

Monotheistic Conception Of The World & Universe

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Chapter 1: Conception Of The Universe

Every doctrine and every philosophy of life is indispensably based on a sort of belief, an evaluation of life and a sort of interpretation and analysis of the world.

The way of thinking of a school in respect of life and the world is considered to be the basis of the entire thinking of that school. This basis is called the world conception of that school.

All religions, social systems, schools of thought and social philosophies are based on a particular world conception. All the goals which a school presents, the ways and methods which it brings into existence are the corollaries of the conception of the world that it entertains.

The philosophers say that there are two kinds of wisdom: practical and theoretical.

Theoretical wisdom is to know the existing things as they are. Practical wisdom is to find out how one should lead his life. This 'should' is the logical result of 'how they are', especially those 'how they are', with which metaphysical philosophy deals.

Conception Of The World And Perception Of The World

Evidently we should not confuse the conception of the world with its sense perception. Conception of the world has the sense of cosmogony and is linked with the question of identification. Unlike sense perception, which is common to man and other living beings, identification is peculiar to man, and hence

conception of the world is also peculiar to him. It depends on his thinking and understanding.

From the point of view of sense perception of the world, many animals are more advanced than man, because either they are equipped with certain senses which man lacks, as it is said that birds have a radar sense, or their senses, although common to them and man, are sharper than the senses possessed by man, as is said of the sight of the eagle, of the sense of smell of the dog and ant and of the sense of hearing of the rat. Man is superior to other animals because he has a deep conception of the world. Animals only perceive the world, but man can interpret it also.

What is identification? What is the relationship between perception and identification? What elements other than perceptual ones are part of identification? How do they enter identification and from where? What is the mechanism of identification? What is the standard by which correct and incorrect identification are judged?

These are the questions which require a separate treatise, and at present we are unable to take them up. Anyhow, it is certain that perception of a thing is different from its identification. Many people view a scene and all of them see it alike, but only a few of them can interpret it, and they too often differ?

Varieties Of World Conception

On the whole there are three kinds of world conception or world identification or, in other words, man's interpretation of the universe. It can be inspired by three sources: science, philosophy and religion. So we can say that there are three kinds of world conception: scientific, philosophical and religious.

Scientific Conception Of The World

Now let us see how and to what extent science helps us form an opinion. Science is based on two things, theory and experiment. For the discovery and interpretation of a phenomenon first a theory comes to the mind of a scholar and then on its basis he carries out experiments in the laboratory. If it is corroborated by the experiment, it gains acceptance as a scientific principle and remains valid till a better and a more comprehensive theory appears and is corroborated by experiment. With the appearance of a new and more comprehensive theory, the old theory becomes invalid.

That is how science discovers the cause and the effect of a experiment. Then it again tries to discover the cause of that cause and the effect of that effect. This process continues so long as possible.

The scientific work has many advantages and disadvantages as it is based on practical experiment. The greatest advantage of the scientific discoveries is that they are specific and particular.

Science can impart to man a lot of information about a particular It can give a volume of knowledge about one single leaf of a tree. Furthermore, because it acquaints man with the particular laws governing each thing, it enables him to control and use things his advantage, and thus promotes industry and

technology.

Though science can teach man thousands of things about a particular thing, yet the knowledge imparted by science being specific, its scope is limited. Experiments place a limitation in it. Science can go forward only to the extent it is possible for it to make an experiment. Obviously it cannot experiment with the entire creation and all its aspects. Science can go forward in pursuit of causes and effects only to a certain extent and then it reaches the stage of 'unknown'.

It is like a powerful searchlight which illuminates a limited area, and does not throw light beyond its range. No experiment can be made on such questions whether this world has a beginning and an end or is it infinite from both sides? When a scholar reaches this point, he consciously or unconsciously resorts to philosophy to express his opinion. From the stand point of science this world is an old book the first and the last pages of which have been lost. Neither its beginning is known nor its end. The reason is that the scientific conception of the world is the outcome of the knowledge of a part of, not of the whole.

Science informs us of the position of some parts of the world, not of the features and the characteristics of the whole of it. The scientific conception of the world held by scientists is like the conception of an elephant acquired by those who passed their hands on it in darkness. He who touched the ear of the elephant thought that it was like a fan; he who touched its leg thought that it was like a pillar and he who touched its back thought that it was like a raised platform.

Another drawback of the scientific conception of the world is that it cannot be the basis of any ideology, for science is inconstant and changeable from its practical aspect, which is the aspect of showing reality as it is and inviting faith in the nature of the reality of creation. Scientifically the features of the world change from day to day, because science is based on a combination of theory and experiment and not on self-evident rational truths. The theory and experiment have a temporary value only. As such the scientific conception of the world is an inconstant and changeable conception and is not fit to become the basis of faith. Faith requires a more stable or rather an eternal basis.

The scientific conception of the world, because of the limitation imposed on it by the tools of science (theory and experiment), is unable to answer a number of questions, the definite answer of which is essential for an ideology. Such questions are: From where has this world come? Where does it go? From the viewpoint of time has the world a beginning and an end? What is its position from the viewpoint of place? Is or is not the existence, on the whole, something good and meaningful? Is the world governed by some essential and unchangeable norms and laws, or does no such thing exist?

