state of life insofar as this continuous struggle has changed into a social tradition. They always either killed or got killed. In his book, Abu Ubaydah (211 A. D.) has documented almost 1200 wars between pagan Arab tribes.

freedom. Thus, they left antagonisms behind and worked together to reach the ideal unity.¹

The Quran has articulated this truth in the following words:

And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited, and remember the favor of Allah on you when you were enemies, then he united your hearts so by his favor you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then he saved you from it, thus does Allah make clear to you his communications that you may follow the right way.
(The Family of Imran 3: 103)

2- The driving motives that were inherited in Islam. It is beyond all doubts that it was Islam that, for the first time, delineated the basic triple rights (the right of life, the right of dignity and the right of intelligible freedom) in a serious fashion. These rights have gradually become an inseparable part of the very fabric of the Islamic

1- One might ask, "How then do you justify the battles that were frequently fought during the Prophet Muhammad's time?" To begin with, we need to note that homicide is absolutely forbidden in Islam. As the Holy Quran reads:

"For this reason did we prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men; and certainly our messengers came to them with clear arguments, but even after that many of them certainly act extravagantly in the land." (Women 4:32)

Moreover, regarding such verses as "It may be that Allah will bring about friendship between you and those whom you hold to be your enemies among them; and Allah is powerful; and Allah is forgiving, merciful." (The One To Be Examined 60:7) as well as such orders as Imam Ali's historic letter to Malik Ashtar, where he advises Malik to treat people in the spirit of justice, kindness and brotherhood, "since they are either your religious brothers or your fellow men," we can conclude quite quickly that Islam prioritizes the right of life, dignity and intelligible freedom. The battles that were fought in the Holy Prophet's time were to vanquish the factors that threatened these rights and ideals. When the Prophet started to preach the primordial and liberating message of Islam, the selfish despots decided to sabotage his divine mission, as it endangered their authority. Therefore, the Prophet had to resist their disruptions and battle them. Thus, word has always come before the sword. It is indeed unfair to say that Islam overcame by means of the force of the sword, since the sword was only used against ruthless despots who interrupted the Islamic movement, and people embraced it with open arms. On the other hand, has even a single Moslem soldier ever crossed the borders of Indonesia, Eastern Asia, Africa or India? Was the sword not in Mongols' hands? When Mongols invaded Islamic lands, they found themselves attracted to Islam. Having said this, how can one believe that two great empires, Iran and Rome, were conquered by a dozens of rotten swords of Arabs unless we accept the power of the message which touched the hearts before the swords?

worldview.¹ Furthermore, Islam continuously invites its believers to surpass each other in learning. These persuasions have influenced the development of scientific and industrial ideals insofar as Moslems, according to the renowned historians of science, not only have promoted science from purely philosophical and abstractive views to observations and experiments but in fact have sustained and safeguarded science in the face of lethal threats of extinction. Let us read together some examples of Western authors' appreciation of Moslem contribution to science:²

In his seminal *Biographical Encyclopedia of Science and Technology* (1972), Isaac Asimov has stated:

The Arabs occupied Syria in the 630s and Egypt in the 640s. In so doing, they fell heir to much of Greek science, and this proved of importance and even benefit to the history of science and even to the survival of civilized world from the onslaughts of barbers.

During the whole era of the Eastern Roman Empire, science had no opportunity to flourish, since there was no scientific circle around to sustain the ideas. For a thousand years of Byzantine history, the only name worth mentioning is Callinicus. Western Europe was in darkness. It was the Arabs alone who were in a position to preserve and transit human scientific heritage. Not only through the translation of Greek scientific and philosophical works did Arabs help human knowledge to survive, but they also produced some brilliant works in certain fields of science and enriched the scientific heritage. Alchemy³ was one of the branches of science that was taken seriously by Moslems and built into great heights.

Bertrand Russell confesses that:

In scientific discoveries – particularly in chemistry – Moslems were more experimental than the Greeks. They sought to transmute the metals into gold, to uncover the mystery of alchemy and to acquire the elixir of life. These were indeed their chief motives to devote themselves to chemistry, Russell argues.

