

THE QUR'AN AND MAN'S SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

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The Quran informs man that in respect of creation, he is not different from other animals;

وَاللّٰهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَابَّةٍ مِّن مَّاءٍ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ بَطْنِهِ و مِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ رِجْلَيْنِ و مِنْهُمْ مَّن يَمْشِي عَلَىٰ اَرْبَعٍ يَخْلُقُ اللّٰهُ مَا يَشَاءُ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

"And God has created every animal from water. Of them there are some that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs and some that walk on four. God creates what he wills. For, verily God has power over all things" (24:45)

This verse shakes man and wakes him up from his slumbrous conceit. It tells man that as a biped he has nothing to boast of. His is a lowly beginning. He has to rise to manhood. He has to grow up physically as well as mentally. His growth is slow in both respects-spiritual growth is slower still. In the words of Iqbal;

Indeed the evolution of life shows that though in the beginning, the mental is dominated by the physical, but the mental as it grows in power, tends to dominate the physical and may eventually rise to a position of complete independence.¹

Man's potentialities are boundless. Man can learn and achieve what no animal can. To begin with, man has a spatial aspect, and thus is strongly prone to be governed by material pulls. This state manifests the domination of instincts. They are but natural but their running riot is wrong. All forces need control, but control does not mean elimination. Controlled instincts are like broken horses, who are much more useful than the unbroken ones. And it takes long to reach the stage where strong instincts bow before the commanding rational self, which means the dominance of spirit over matter. The impulse for change is an ingrained trait of man. Factors from outside,

¹ The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. Sh. M. Ashraf, 1944. p.106

only shake the dormant inner potentialities in to wakefulness.. Without inner capacity no foreign aid can be of any use.

Man must therefore achieve his destiny. Religion alone can and should mould man's attitude into fighting his way out of all sorts of opposing forces resulting in apparent chaos. Julian Huxley observes.

Hard fact and transforming value together build future reality-1 believe that the whole duty of man can be summed up in the words; 'More life', for your neighbour and yourself. And I believe that man, though not without perplexity, effort and pain,- can fulfil this duty and gradually achieve his destiny. A religion which takes this as its central care and interprets it with wide vision; both of the possibilities open to man and of the limitations in which he is confined, will be true religion, it is coterminous with life, it will encourage the growth of life, it will itself grow with that growth. I believe in the religion of life.²

But life means, the life of a human being i.e. a biped has to outgrow his material self. By conquering the material self a person can rise to such great heights and become capable of progressing towards the Status where the conquest of the universe may look possible. Man in his own self is a microcosm. And he who can rule the microcosm should be potentially capable of ruling the macrocosm. But summum bonum, it is man's God-ward journey only which frees him by degrees, from baser earthly bondages. By living according to the God's commands man ascends above the protoplasm of flesh that he is. Then he fears God only. The fear of material loss or the hope of material gain, by and by lose their grip and significance. That is the stage where man feels that he is his own master and his intellect, moral stature and rightful determination begin to form his personality.

Man's God-ward journey is a unifying experience. His unity within, grows in proportion to his freedom from the dominance of matter, He should become one, provided he imbibes the attributes of the One, a state attainable only through abiding by God's law and thus becoming God-centred. A man who does not believe in God remains not only at the animal level, rather, according to the Quran, he can be characterised as the worst of the animals.

² Religion without Revelation, Watts and Co: London, 1940, p.113

ان شر الدواب عند الله الدين كفرو افهم لا يو منون

"The worst of all animals in God's sight are the human beings who reject Him. They will not believe in Him. (8:55)