Is the creation on the whole a living and conscious unit or is man alone an accidental exception? Can an existing thing become non-existent or a non-existing thing become existent? Is the restoration of a non-existing thing possible or impossible? Is the exact re-creation of the world and history in all their details possible even after billions of years (Theory of recurring in Cycles?) Is unity preponderant or multiplicity?

Is the world divided into material and non-material, and is the material world a small part of the entire

world? Is the world rightly guided and perceptive or is it imperceptible and blind? Are man and the world in a state of reciprocity? Does the world show reaction to the good and bad deeds of man? Does there exist an eternal life in the wake of this transient life? There are so many other similar questions.

Science does not answer all these questions, for it cannot make an experiment with them. Science can answer only limited and particular questions, but is unable to draw a general picture of the world. We give an example to make our point clear.

An individual may have a local knowledge of a big city. He may know a part of it in detail and may be able to draw a picture of its roads, lanes and even houses. Another person may have a similarly detailed knowledge of another part of the city, and a third, a fourth and a fifth person may know other parts of it. If we collect information from all of them, we may get enough information about each part of the city. But will this information be enough to have a complete and overall picture of it? For example, can we know what shape the city is; whether it is circular, quadrangular or of the shape of a leaf? If it resembles a leaf, then a leaf of which tree? How are various areas of it connected with each other? What sort of automobiles connect them? Is the city on the whole beautiful or ugly? Evidently we cannot get all this information.

If we want to have such information and for example if we want to know the shape of the city or want to know whether it is beautiful or ugly, we should ride an aircraft and have an overall aerial view of it.

As we have said, science is unable to answer the basic questions necessary to form a conception of the world. It cannot provide an overall picture of the whole body of the universe.

Leaving all this aside, the value of scientific conception of the world is practical and technical, not theoretical, while an ideology can be based on theoretical value only. Had the reality of the world been as depicted by science, which would have constituted the theoretical value of science. Its practical and technical value lies in the fact that irrespective of its depicting or not depicting reality, it enables man to perform fruitful tasks. Modern industry and technology demonstrate the practical value of science. It is really amazing that in the modern world while technical and practical value of science has increased, its theoretical value has been reduced.

Those who are not fully conversant with the role of science, may think that along with its undeniable practical progress science has also enlightened the conscience of man and has convinced him of the reality as depicted by it. But that is not a fact.

From the foregoing it is clear that an ideology requires that kind of conception of the world which (i) may answer the basic questions concerning the universe as a whole, not only a part of it; (ii) may be an eternal and reliable conception, not a transient and passing one; and (iii) may have a theoretical and realistic value also not merely a practical and technical one. Thus, it is also clear that the scientific conception of the world, despite of its other merits, lacks all these three requirements.

Philosophical Conception Of The World

Though philosophical conception of the world is not as exact and specific as scientific conception, it is based on a number of principles which are self-evident and undeniable by the mind. These principles proceed logically and are general and comprehensive. As such they have the advantage of being firm and constant. Philosophical conception of the world is free from that inconstancy and limitations which are found in scientific conception.

Philosophical conception of the world answers all questions on which the ideologies depend. It identifies the overall shape and features of the world.

Both the scientific and philosophical conceptions are a prelude to action, but in two different ways. Scientific conception is a prelude to action because it enables man to control nature and introduce changes in it. Man by means of science can use nature to his advantage as he wishes. Philosophical conception is a prelude to action in the sense that it determines man's choice of his way of life. It affects his reaction to his encounter with the world. It fixes his attitude and gives him a particular outlook on the world and the creation. It either gives an ideal to man or takes away an ideal from him. It either gives meaning to his life or draws him to absurdity and nothingness. That is why we say that science cannot give man a world conception that may become the basis of an ideology, but philosophy can.

Religious Conception Of The World

If we regard every expression of an overall view of the world and the creation as a philosophical conception, not taking into consideration whether the source of this conception is a guess or reasoning or a revelation from the unknown world, religious and philosophical conceptions belong to the same domain. But if we take their source into account, philosophical and religious conceptions of the world are undoubtedly two different things.

In certain religions like Islam, religious conception of the world, has taken a philosophical or argumentative colour and is an integral part of the religion itself. The questions raised by religion are based on reasoning and proof. Thus Islamic conception of the world is rational and philosophical.

Besides the two merits of philosophical conception, namely eternity and comprehensiveness, religious conception of the world unlike scientific and purely philosophical conceptions, possesses one more merit of sanctification of the principles of world conception.

If we keep in view that an ideology, besides requiring faith in the eternity and inviolability of the principles held sacred by it, requires a belief in and adherence to a school of thought, it becomes clear that its basis can be only that conception of the world which has a religious colour.

From the foregoing discussion it may be inferred that a conception of the world can be the basis of an

ideology only if it possesses stability, philosophical broad thinking and the sanctity of religious principles.

How To Judge An Ideology?

A perfect ideology is that which:

- (i) Can be proved and expressed in a logical form; in other words, is logically and intellectually tenable;
- (ii) Gives meaning to life and removes nihilistic ideas from the mind;
- (iii) Is inspiring;
- (iv) Is capable of giving sanctity to the human and social goals; and
- (v) Makes man accountable.

If an ideology is logically tenable, the way is paved for its being accepted intellectually and there being no ambiguity about it, action as suggested by it becomes easy.

An inspiring ideology makes its school attractive and gives it warmth and power.

