

**Prof. Gangovsky, Dr. Gennady Avdeyev, Prof.  
Arapachyan and Dr. Salih Aliyev**

**Subject: Islam and Materialism**

**Nationality: Russian/ Major: Philosophy and Oriental Sociology**

**Dialogue Date: 1982**

**Gangovsky:** Several books have been published on British interferences in Iran as well as books on Iran's contemporary history at the USSR Institute of Oriental Studies. Dr. Aliyev, who studies the history of Iran, has published a book on Iran, for which he has toiled for almost five years. Professor Arapachyan, who is the head of the Iran desk at the Institute, has recently compiled a book about Iran's economic issues that will be published this year. I need to mention that these books all are in Russian. I would like to ask you to tell us about your education and fields of study.

**Ja'fari:** After finishing my elementary school, I continued my studies in different places like the Tabriz Seminary of Theology, the Qom Seminary of Islamic Studies, Marwi School in Tehran, and finally, I studied at the Najaf Seminary of Religious Sciences for eleven years.

**Gangovsky:** For several years now, I have been studying the history of Islam. For some time in the past, there were renowned politicians and scholars who tried to revive the Orthodox Caliphs' Islam once again so that people could have a happy life. The question is: how can we implement the dynamic principles of Islam today?

**Ja'fari:** The ideology of Islam, indeed, accepts both the existential and objective aspects of matter and does not ignore the realities of life; neither does it imagine life in vacuum. In fact, it says that man resides in a real world that should be modified by him so as to fit his purposes. "Reality", according to Islam, has a concrete existence independent of my mind. This reality is the basis of values and relations.

Islam's coexistence with all nations is possible, provided that they do not have any intention to battle Islam and Moslems, since Islam does

not exclude any nation and does not declare war upon any nation, either. Islam has many positions in common with other schools and religions, which can serve as a foothold for the fulfillment of various tasks.

It seems that those schools and ideologies that have the uncovering of the logic of life as their target can change their pernicious conflicts into constructive competitions through discovering their common principles. To make this real, we should firstly mobilize all scientists to depict a scientific picture of the world with utmost impartiality without being motivated by their predetermined frames of mind, and then, ask the scholars of humanities to know "man as he is" based on pure reality. Then we must give the results of these studies to a group of neutral ideologists to derive the common grounds in worldview and anthropology and determine the common values of humanity as a whole. As an example, I shall indicate one of these common grounds.

In *Life, Its Nature and Source of Evolution*, Oparin, the renowned Russian biologist, says:

*Our bodies are flowing like streams and their materials are continuously renewed like the brook's flow.*

This point has also been underlined in Rumi's *Masnavi*:

*Each breath the world's renewed, though we can't tell,  
While it's renewed, the world persists as well.  
Life's constantly renewed just like the stream,  
A single mass in form though it might seem,  
Its swift flow makes it seem continuous.<sup>1</sup>*

As you see, Oparin has reached the same conclusion through modern experimental equipments in the twentieth century that Rumi has come to almost seven hundred years ago in Qunyah.

Thus, we can use these common grounds as a basis to change the existing destructive conflict of ideologies into a constructive competition. Unfortunately, even with these common grounds, politics does not allow us to come to terms with each other.

Mr. Avdyev, as a human being, do you have any problem with me as your fellow human being?

**Avdyev:** No!

**Ja'fari:** I have no problem with you, either. Then we need to see how policy makers of societies orchestrate such conflicts?!

**Avdyev:** You argued that intellectual schools must have in the end some common grounds to stand on. What is your idea about

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1- Rumi's *Masnavi*, Book 1.

Pakistanis?

**Ja'fari:** I have travelled to Pakistan; I was attending a conference held on Islamic law and jurisprudence, and I found the people there nice and friendly.

**Aliyev:** I have a question in regard to Rumi. Almost twenty years ago, a scientific symposium was held in our institute, and we had some guests from Iran as well. One of the Iranian participants argued that there had been a strong materialist impulse inside Rumi to the extent that, even five centuries before Hegel, Rumi had fathomed the essence of material subjects. What is your idea in this regard?