Throughout the dark ages of the Christian world, it was in fact Moslems, according to Russell, who sustained human civilization and those scientific ideas, which were later developed by such medieval thinkers, as Roger Bacon was mainly drawn on Muslim intellectual heritage.⁴

George Sarton has also appreciated Moslems' contribution in the following words:

1- For more details on the Islamic view of human basic rights versus the Western perspective, see M. T. Ja'fari (2014): *Human Universal Rights: A Comparative Research in Islam and the West*. This book has also been translated into English by Allameh Jafari's Institute.

2- See Ja'fari, M. T. (2008): *Science and Religion in Intelligible Life*. (Originally in Persian).

3- A medieval form of chemistry which focused on the transmutation of base metals into gold. (Translator).

4- Russell, Bertrand, *The Scientific Outlook* (1931).

Perhaps the main, as well as the least obvious, achievement of the middle ages was the creation of the experimental spirit, or more exactly, its slow incubation. This was primarily due to Muslims down to the end of the twelfth century, then to the Christians.¹

He continues his appraisal as follows:

The briefest enumeration of the Arabic [Islamic] contributions to knowledge would be too long to be inserted here, but I must insist on the fact that, though a major part of the activity of Arabic-writing scholars consisted in the translation of Greek works and their assimilation, they in fact did far more than that. They did not simply transmit ancient knowledge, they created a new one. To be sure, none of them attained the highest peaks of the Greek genius. No Arabic mathematician can begin to compare with Archimedes or Apollonius. Avicenna makes one think of Galen, but no Arabic physician had the wisdom of Hippocrates. However, such comparisons are hardly fair, for a few Greeks had reached, almost suddenly, extraordinary heights. That is what we call the Greek miracle. But one might speak also, though in a different sense, of an Arabic [i.e., Islamic] miracle. The creation of a new civilization of international and encyclopedic magnitude within less than two centuries is something that we can describe, but not completely explain.²

On the other hand, the ideas offered by Islam were primordial, simple, logical and rational. To understand these ideas, the human brain not only had no need to suffer any stress or tension, but rather since they bespoke human primordial nature they were found enthralling by conscious people. It is needless to say that the emergence of such brilliant figures as Nezami, Nasir Khusrow, Rumi, Sanaei, Attar, Sa'di, Hafez, Faryabi, Abu Rayhan Biruni, Avicenna, Zakarya Razi, Mulla Sadra, Sheikh Bahaei and the like demanded a society with a rich and eternal culture that Islam had provided.

The rules and obligations that Islam has drawn up for humanity are based on "intelligible life,"³ which is equally accessible to every human collectivity upon the primordial principle of unity and human equality by the Lord regardless of one's race, color and social background as well as the maxim of conditionality of obligations.

The Taproot of Islam

If we accept the definition that was broached in the beginning, we can easily reach the taproot of Islam by considering the knowledge that man has garnered of his basic needs

1- Sarton, George, *The Life of Science: Essays in the History of Civilization* (1948).

2- Ibid.

3- For more details on Allameh's seminal theory of Intelligible Life see: Ja'fari, Muhammad Taghi, *Intelligible Life* (2011), translated into English by Beytollah Naderlew, The Allameh Jafari Institute.

to this day. The taproot of Islam stands on two pillars, i.e. subjective and objective elements.

1- The subjective element consists of "sane thinking" and "conscience", which are two basic elements of human primordial nature.

Not only is neither one of Islamic rules and beliefs objected to by sane sense and conscience, but they are in fact wholly embraced by these two basic factors of human knowledge and practice. This fact is indeed demonstrated by three proofs:

The first proof resides in the fact that Islamic rules and beliefs, if expounded in clear terms, are indeed the very universal principles that have been accepted one way or another as the groundwork of belief by human societies throughout the history. On the other hand, if we deeply analyze the other societies' belief systems, we can discern the universal principles of Islam in them in a delicate fashion.