The sanctification of the goals of a school by its ideology, makes it easy for the adherents of this school to make sacrifice for its cause. If a school does not declare its goals to be sacred, it cannot create a sense of adoration and sacrifice in regard to its principle, nor can there be any guarantee of the success of such a school.

The accountability of man declared by a conception of the world, commits the individual to the depth of his conscience and makes him responsible to himself and to society.

Monotheistic Conception Of The World

All these qualities and characteristics which are an essential requirement of a good conception of the world are found in monotheistic conception. It is the only conception which has all these characteristics. Monotheistic conception means the realization of the fact that the world has come out of a wise will and that its system is founded on mercy, munificence and all that is good. It aims at leading the existing things to a perfection befitting them. Monotheistic conception means that the world is 'mono-axis' and 'mono-orbit'. It means that the world is 'from Allah' and returns' to Allah'.

All the existing things of the world are harmonious and their evolution proceeds towards the same centre. Nothing has been created in vain and without having a purpose. The world is being managed under a series of definite systems known as 'Divine law'. Among the existing things man enjoys a special dignity, and has a special duty and a special mission. He is responsible for his own promotion and perfection as well as the reform of his society. The world is a school, and Allah rewards everyone

according to his intention and valid effort.

Monotheistic conception of the world is supported by logic, science and sound arguments. Every particle of the world is a sign of the existence of an All-Wise and All-Knowing Allah and every leaf of a tree is a book of spiritual knowledge.

Monotheistic conception of the world gives to life a meaning, a spirit and a goal. It puts man on a way to perfection on which he continues to march forward without stopping at any stage.

Monotheistic conception of the world has a special attraction. It gives vitality and vigour to man. It puts forward lofty and sacred goals and produces selfless individuals.

Monotheistic conception of the world is the only conception of it which gives meaning to the responsibility of people to each other. Similarly it is the only conception that saves man from falling into the abyss of absurdity.

Islamic Conception Of The World

Islamic conception of the world is monotheistic. Islam has presented monotheism in its purest form. From Islamic point of view, Allah has no like of Him and nothing can be compared to Him:

"There is nothing like Him." (Surah ash-Shura, 42: 11).

Allah is absolutely independent. All depend on Him, but He depends on none:

"You are in need of Allah. And Allah! He is Absolute, Laudable." (Surah al-Fatir, 35: 15).

Allah is aware of everything. He can do whatever He likes:

"He is fully aware of everything." (Surah ash-Shura, 42: 12).

"He is able to do all things." (Surah al-Hajj, 22:6).

Allah is everywhere. Every place, whether it is above the sky or in the depth of the earth has the same relation to Him. To whatever direction we stand, we face Him:

"Wherever you turn, there is Allah's countenance" (Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 115).

Allah knows what is in the hearts of people. He is aware of their intentions and aims:

"Indeed We have created man and We know what his soul whispers." (Surah Qaf, 50: 16).

Allah is closer to man than his jugular vein:

"We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." (Surah Qaf, 50: 16).

Allah has all the good attributes and is free from every defect:

"Allah's are the fairest names." (Surah al-A'raf, 7: 180).

Allah is not a material organism and cannot be seen with eyes:

"Vision does not comprehend Him, but He comprehends all vision." (Surah al-An'am, 6: 103).

From the stand point of monotheistic and Islamic conception of the world, the universe is a creation and is looked after by Divine will and attention. If Divine attention were withheld for a moment, the whole universe would be annihilated in no time.

This world has not been created in vain or in jest. There are many advantages implied in the creation of man and the world. Nothing has been created unbecoming and futile. The existing system of the universe is the best and the most perfect. It manifests justice and truth and is based on a sequence of causes and effects. Every result is a logical consequence of a cause and every cause produces a specific effect. Divine destiny brings a thing into existence through its specific causes only, and it is a chain of causes which constitutes the Divine destiny of a thing.

Divine will always operates in the world in the form of a law or a general principle. Divine laws do not change. Whatever changes take place, they are always in accordance with some law. Good and evil in the world are related to man's own conduct and his own deeds. Good deeds and bad deeds, besides being recompensed in the next world, have their reaction in this world also. Gradual evolution is a Divine law. This world is a nursery for the development of man.

Divine destiny is supreme in the whole world. Man has been destined by it to be free and responsible. He is the master of his own destiny. Man has his special dignity. He is fit to be the vicegerent of Allah. This world and the Hereafter are but two interconnected stages like those of sowing and harvest, for one reaps what one sows. They may also be compared to the two periods of childhood and old age, for the latter period is the outcome of the former.

Chapter 2: Realistic Conception Of The World

Islam is a realistic religion. The word "Islam" means submission. This indicates that the first condition of being a Muslim is to submit to the realities and truths. Islam rejects every kind of obduracy, stubbornness, prejudice, blind imitation, bias and selfishness, and regards all of them as contrary to realism and realistic approach to truth. From the point of view of Islam a man who seeks truth, but fails in his efforts may be excused, but the acceptance of truth by virtue of imitation or heredity by a man who is otherwise stubborn and arrogant has no value.

A true Muslim, whether a male or a female, eagerly accepts truth wherever he or she may find it. As far as the acquisition of knowledge is concerned, a Muslim shows no bias. He may go even to the farthest corner of the world for acquiring knowledge. His efforts to gain knowledge and to find truth are not confined to any particular period of his life nor to any territorial region. Nor does he insist to acquire knowledge from any particular person. The Holy Prophet has said that to seek knowledge is the duty of every Muslim, whether a man or a woman. He has also asked the Muslims to receive it even from an idolater.