It is clear that every animal has its limits commensurate with the species it belongs to. All the potent characteristics of an animal can be defined. The extent of an animal's intelligence according to its species, is always obvious. Hence the utmost that can be done by a certain animal is always clearly understandable. On the contrary, man has no such categorical or special limits. He can be good. He can be evil. And in that respect, there are no upper or lower levels foreseen. He can soar aloft and touch the uppermost heights. He can fall and touch the lowermost depths of degradation. No wonder, Milton in 'Paradise lost' had to exclaim oh! from what pernicious heights thou fallen.. And a man who does not believe in God sincerely and hence fails to realise "manhood" can do more harm to human individuals and societies than any of the animals. The reason is evident. A person who is not brought up according to the laws of God is internally an animal. Now we can very well visualise an animal with the intelligence and cunning of man. The cruelest of ferocious animals cannot use weapons other than their teeth, horns, claws, legs, tails, and etc. Hence the scope of their rendering harm is always limited. But man, if bent upon doing mischief, can perpetrate untold damage. He can conspire. He can originate intrigues. And above all, he can invent and wield destructive weapons. His angry fist or kick are not the only expression of his wrath. He has extended the reach of his hand and legs by using clubs. From clubs he came to swords and spears and arrows. Then he used bullets. Now the bullets have been augmented with tanks, bomber planes and bombs - atomic bombs as well as hydrogenic ones. Animals are incapable of 'inventing anything. Man can invent elixirs of so many kinds. He can make panaceas for all sorts of diseases. At the same time, he can make the atmosphere poisonous and endanger the human race. Therefore, man should always be capable of taking care of himself. He should know that he is accountable to God for what he does. The Qur'an Warns: (19:90).

و كلهم آتية يوم القيمة فردا

"And every one of them will come to him singly on the Day of Judgment".

Nobody can cast the burden of his misdeeds on others. Moreover, Islam does not entertain the idea of 'Original Sin'. Man has to be taught where to use his fist. Similarly he must be taught where not to use it. In it lies his own good as well as the good of others.

We place things where they are safe. We touch fragile things with care. We take care of infants. We do not allow children to do what they will, lest they should get injured or do some harm to themselves as well as to others. At times children insist on having things or on doing what can cause even death to them. Their elders forcibly check them back. They can call names, cry and kick but they have to be saved from themselves. Also, there are individuals and groups who come of age, even grow old, without maturing. And yet, in contradistinction, there is another kind of people who learn and rise to high pedestals of knowledge. They receive dazzling accolade and degrees in different scientific fields. They march forward to the highest academic excellence. But in spite of it when they transgress, mentally they remain infants. They have not matured as true human beings. They may, therefore, act irresponsibly any time and cause danger to themselves as well as to others. They also are to be taken care of. Like infants they are haughty. They will do what they like.

These are the complexities to be understood.

Man is not his own creator. He, therefore, can never really know himself nor can he know others. He can know himself only through his creator, the Almighty Allah. Then and only then can he understand what is the worth of the lives of other human beings. Only the creator knows in what order and gradation, guidance is to be provided to humanity. We Muslims believe that without Divine guidance, man can not bring about rules of ethics nor can he propound theories regarding man's respect for man. Man's respect for man, in actual fact is the hall mark of man's maturity. But it is a long way from biped to man.

George. D Kelsay observes:

"Man is truly man and truly person only if he responds in obedient love to the Divine call. He is so created that he has no true life except in God. He is

an independent being who can only be himself in free response to the call of God in every detail of his life.³ "

The best concrete example of good persons whose lives were the embodiment of the followers of God's guidance in all aspects of their lives; were prophets of God. All Prophets had superior selves. As compared to the peoples of the societies they were enjoined to live with and preach in. The basic teachings of all of them were essentially the same. The prophets of God epitomised God's mercy on human beings, because left to themselves, human beings could have no clear vision of truth and falsehood, justice and cruelty, pride and humility-courteousness and sacrifice and so on. Prophets of God were in fact the epitomes of Godly virtue. According to the Quran it was God's favour conferred in the guidance to the right path given to mankind. 'Straight is the gate and narrow is the path but few he there who enter it, was also conveyed in the scriptures. That is why the Quran made it manifest several times that those who accepted Islam should not behave as if they had done some favour to the Prophet (P.B.U.H).