**Ja'fari:** My fifteen years of research on Rumi have proven to me that he was indeed an astonishing man. He has made remarks regarding almost all famous intellectual schools from Buddhism and Hinduism to contemporary pragmatism. Although Rumi did not know anything about modernity and modern life, he still had a dynamic mind that deserves to be studied seriously. I have myself seen the basic principles of many worldviews in Rumi's works, particularly in his *Masnavi*.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, those who seek to push Rumi into an intellectual school seem to be in fact trying to park a trailer with thirty tons of cargo in a match box and even reserve two seats for passengers!

**Gangovsky:** Have you compared Rumi with Marx in your book?

**Ja'fari:** As Marx himself has once said, his philosophy is the reversed version of Hegel's. Thus, since we have already compared Rumi's ideas with some basic principles of Hegel's philosophy, we will no longer need to open an independent chapter for Marx.

**Avdyev:** How does Islam bring about a balance between the clergy and the laity? Do all organizations of an Islamic state certainly have to be Islamic through and through? Moreover, is there any place for non-clerics in an Islamic Republic?

**Ja'fari:** An Islamic society welcomes all individuals with every intellectual bent, of course as long as they have not crossed the red lines of existing social order, since every human individual has an equal right to live [in peace]. However, if someone tries to disturb the social makeup, it would not be tolerated by law, and this is seen in all human societies.

We merely act upon Islamic laws and do not impose anything intellectually onto anybody since "*there is no compulsion in religion*"<sup>2</sup>,

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1- The Allameh then brought a copy of his work *Rumi and World-views* and showed his findings in this book to the audience.

2- The Holy Quran, The Cow 2: 256.

according to Islam – unless, as I already have stated, someone tries to interrupt social order.

All human beings have equal rights to life, dignity and committed freedom. There are five types of personality in Islam:

- 1- A human being as such who has the right to a respected life.
- 2- Those individuals who believe in a particular set of principles. These people are respected as long as their presence is not harmful for other citizens. The human value of this group lies in the fact that they have distanced themselves from animal life and thus stand in a higher place than the first group.
- 3- Those individuals who follow the rules of reason and common sense; this group stand in an even higher rank in respect of human value.
- 4- The people of the Book, like Christians; they have a higher human status than the previous groups, but this does not mean that they have any privilege over the rest in general human rights.
- 5- Moslems, who have taken a step further than the others in the course of intellectual evolution; thus, they have more human values indeed.

In Islam, a human being is more valuable and in fact *"the most honorable ... with Allah ... [who is] most morally integrated"*<sup>1</sup>, i.e. the one who is more faithful to lofty principles of humanity.

**Gangovsky:** Numerous prophets have been delegated by God, the last one of whom is Prophet Muhammad. What Muhammad brought was the last message of Allah to mankind. If whatever is necessary for human life has already been indicated in the Quran, what role does an "Imam" have to accomplish then?

**Ja'fari:** There are two issues here that need to be addressed:

Firstly, what is the new thing that Muhammad (PBUH) has brought for us? In a number of places, the Quran indicates that Muhammad (PBUH) has brought the same message that had been brought by Abraham (PBUH) and the former's religion is the same as that of the latter, at least in its general outlines. Moreover, other prophets have also brought the same thing that has been brought by Abraham (PBUH).

Secondly, what does the Imam have to do? The term Imam has two applications, one of which exclusively belongs to Shi'ah and is the designation of twelve brilliant persons. Thus, they have been the continuers of the Prophet Muhammad's eternal path; their task has been the interpretation of the Quran and the ideology of Islam in Moslem communities. They pursued Muhammad's enterprise toward

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1- The Holy Quran, The Apartments 49:13.

a more extensive and better introduction of people into Islam and its implementation as far as possible.

In the Shi'ah perspective, the Imam has the highest status among all human individuals, and at the same time, he is the leader of the society as well. However, he is not merely a church father, but in fact the personal medium of individuals for connecting themselves to the transphysical.