There is another saying of the Holy Prophet which exhorts the Muslims to seek it even if they have to go to China for that purpose. He is also reported to have said: "*Continue to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave*". Superficial and partial notions of the problems, blind imitation of the forefathers and submission to the absurd hereditary traditions, being contrary to the spirit of submission to truth, are censured by Islam and regarded as misleading.

Allah Is Absolute Reality And Source Of Life

Man is a realistic being. A new-born human child from the very first moments of its life, while looking for its mother's breast, seeks it as a reality. Gradually the body and the mind of the infant develop to the extent that it can distinguish between itself and other things. Though the new-born child's contact with other things is established through a series of its thoughts, it knows that the reality of the things is distinct from that of the thoughts which it entertains and uses as a medium only.

Integral Characteristics Of The World

The realities which man can perceive through his senses and which we call the world, have the following integral characteristics:

A. Limitation

Everything perceptible, from the smallest particle to the biggest star has spatial and temporal limitations. Nothing can exist outside a particular space and a particular period of time.

Certain things occupy a bigger space and last longer while some others occupy a smaller space and last comparatively for a shorter time. But in the final analysis they are all limited to a particular portion of place and a particular period of time.

B. Change

Everything is subject to a change and is indurable. Nothing perceptible in the world is in a standstill state. It is either growing or decaying. A material and perceptible being throughout the period of its existence passes through a constant course of change as a part of its reality. It either gives something or

takes something or gives as well as takes. In other words, it either takes something out of the reality of other things and adds it to its own reality or gives something out of its reality or performs both the actions. In any case, there is nothing that remains static. This characteristic also is common to all things existing in this world.

C. Attachment

Another characteristic of the perceptible things is their attachment. We find that they all are conditional. In other words the existence of each one of them is attached to and, conditional on the existence of one or more other things. None of them can exist if those other things do not exist. If we look deeply into the reality of the material and perceptible things, we will find that many 'ifs' are attached to their existence. We do not find a single perceptible thing which may be existing unconditionally and independently. The existence of everything is conditional on the existence of something else, and the existence of that something else in its turn is also conditional on the existence of something else, and so on.

D. Dependence

The existence of all our perceptible things depends on the fulfilment of the numerous conditions attached to it. The existence of each of these conditions again depends on the fulfilment of a series of some other conditions. There is no perceptible thing which may exist independently, i.e. in the absence of the conditions on which its existence depends. Thus dependence pervades all existing things.

E. Relativeness

All perceptible things are relative as regards to their existence as well as to their qualities. When we attribute to them greatness, power, beauty, antiquity and even existence, we say so in comparison to other things. When we say, for example, which the sun is very large, we mean that it is larger than the earth and other planets of our solar system. Otherwise this very sun is smaller than many other stars. Similarly when we say that such and such ship or such and such animal is powerful, we compare it with man or something weaker than man.

Even the existence of a thing is comparative. Whenever we speak of any existence, perfection, wisdom, beauty, power or grandeur, we take into consideration a lower degree of that quality. We can always visualize a higher degree of it also and then a further higher degree. Each quality as compared to its higher degree is changed into its opposite. Existence becomes non-existence, perfection is changed into defectiveness. Similarly wisdom, beauty, greatness and grandeur are changed respectively into ignorance, ugliness and despicability.

The thinking power of man, the scope of which, contrary to that of the senses, is not confined to the exterior features, but also penetrates what is behind the screen of existence, tells us that existence is in no way confined to these perceptible things which are limited, changing, relative and dependent.

The scenery of existence which we observe appears on the whole to be self-existing and self-dependent. Hence there must be an everlasting, unconditional and ever-present absolute and infinite truth behind it on which everything must depend. Otherwise this scenery of existence could not stand so firmly. In other words nothing would have existed at all.

The Holy Qur'an describes Allah as Self-existing and Self-dependent, and thus reminds us that all existing things, being conditional and relative, are in need of a Self-existing truth to support and sustain them. Allah is Self-dependent because everything else depends on Him. He is Perfect, for everything else is hollow from within and needs a Truth which may fill it with existence.

The Holy Qur'an describes the perceptible things as 'signs'. In other words everything in its turn is a sign of an Infinite Being and His knowledge, power and will. From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an the world is like a book composed by a wise and sagacious being, every line and every word of which is a sign of the wisdom and sagacity of its author. From the point of view of the Holy Qur'an, the more a man comes to know the reality of the things, the more he gets acquainted with Divine wisdom, power and blessings.

From one angle every natural science is a branch of cosmology. From another angle and from a deeper way of looking at things, it is a branch of the knowledge (recognition) of Allah.

To elucidate the Qur'anic point of view in this respect we quote here just one verse of the Holy Qur'an out of so many similar verses:

"Surely in the creation of the heavens and the alternation of night and day, the ships which sail on the sea with (cargoes) beneficial to man, the water that Allah sends down from heaven with which He revives the earth after it is dead and replenishes it with all kinds of animal life, in the movement of the winds and in the clouds held between the sky and the earth, there are signs for the people who have sense." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2: 164).