The second proof is the emphatic orders and recommendations depicted by original sources of Islam, i.e. the Quran, Sunnah¹ and the Prophet and his progene (PBUH), about the strengthening and cultivation of reason, thought, heart and conscience and following them. There are huge numbers of verses in the Quran which are concerned with the necessity of rational and sapiential activities. The following list embodies a concise categorical itemization of such verses:

1. The strengthening of reason and following it: 40 verses
2. Exact deliberation: 15 verses
3. Contemplation: 17 verses
4. Reflection: 4 verses
5. The necessity of being considered among the sages: 15 verses
6. The acquisition of intelligence and consciousness: 21 verses
7. The pursuit of knowledge and escaping ignorance: 21 verses
8. The necessity of the acquisition of wisdom, which is among the underlying goals of the delegation of prophets: 20 verses
9. Speculation in regard to the cosmos: 20 verses
10. Adherence to substantiated facts: 18 verses
11. The heart: 35 verses

1- The body of Islamic religious law which is based upon the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). (Translator).

Regarding these recommendations and persuasions concerning the necessity of engaging oneself with realities through all perceptual means, one can concede that there is nothing against reason and conscience in Islamic rules and beliefs.

Eventually, the third proof is indeed the appointment of reason as a substantiator of Islamic rules and beliefs. Undoubtedly, if we ignore some occasional verbal quarrels, we shall see that as Shi'ism grounds the articles of faith in reason and regards the latter one of the main quadruple sources (the Book, Sunnah, Juristic consensus and reason), Sunnism in one sense also considers human reason as one of the main sources.

- 2- The objective element comprises of Divine Prophets, who have been delegated by the Lord to guide people toward the Supreme Telos of Life through religious rules and beliefs as well as the successors of the prophets and that group of scholars whose knowledge of religious truths is in such degree that they can take on people's guidance.

To demonstrate the necessity of both elements in Islam, i.e. the necessity of sane sense and conscience as well as prophetic guidance, we need to add that sane sense and conscience should act in two significant domains:

The first domain is concerned with the demonstration of the general requirements of "intelligible life" as articulated in Islam. For example, the appreciation of purposefully-built-ness of human beings and the universe in the wake of the Ultimate Telos of creation; appreciation of the fact that man, with so many glories and gifts, could not be an irrelevant and deserted creature like animals that manage themselves through their animal instincts. To put it otherwise, besides eating, sleeping, mating and struggling as well as other animal activities, the human being is committed to meet some obligations which set him on the path of evolution. Moreover, we should have in mind the idea that the regulation of the quadruple existential relationships (man's relationship with himself, with God, with the world and his fellow men) is one of human beings' obligations; in addition, appreciation of the necessity of self-knowledge and the unity and harmony of all human

individuals in intelligible life is also necessary. All of these requirements belong to the first domain of the activity of sane sense and conscience.

The second activity domain of the human conscience consists of the issuance of universal prescriptions on the aspects and quality of individual and social life such as enjoining people to justice and distancing oneself from lies, wile, treason, fornication and every evil which is in conflict with sane human character. The issuance of such injunctions, which are considered significant by Islam, is up to the sane intellect and conscience. As a result, these injunctions are called *ratified precepts* versus positive precepts.

But what renders necessary the delegation and guidance of Divine Prophets, their successors and well-versed scholars is the very course of human history which is fraught with blood, deviation, selfishness and ignorance toward human beings' true interests and torts. Man is plunged in a natural life that attests to his unawareness of the reality of an intelligible life that can interpret all aspects of his existence. The laws and rules which have been ordained by man are in fact merely for the regulation of this very natural life, which he has been unconsciously thrown into.

This is why Jean-Jacques Rousseau says:

In order to discover the rules of association that are most suitable to nations, a superior intelligence would be necessary. A being who could see all the passions of men without experiencing any of them; one who would have no affinity with our nature and yet know it thoroughly; a being whose happiness would not depend on us, and who would nevertheless be quite willing to interest himself in ours; and, lastly, one who, storing up for himself with the progress of time a far-off glory in the future, could labor in one age and enjoy in another. Gods would be necessary to give laws to men.¹

There is no doubt that by "Gods", the monist Rousseau means Divine Prophets, who represent the Lord on earth.

Moreover, regarding so many errors that continuously occur in people's individual reasoning, this concern is always with those who seek to find due answers for the questions posed by life, particularly those concerning the quadruple relationships. Such

1- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *On the Social Contract* (2002) [translated by Susan Dunn, Yale University Press, New Heaven and London].

concerns over human lapses will never fade away without resorting to revelation, since everyone knows that man cannot easily touch on all aspects of his existence.

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