يَمْنُونَ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ أَسْلَمُوا قَلِيلًا لَمْ يَمْنُوا بِلِلَّهِ بِمَا هَدَىٰكُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ يَهْتَدُوا بِرِجْزِ اللَّهِ فَهُمْ لَهَاكِبٌ
لَا يَمْنُونَ عَلَيْكَ أَنْ أَسْلَمُوا قَلِيلًا لَمْ يَمْنُوا بِلِلَّهِ بِمَا هَدَىٰكُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ يَهْتَدُوا بِرِجْزِ اللَّهِ فَهُمْ لَهَاكِبٌ

"They impress upon you as a favour that they have embraced Islam. Say! count not your Islam as a favour upon me. It is God on the contrary who has conferred a favour upon you that he has guided .you to the faith, if you be true and sincere". (49:17)

Without the examples of the prophets of God, human beings could form no idea of an integrated personality and character, which means they could not have achieved manhood by themselves.

In Hamid-i-ud-Din Khan's opinion;

"The ideology of Islam is based upon the teachings of the Quran which prescribes a definite set of principles and relations governing every aspect of human life both individual and collective".⁴

Human being are potentially different from all other living beings. They, therefore, had to be brought up differently. All animals, as such, were given

³ Racism and the Christian understanding of Man. p.76

⁴ History of Muslim Education, Academy of Educational Research, Karachi. p.132

instincts to motivate them, to warn them, to pull them, to deter them. In short, in instincts lies the guidance of almost all kinds of animality. But man is superior to all other beings in respect of spiritual potentialities. His life, according to the revealed books, is a particle of Divine breath. This explains that for man the possibilities of progress are unlimited. He, according to the Qur'an is called upon to assume the tinge of God.

صبغة الله و من احسن من الله صبغة و نحن له عبدون

"Ours is the dye of Allah. And who is better at dyeing than Allah. And we are his worshippers"

"In other words the Quran prepares its votaries to develop their intellect, understanding and physique in such a harmonious way that they become perfect model of Islam".⁵

Similarly, the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.S.) urged human beings to inculcate in them the Godly ways.

تخلقوا باخلاق الله

Inculcate in you the habits of God

How could they be asked to do this if they were not capable of doing it? They can, therefore, they should. Such men i.e. genuine men, deserve to be called God's vicegerents on earth. They have to act as the guardians of mankind.

All prophets- of God were the trustees of God. No prophet could be untrue to God's trust. The followers of prophets, therefore, always should be capable of being trustworthy. They have to account for all sorts of trusts at their disposal. Says the Holy Quran

وما كان لنبي ان يغفل و من يغفل يات بما غل يوم القيمة ثم توفى كل ما كسبت وهم لا يظلمون

No prophet could ever be false to his trust. And if any person betrays his trust he shall, on the Day of judgment restore what he misappropriated; then shall every soul receive its due whatever it earned. And none will be

⁵ Ibid. p.133

dealt with unjustly. Men of God overwhelm others because of their better initiative and wakefulness. This state can be achieved by following the guidelines expressly conveyed by the prophets of God who are nearest to him on account of their God-Centeredness.

C.A. Richardson characterized such superior human beings as sons of God. This is how it is so in his opinion.

"Moreover as God is imminent in Monads' the metaphor of sons of God may be applied to all as Christ himself pointed out, otherwise as transcendent, God is distinct from Christ as from all monads. The imminence of God, in a very highly developed personality, would result in an exceptional manifestation of His Nature through that personality and this is in accordance with Christian belief."⁶

E. Clinton Gardner's statement, in this respect, is also very encouraging, God's kingship is present in a special way in the lives of those who obey His will. His rule is even now more fully manifest by the righteous man who obeys the laws of God and thereby takes upon himself the yoke of the kingdom.⁷

All wisdom and guidance revealed to the prophets was passed on to respective societies to which the prophets were ordained. The prophets of God were the embodiments of truth and trust. And in the form of Muhammad's prophecy (P.B.U.H.), prophecy attained perfection. The trust became complete in all respects. That is why the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) is entitled al-Amin . "The most trustworthy."

The revealed wisdom and guidance aimed at enabling human beings to become human beings in the real sense of the word. It was God's mercy on man. The Divine wisdom perfected and contained in the Quran is surely the greatest of God's boons bestowed on man. Through the Quran man can attain his ultimate destiny and can become really the man, as desired by God.