In this verse the Holy Qur'an invites the attention of the people to general cosmology, to the ship-building industry, to tourism and its financial advantages, to meteorology, to the origin of winds and rain, to the movement of clouds, to biology and zoology. It regards the pondering on the philosophy of these sciences as something leading to the recognition of Allah.

Attributes Of Allah

The Holy Qur'an says that Allah has all the attributes and characteristics of a perfect being.

"He has the most beautiful names." (Surah al-Hashr, 59:24).

"His is the sublime similitude in the heavens and in the earth" (Surah ar-Rum, 30:27).

As such Allah is Living, Almighty, All-Knowing, Master of His Will, Merciful, Guide, Creator, Wise,

Forgiving and Just. There is no sublime quality which He does not possess. On the other hand He is neither a body nor a compound. He is neither weak nor cruel.

The first group of the sublime attributes of Allah, denoting His perfection is called His affirmative attributes and the second group of His attributes denoting His freedom from every kind of defect and imperfection is called His negative attributes. We both praise and glorify Allah. When we praise Him we mention His affirmative attributes and when glorify Him, we say that He is free from all that is not worthy of Him. In both the cases we affirm His Knowledge to our own benefit and thus uplift ourselves.

Monotheism

Allah has no associate or partner. There is none like Him. It is basically impossible that there should be anyone like Him, for in that case we shall have two or more Gods instead of one. To be two, three or more is a characteristic of the limited and relative things. Plurality has no meaning in regard to an absolute and infinite being.

For example, we can have one child. We can also have two or more children. Similarly we can have one friend. We can also have two or more friends. A friend or a child is a limited being, and a limited being can have a like of him and can be multiplicable. But an infinite being is not multiplicable at all. The following example, though not adequate may be found useful for the purpose of elucidating the point.

In respect of the dimensions of the material world, which is the world which we can see and perceive, the scientists have two theories. Some of them maintain that the dimensions of the world are limited. In other words this perceivable world reaches a point where it ends. But some others are of the opinion that the dimensions of the material world have no middle, no beginning and no end. If we accept the theory that the material world is limited, a question arises as to whether it is one world or more than one? But if we maintain that this world has no limits, the question of the existence of another world becomes absurd. Whatever we may presume to be another world, it will either be identical with this world or a part of it.

This examples applies to the material world as well as the material beings which are limited, conditional and created. The reality of none of them is absolute, independent and self-existing. The material world, though limitless from the viewpoint of its dimensions, is limited from the viewpoint of its reality. But as its dimensions are limitless, we cannot presume the existence of another world.

Almighty Allah has an infinite existence. He is an absolute reality, and He pervades everything. No space or time is devoid of Him. He is closer to us than our jugular vein. Hence it is impossible that He should have a like of Him. We cannot even suppose the existence of another being like Him.

Furthermore, we see the signs of His wisdom and attention prevailing everywhere and pervading everything. We observe that one single will and one single system govern the entire world. That shows that our world is uncentred, not multcentred.

Furthermore, had there been two or more Gods, evidently two or more wills would have applied to everything and two or more realities having a different centre would have existed in every existing thing. As a result everything would have become two or more things. This being an absurd proposition, in fact nothing would have existed at all. This is what the Holy Qur'an means when it says:

"If there were therein (in the Universe) Gods besides Allah, then surely both the heavens and the earth had been discorded." (Surah al-Anbiya', 21:22).

Worship And Adoration

The acknowledgement of One Allah as the most perfect being, having the most sublime attributes and free from every defect and deficiency, and the recognition of His relation to the world consisting in His creatorship, guardianship, munificence, compassion and mercy, create a reaction in us which is called adoration and worship.

Worship is a kind of relationship which man establishes with his Creator. It consists of man's submission to Allah and extolling and thanking Him. It is a relationship which man can establish with his Creator only. The establishment of such a relationship with anyone else is neither conceivable nor permissible.

The acknowledgement of Allah as the only source of existence and the only Master and Lord of everything makes it incumbent on us not to associate any creature with Him in adoration. The Holy Qur'an insists that Allah alone should be worshipped. There is no sin more deadly than associating anyone or anything else with Him.

Now let us see what is worship and what kind of relationship is that which is peculiar to Allah and which cannot be established with any other being.

Definition Of Worship

To make the meaning of worship clear and in order to define it correctly, it is necessary to mention two points as a prelude:

(i) Worship may consist either of words or of actions. The former kind consists of a series of words and sentences which we recite, such as praising Allah, the recitation of the Holy Qur'an or the recitation of the formulas normally recited while offering prayers, and pronouncing '*Labbayk*' during Hajj.

The worship which consists of actions is represented by such acts as standing, bowing and prostration in prayers, circum-ambulation of the Holy Ka'bah, and staying at Arafat and Mash'ar. Most of the acts of worship, such as prayers and pilgrimage (*Hajj*) comprise words and actions both.

(ii) Human acts are of two kinds. Some acts have no remote purpose. They are not performed as a symbol of something else, but they are performed for their own natural effects. For example, a farmer

carries out the functions connected with farming in order to secure their natural results. He does not carry them out as a symbol or to express any feelings. The same is the case with a tailor when he is doing his tailoring. When we proceed to school, we have nothing in mind except reaching there. With this act we do not intend to convey any other purpose or meaning.

But there are acts which we perform as a symbol of a series of some other objects or in order to express our feelings. We lower our head as a sign of confirmation, we sit in the doorway as a sign of humility and bow to someone as a sign of reverence.

