

Introduction

We should see the exchange of ideas and opinions as a path towards the beyond which, according to theosophers, starts from the "invisible", stretches into other existential orders and finally touches the "Mystery of Mysteries". In fact, thoughts, in their essence and structure, besides having a clear sign of depths, are continuously in search of depths and sometimes even in search of the depths of depths.

The first thing to which one can ascribe this excavation of depths is undoubtedly the essence of thought itself. The search for springheads and the reclamation of beginnings are counted among the most fundamental aspects of thought. Thus, one cannot find any thought indisposed of depth in at all. It is also to be mentioned that the thinking faculty is illimitable due to its springy and resilient nature. It is this very quality of thinking that has induced thinkers to consider it the moving immovable; indeed, how can one envisage it otherwise while thinking is the mother of every idea, perception, discovery, achievement and all spiritual and corporeal realities?

History itself has proven that human identity is indeed built upon thinking as such. Consciousness and wisdom, which are two cornerstones of a conscious life for all nations, represent only two reflective extensions of this primordial quality of humanity. Thinking is an integrated process which begins with the simplest of matters and continues through the most sophisticated psychological and existential realities of human beings and ends up in an eternal synthesis of past, present and future.

Thus, no one would ever cast any doubt over this part of the identity of thinking. These remarks bring us to the point which is worthy to be touched in this prologue, i.e. the enrichment and amendment of ideas under the auspices of debates and dialogues. A renowned Arabic proverb says that the truth is the daughter of debate. Those who believe in the idea which has been articulated in this proverb are well aware that discussion heightens the flames of thought, which is enough to eradicate the darkness of ignorance and ambiguity.

It is not an exaggeration to say that nothing has ever been more illuminative than debate and dialogue in the history of ideas. Had people not engaged in dialogue with each other, life would have been confined only to misunderstandings and every possibility for an intellectual consensus, which is a prerequisite of both social and individual life, would have vanished. As a result, it must be reiterated time and again that dialogue has been among the first steps taken by man to find his way to the land of knowledge. Despite the impressive changes that human epistemic structures have gone through since the

dawn of modernity, dialogue is still being seen as a unique path that can lead the wayfarers of knowledge to the kingdom of truth.

The significance which is attached here to dialogue has its origin in the fact that in dialogue, a single mind does not undertake the issue; rather, at least two minds along with their specific presuppositions, backgrounds and methods engage in a debate to shed light on the dark sides of the issue at hand. This has to be elaborated more in its due place. In the second half of the twentieth century, two scholars have been the pioneers of religious dialogues and debates in Iran – though from different perspectives and in their own particular manners: Allameh Muhammad Hussein Tabatabaei and Allameh Muhammad Taghi Ja'fari. Allameh Tabatabaei's intellectual engagements were typically focused on the traditions of Iranian wisdom and philosophy, as reflected in his groundbreaking dialogues with Professor Henry Corbin. On the other hand, Allameh Ja'fari's debates and dialogues with world-leading thinkers and scholars covered a wider range of issues and areas of knowledge.

The publication of Ja'fari's intellectual engagements with Eastern and Western scholars and academics on theology, philosophy, culture and almost all fields of human sciences in the early 80's in his native country revealed for Persian readers another constructive and serious face of the philosopher's thought. Now the work is being published to be presented to the global audience.

It should be noted that most of these interviews and dialogs took place in Ja'fari's home library, while some others took place in Switzerland, Greece and several other different countries.

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