Given a perfect code of life to follow, now man could be left free to make his own choice. In this regard E. Clinton Garden Says:

⁶ Happiness Freedom and God, George & Harrap and Co., London, 1944, p.202.

⁷ Biblical Faith and Social Ethics, Harper and Row, N. York, 1960. p.48

Moral freedom means the capacity for self-determination in the sense that man is free to choose the ends, the goals and the values which he will seek, and he free to accept or to reject the demands of duty.⁸

As in the words of Holy Qur'an, revealed fourteen hundred years ago:

لا اكراه فى الدين قد تبين الرشد من الغى فمن يكفر بالطغوت ويؤمن بالله فقد استمسك بالعروة الوثقى لا انفصام لها والله سميع عليم

"Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error - whosoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things."

Ahduallah Yusuf Ali explains the above verse in the following words:

"Compulsion is incompatible with religion because:-

1. Religion depends on faith and will, and these would be meaningless if induced by force.
2. Truth and Error have been so clearly segregated by the mercy of God that there should be no doubt in the minds of any person of good will as to the fundamentals of the faith.
3. God's protection is continuous, and His plan is always to lead us from the depths of darkness into the clearest light.

Man is free to accept or reject what the Quran offered and what the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) preached and practiced. Moreover, it is clear in the minds of Muslims that the universe with all its expansion is to be taken as a circle within which there are billions into billions of small circles. But they are all concentric. The very centre of all is the Almighty Lord. Then the world of man, taken as a circle, also cannot have more than one centre. And that centre of the world of man is the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H). Mankind must unite around him. According to Iqbal:

In Islam prophecy reached its perfection in discovering the need for its culmination de finale.⁹

⁸ Biblical Faith And Social Ethics. p.4.

⁹ Reconstruction, p.127

We Muslims believe that God's revealed teaching and guidance became perfect in the form of the Holy Quran which not only bears testimony to the truth of all previously revealed books but also represents them all with much more to add. Similarly the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) represents all prophets and is the embodiment of the perfection of prophecy.

Finality of prophethood is one of the greatest favours of God conferred on mankind because this gives one and only one source of perfect and standard morality to be imbibed by humanity so that they become one vast brotherhood with one common behaviour and the similar outlook on life and necessarily with common rights and duties. Islam being the last revealed religion has to serve as the spiritual rallying point for humanity. Islam as such has the capacity to stand for a fatherland as well as a family in the eyes of a Muslim. Thus humanity may get rid of racial territorial' and colour prejudices which serve as perpetual prompters towards man-killing and other manifold collective outrages perpetrated by man against man.

Man should know himself so that he may be able to know others. He should learn to respect himself so that he may be able to respect others. That has been the vocation of all prophets of God. And hereinafter, till the Day of Judgement, this solemnity is to be performed by those who believe in the prophethood of Muhammad (P.B.U.H), the last messenger of Allah.

Man is not mere body nor sheer soul. He is both body, soul and much more. Both body and soul need suitable nourishment. Apart from environmental and social factors, body hungers for material food and soul hungers for a different kind of sublime nutrition. Among these are love, belief, worship etc. It is evident that physical growth, as the growth of all living bodies, has categorical limits. Man can become boundless. He possesses an atom of Divine light in his soul. It is God's breath – Says the Quran.

وتفخت فيه من روحي

I breathed into him My Spirit.

The gist of all moral teaching; oral, written and practical, is the respect of man for man. But man cannot do so unless he knows his own self through the knowledge of his own self. Only through the consciousness of his own significance can he respect the other selves. Yet to be fully conscious of his

own self means the attainment of one's self which shows that the self became one and an integrated whole. Unless it is so, it is no self and hence not fully conscious not realized. The integrated self is self-conscious as well as conscious of other selves. Only thus all humanity can become one large brotherhood and in the words of Iqbal that would be the spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.¹⁰

In that democracy there would be no high handed racial groups of ruling masters and miserable sections of serving serfs, no color bar, no class hatred. Men have been created through one breath of life Hence they should all turn to One and the only. It is their own basic spiritual need. They are created like that.

¹⁰ Reconstruction, p.179