Most of the human acts are of the first kind and only a few of the second. Anyway, there are acts which are performed to express our feelings or to show some other objectives. These acts are used in place of words to express an intention.

Now keeping in mind the above two points, we may say that worship, whether it is performed by means of words or acts is a meaningful deed. Man by means of his devotion gives expression to a truth. Similarly by means of such acts as bowing, prostration, circumambulation etc. he wants to convey what he says when he pronounces devotionals and liturgy.

Spirit Of Adoration And Worship

Through his worship, whether it is performed by means of words or acts, man conveys certain things:

- (i) He praises Allah by pronouncing His peculiar attributes having a sense of absolute perfection, such as absolute knowledge, absolute power and absolute will. Absolute perfection means that His knowledge, power and will are not limited by or conditional on anything else and are a corollary of His total and complete independence.
- (ii) He glorifies Allah and declares Him free from every defect and deficiency such as death, limitation, ignorance, helplessness, stinginess, cruelty etc.
- (iii) He thanks Allah, considering Him to be the real source of everything good and of all bounties, and believing that all favours are received from Him alone. Others are only intermediaries appointed by Him.
- (iv) He expresses total submission to Him and acknowledges that unconditional obedience is due to Him. He, being the Absolute Master of all that exists, is entitled to issue orders and we being slaves, it is our duty to obey Him.
- (iv) In regard to His above attributes Allah has no associate or partner. None other than Him is absolutely perfect and none other than Him is absolutely free from every defect. None other than Him is the true source of all bounties and none other than Him deserves to be thanked for all of them. None other than Him deserves total submission and to be obeyed unconditionally. Every other obedience like that of the Prophet, the Imam, the lawful Muslim ruler, the parents and the teachers must culminate in

His obedience and be subject to His good pleasure to be lawful. That is the appropriate response which a man should show to his Almighty Lord. Except in the case of Allah this kind of response is neither applicable nor permissible.

Chapter 3: Degrees Of Monotheism

Both monotheism and polytheism have degrees and stages. Unless a man passes through all the stages of monotheism, he cannot be a true monotheist.

1. Unity Of The Essence Of Allah

To acknowledge the unity of His essence means that Allah is One in His essence. The first impression of Allah which anybody has is that of His Self-dependence. He is a Being who is not dependent on any other being in any way. In the words of the Holy Qur'an, He is *Ghani* (the Absolute). Everything depends on Him and seeks His help. He is independent of everything. The Holy Qur'an says:

"O men, it is you who stand in need of Allah. As for Allah, He is above all need, worthy of praise."
(Surah al-Fatir, 35: 15).

The philosophers describe Him as Self-existent or as a being whose existence is necessary.

The second impression of Allah which everybody has is that of His creatorship. He is the Creator and the ultimate source of all the existing things. All things are "from Him". He is not from anything. According to the philosophical terminology, He is the First cause.

This is the first conception of Allah which everybody has. Everybody thinks of Allah, and while thinking of Him, he has this conception in his mind. Then he decides whether there, really exists a truth, which is not dependent on any other truth, and from which originate all other truths.

Unity of essence means that this truth is not multiplicable, and has no like of it. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Nothing is similar to Him." ***(Surah ash-Shura, 42: 11).***

"And there is none comparable to Him." ***(Surah at-Tawhid, 112:4).***

The rule that an existing being is always a member of a species, is applicable to the created beings only. For example, if is a member of the human species, we can presume that may be other members of this species. But no such thing be presumed in the case of the Self-existing Being. He is above all such notions.

The Self-existing truth being one, this world has only one source and one end. It has neither originated from various sources nor will it return to various sources. It has originated from one source and one truth. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Say: Allah is the Creator of everything." (Surah ar-Ra'd, 13:16).

Everything will return to the same source and the same truth:

"Do not all things reach Allah at last?" (Surah ash-Shura, 42:53).

In other words, the whole universe has one centre, one pole and one orbit.

The relation between Allah and the world is that of the Creator and the created, which is the relation of the cause and the effect, not that kind of relation which exists between light and lamp or between human consciousness and man. It is true that Allah is not separate from the world. He is with everything. The Holy Qur'an says:

"He is with you wherever you are." (Surah al-Hadid, 57:4).

Anyhow, the non-separation of Allah from the world does not mean that He is to the world as light is to a lamp or as consciousness is to a body. Had it been so, Allah would have been the effect of the world, not the cause of it, as light is the effect of a lamp. Similarly the non-separation of Allah from the world does not mean that Allah, the world and man, have the same orientation and they all move and live with the same will and spirit. All these are the attributes of the created and non-self-existing beings. Allah is free from them. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Glorified be your Lord, the Lord of Majesty, from that which they ascribe to Him." (Surah as-Saffat, 37:180).