After these twelve Imams, the leader is the fully qualified jurist. He is to be elected by the votes of experts and people are committed to follow his orders. The leader is spiritually and intellectually purified of all egotisms and carnal desires and cares more than anyone else about his moral and religious duties; indeed, his heart only beats for people. If reason and conscience are cultivated well in human individuals and if people are immunized against impurities and whims and whams, they could accomplish truly great goals.

**Gangovsky:** Has any new title been published recently on Imamate and its place in the society?

**Ja'fari:** *Imam: The Identity of the Society* by the scholar Muhammad Reza Hakimi can help you in this regard.

**Arapachyan:** What is your idea about historical materialism? As you know, our official ideology is Marxism. Earlier in your discussions, you said that Islam recognizes both matter and spiritual factors as facts. What is, in your view, the basic difference between Islam and Marxism?

**Ja'fari:** Marxism is mostly known through its strong atheistic stance that is hardly acceptable for humanity. Unfortunately, this stance has been persistently defended by Marxists, while if the arguments on the existence of God are not convincing for someone, he must pass them over in silence, since as we know, not even one single [intelligent] argument has been posed against the existence of God to this day. This is a completely clear fact. The one who claims that there is no God is in fact making a truly demanding claim that requires the claimant to have searched the whole gamut of reality and eventually failed to find a being called God! Moreover, we all know that man lives in a small part of the great cosmos and his existence, as compared to the cosmos as such, is lesser than a droplet as compared to the sea. Having said these, how could man claim that, "I have searched the entire world and have not found a being called God!"

Let us suppose that someone or some group of individuals have managed to search the entire gamut of reality. They cannot still make such a baseless claim that, "We have searched the whole world and did not see such reality as God!" Likewise, you can dissect the organs of a human body by various instruments in an anatomy class, but it is

impossible to you to see "I", "thought", "emotions", "sentiments", "will" and the like, because they can be seen neither by natural senses nor by other means. Nevertheless, they certainly exist.

Accordingly, if the believers were to say that God stands in the same relation with the world of existence that "I" or "will" have with our physical body, we would have no way to refute or criticize their claim. This must be added to the routine arguments of God's existence.

On the other hand, Islam does not reduce human life into some manual or intellectual works and bottles of narcotic liquors so that, after eighty years, man were to say, "That was life, and now it is time to leave!"

For Islam, this world is a meaningful thoroughfare where man must put forth his maximum effort to realize his own gifts. As I have mentioned earlier, we cannot empirically demonstrate the existence of will or soul by analyzing the human body; however, this does not mean that they do not exist at all. By the same token, Islam regards the world as a material body which has a soul that is not visible. When you analyze the world into quantum level, you cannot accept the existing causal relations between particles without reason. Islam says that there is a huge management behind this material corpus that you cannot deny.

Professor Gangovsky! In some philosophical works of your thinkers, it is seen that they have accused Islam of being idealist. I must ask these thinkers to show their evidence of the latter claim.

In *Rumi and World-Views*, I have criticized the idealism presented by Berkeley,<sup>1</sup> Fichte<sup>2</sup> and Schelling<sup>3</sup> and demonstrated the objective reality of world via three arguments.<sup>4</sup>

**The First Argument** is based on the unity of perception and the difference of perceived objects. The function proper of the eye is seeing the appearances of figures, colors and the like. This activity is exclusively done by the eye and nothing else can undertake such a function but the eye. On the other hand, when the eye sees a bench as its object, it sees that bench in its particular form. To put the matter otherwise, this particular form of bench is not, say, bread, a flower or a mountain. In fact, this is the case with all other visual objects. Everything appears in its particular form and color. Now we should ask the idealists, "If those objects do not have a concrete reality of their own in the outside world, where has our visual diversity

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1- Berkeley, George (1685-1753), Irish philosopher and bishop. (Translator).

2- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1762-1814), German philosopher. (Translator).

3- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von (1775-1854), German philosopher.