2. Unity Of The Attributes Of Allah

The unity of His attributes means to recognize that the essence and the attributes of Allah are identical and that His various attributes are not separate from each other. The unity of essence means there is no being or any peer like Allah and the unity of His attributes means the negation of any kind of multiplicity or plurality within His essence. Allah has all the attributes implying the perfection of majesty and beauty, but His attributes have no aspect really separate from Him. The separation of the essence from the attributes and the separation of the attributes from each other, are the characteristics of the limitation of existence, and are not conceivable in the case of infinite existence. Multiplicity, combination and the separation of the essence and the attributes are inconceivable in the case of the Absolute Being. Like the unity of the Divine essence, the unity of the Divine attributes is an Islamic doctrine and one of the most valuable human ideas which has exclusively crystallized in the Shi'ah school. We here quote a passage from the first sermon of the Nahjul Balaghah [1](#) which corroborates as well as explains this idea:

*"All praise is due to Allah, who cannot be adequately praised by any rhetoricians, whose blessings cannot be counted by any enumerators, whom due homage cannot be paid by the most assiduous, who cannot be fully comprehended howsoever one may try, who cannot be reached by intelligence howsoever deep it may go, whose attributes are not limited by any limitation. There exist no words to describe Him fully."*²

As we see, in the above passage the boundlessness of the Divine attributes has been emphasized. In the same sermon after a few sentences Imam Ali says:

*"Perfect devotion to Him means to deny the imputation of attributes to Him, for the person to whom an attribute is imputed, bears witness that he is different from the attribute imputed to him and every attribute of him bears witness that it is different from the person to whom it has been imputed. He who imputes an attribute to Allah compares Him (to something and he who compares him. . ."*³

In the first passage it has been affirmed that Allah has attributes (whose attributes are not limited by any limitation). In the second passage also it is confirmed that He has attributes, but instruction has been given to impute no attributes to Him. The wording of these passages shows that the attributes which He has are unlimited like the limitlessness of His own self, which they are identical with His essence, and the attributes from which He is free are those which are limited and separate from His essence and from each other. Thus the unity of the Divine tributes means to acknowledge the unity of Allah's essence and His attributes.

3. Unity Of The Work Of Allah

Unity of His work means to recognize that the world with all its systems, ways, causes and effects is the work of Allah alone and has originated from His will. Nothing in the world is self-existing. Everything depends on Him. In the words of the Holy Qur'an, He is the sustainer of the whole world. The existing things are not independent with regard to their effect and causation. As a result, as Allah has no partner in his essence, similarly He has no partner in His work. Every agent and every cause owes its existence and effectiveness to Him and depends on Him. All power as well as ability to do things belong to Him alone.

Man is one of the existing things and hence a creation of Allah. Like other things he is effective as far as his own work is concerned and unlike of them, he is the master of his own destiny. But Allah has in no way delegated His powers to him. Thus he has not got complete discretion.

"By the power of Allah I stand and sit"

The belief that any being, whether man or a being other than man, has a complete discretion, amounts to believing that being to be a partner of Allah as far as independence of activity is concerned. As independence in activity amounts to independence in essence it is contrary to Allah's unity of essence,

what to say of His unity of work.

"All praise is due to Allah who has taken no spouse nor a child. He has no partner in His sovereignty, nor has He a helper to help Him out of weakness. Therefore glorify Him a great deal." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:111).

4. Unity In Worship

The three degrees of monotheism mentioned above are theoretical and a matter of creed. They are to be recognized and acknowledged. But the unity in worship is a practical matter. It is a form of 'being' and 'becoming'. The above degrees of monotheism involved right thinking. This degree is the stage of becoming righteous. The theoretical stage of monotheism means to have a perfect view. The practical stage of it means to move forward to attain perfection. The theoretical monotheism means to comprehend the Divine oneness and the practical monotheism means man's becoming one. The theoretical monotheism is the stage of seeing and the practical monotheism is the stage of going.

Before we further explain the practical monotheism, it is necessary to mention one more point about the theoretical monotheism. The question is whether it is possible to know Allah together with the unity of His essence, the unity of His attributes and the unity of His work, and if possible, whether such a knowledge is conducive to human weal and bliss; or out of the various degrees and stages of monotheism it is only practical monotheism that is useful.

As far as the possibility of gaining such a knowledge is concerned, we have discussed this problem in our books, Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism. As far as its being useful or otherwise, which depends on our own conception of man and his weal and bliss. The modern wave of materialistic thinking has induced even the believers in Allah to consider the questions related to His knowledge to be of little use.

They regard such questions as a kind of mental exercise and an escape from the practical problems of life. But a Muslim who believes that the reality of man is not his physical reality alone, but his true reality is his spiritual reality and that the essence of human spirit is the essence of his knowledge, sanctity and purity, knows well that the so called theoretical monotheism, besides being the basis of practical monotheism, is in itself a psychological perfection of the highest order. It uplifts man, leads him towards the Divine Truth and makes him perfect.

"To Him good words ascend and the pious deeds does He exalt." (Surah al-Fatir, 35:10).

Humanity of man depends on his knowledge of Allah.

Man's knowledge is not something separate from him. The more man attains knowledge of the universe, its system and its source, the more will develop his humanity, the 50% substance of which consists of knowledge.

From the point of view of Islam, especially the Shi'ah doctrine, there is not the least doubt that the attainment of the knowledge of Allah, irrespective of its practical and social effects, is in itself a goal of humanity.

Now we take up the question of practical monotheism:

Practical monotheism or unity in worship means to worship Allah alone; in other words to be single-minded in respect of the worship of Allah. Later we will explain that from the viewpoint of Islam, worship has a number of degrees. The clearest degree of it is the performance of the rites related to glorification and exaltation of Allah. The performance of such rites in respect of anyone other than Allah, means total exit from the pale of Islam. Anyhow, from the viewpoint of Islam worship is not confined to this degree alone. Every form of spiritual orientation and accepting something as one's spiritual ideal is included in worship. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Have you seen him who has chosen for his god his own lust?" (Surah al-Furqan, 25:43).