4- Ja'fari, M. T. (2009), *Rumi and World-views*. (Originally in Persian).

resulted from then?" This diversity cannot have its origin in the mind as it has the same function in all cases, i.e. the representation of the facts of the objective world. Then what is it that causes such visual diversity?

**The Second Argument** is to be developed upon the fact that no reality can fluctuate between being itself and not being itself. To be sure, everything that has a reality is indeed a determinate entity – even if its demonstration is dependent on my perception – not an identity fluctuating between itself and something else. For example, I see an object in a wilderness from a far distance and I do not know if it is a man or a stone. It is in reality either a man that is not a stone or a stone that is not a man. My perceptual sway does not change the reality of an object as such.

No idealist could say that what he sees is in fact a suspended reality! If an idealist says so, then he is not a true philosopher, but his place is the drunken clam of Greek sophists. It is indeed the idealist who is not able to prove his own "self" as he does not have any picture of it in his mind.

The idealist may invoke the principle of uncertainty to say that no phenomenon has a preestablished determination according to modern physics and as long as an event has not taken place, we are not able to recognize its identity. Firstly, if we jump from "I don't see it" to "it does not exist" in sciences and other branches of knowledge, we will have to throw away the subject-matters of such disciplines as psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, for no human mental phenomena and activities which constitute the underlying truth of the latter disciplines is visible. Can we say that they do not exist? Secondly, an event that is in the course of coming into being in any point of this course has a particular determination that exclusively belongs to that point, and after departing that point for a new point, it takes a new determination proportionate to the newly reached point, although the beholder believes that this latter determination was implicitly hidden in the former one. I do not see why idealists are reluctant to accept the fact that the reality of the world is a category other than the perception of the world.

**The Third Argument** grounds itself in the necessity of human reactions to "non-subjective" realities.<sup>1</sup> For example, cold weather compels man to put on warm clothes, he escapes from

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1- One of these three reasons has been quoted from Allameh Tabatabaee; the other two have been theorized by Allameh Ja'fari.

wild animals, when he sees a hole along his path, he changes his route, he seeks for light in order to see better and so on and so forth. These reactions as such are proofs to the existence of non-subjective facts. Man knows that he is necessarily engaged with realities regardless of his understanding of them.

As you see, idealism does not invoke science to explain the criterion of the essential reality of objects; in fact, science is alien to idealism. The following is the most explicit verse of Rumi's on the acceptance of "reality in itself":

*O' Lord! Show us in this house of deception*

*How things truly are, what their real state is like.<sup>1</sup>*

Rumi alludes here to the following statement that has been quoted from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

*O' Lord! Show me things as they are.*

If one still refuses to accept the world as an objective reality even after reading the following verse of the Holy Quran that reads:

*And we did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them two but in truth.* (The Rocky Tract 15: 85)

Such a person is not a Moslem indeed. Of course, you know that truth in one sense refers to a reality that is higher than objective reality.

**Gangovsky:** This is my personal view and you can retort. I think there is no unbridgeable gap between Islam and Communism as they have many shared grounds.

For example, after the October Revolution of Russia, in Bukhara there were Islamic circles alongside Communist circles. There were Moslem Communists who believed in the basic principles of Islam and worked for the Communist party.

**Ja'fari:** You know that God's existence is an uncompromising hypothesis in Islam, like all other revealed religions, while it is challenged by Marxism.

**Gangovsky:** Let me give you another example. Zulfaqar Ali Bhutto was executed by Zyaulhaq in Pakistan. Bhutto was from a rich family, but he devoted himself to the poor people. In our last meeting in December 1976, he said to me, "I am becoming more and more interested in Islam, but I intend to design a socialist economy for Pakistan." Bhutto was not a dogmatist; he was a Shi'ah and his wife was Iranian. However, he sought to realize socialist economical ideals in Pakistan. This is why I think we can have friendly relations with each other based mutual understanding.

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1- Rumi's *Masnavi*, Book 5.

**Ja'fari:** Nevertheless, what I pointed out earlier still needs to be taken into consideration because the interpretation of man and his place in the world is indispensable in Islam.



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