He who obeys someone whom Allah has not allowed to be obeyed and submits to him totally, worships that person:

"They have taken their rabbis and their monks as their lords besides Allah." (Surah at-Tawbah, 9:31).

"And similarly none of us shall take others as our lords besides Allah." (Surah Ale Imran, 3:64).

Thus practical monotheism or unity in worship means to accept Allah alone as fit to be obeyed unconditionally, regard Him alone as one's ideal and the direction of one's conduct and to reject all others and consider them to be unfit to be obeyed unconditionally or regarded as one's ideal. Practical monotheism means to bow to Allah alone, to rise for Him, to live for him and to die for Him.

"(Prophet) Ibrahim said: I have set my face earnestly to Him who has created the Heavens and the earth. I am not a pagan. My prayers and my sacrifice, my living and my dying all are for Allah, the Lord of the universe. He has no partner. So have I been commanded, and I am the first to submit to Him." (Surah al-An'am, 6:79 & 3: 163- 164)

This monotheism of Prophet Ibrahim is the practical monotheism. This is what the creed, *'There is no god but Allah'*, visualizes.

[1.](#) The Islamic Seminary has published this book in English language under the title, Peak of Eloquence, 1984.

[2.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Sermon 1.

[3.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1984, Sermon 1, p. 137.

Chapter 4: Man And Unification

The unification of the existential reality of man in a psychological system in consonance with his human and evolutionary tendencies and similarly the unification of human society in a harmonious and evolutionary social system, are the questions which have always engaged the attention of mankind. As opposed to unification is the polarization of individual personality and its split into discordant segments, and the division of society into conflicting groups and classes. The question is: what is to be done to ensure the harmonious development of human personality both from psychological and social points of view? In this respect there are three theories: materialistic theory, idealistic theory and realistic theory.

1. Materialistic Theory

The upholders of this theory think of matter only and give no importance to soul. They claim that what splits an individual psychologically and a society socially and causes discord and incongruity is the existence of the system of private property. Man by nature is a social being. In the beginning of history he led a collective life, and was not conscious of his individual existence. At that time he had a collective spirit and a collective feeling.

His life depended on hunting and every body could obtain his means of living from the river and the forest according to his requirements. There was no question of surplus production till man discovered the art of cultivation. With it the possibility of surplus production and the possibility of some peoples' doing work and some other's simply eating without doing any work appeared. That was the development which led to the practice of ownership.

The private ownership of the sources of production like water and land and the production tools like plough, did away with the collective spirit and split the society which was so far living as one unit, into 'haves' and 'have nots'. The society which lived as 'We' took the shape of 'I'. As a result of the appearance of ownership man became unconscious of his own reality as a social being. Previously he felt that he was just a man like others. Now he regarded himself as an owner instead of a man. Thus he became unconscious of himself and began to deteriorate.

Only by abolishing the system of private ownership man can once more regain his moral and social unity and his mental and social health. The compulsory movement of history is already taking place in this direction. Private properties, which have turned human unity into plurality, and collectivity into dispersal, are like the turrets mentioned by the Persian mystic poet, Mowlavi in a beautiful simile. He says that the turrets and pinnacles divide one single and extensive sunshine into compartments by introducing shadow pieces in between. Of course Mowlavi visualizes a gnostic truth, which is the emergence of plurality from unity and its ultimate return to unity. But with a little twist, this simile can also be used to illustrate the Marxist theory of socialism.

2. Idealistic Theory

This theory gives importance to man's spirit and his relation to his inner self only. According to this theory, it is true that the relation between man and the material things does away with unity, causes plurality and dismembers collectivity.

It leads the individual to psychological split and divides society into classes. But it is also to be remembered that in the case of the attachment of one thing to another, it is the latter that causes the split and dismemberment of the former. Hence the attachment of such things as property, wife and position to man is not the cause of his psychological split and the dismemberment of society. In contrast, it is the heart-felt inner attachment of man to the material things that causes this split and dismemberment. Ownership has not alienated man from himself and society. It is his 'being owned' that has alienated him. What dismembers his individuality from moral and social point of view is not 'my property', 'my wife' and 'my position'. It is 'my being property', 'my being wife' and 'my being a position' which dismembers his individuality.

To change 'I' into 'we' it is not necessary to sever the relation of the things with man. It is the relation of man with the things that should be severed. Release man from the bondage of the things, so that he may return back to his human reality. Give man his moral and spiritual freedom. To release things from his ownership will serve no useful purpose. The moral and social unification of man is a matter of spiritual education and training. It is not an economic question. What is required is inner development of man, not his outer curtailment. Man is first an animal and then a human being. He is an animal by nature and a human being by acquisition. Man can regain his latent humanity by correct education. So long as he does not gain it, he remains an animal by nature and there is no question of the unity of his spirit and life.

It is unhumanistic to consider material things to be the cause of the split and coalescence of man and to think that with their division man is divided and with their unification he is united, and that his moral and social personality is subservient to economic and production situation. Such notions are the result of not knowing man and not believing in his humanity and his faculties of understanding and will.

Furthermore, it is impossible to sever man's private relation with other things totally. Even if his relation with wealth and property is severed, it is not possible to do so in the case of wife, children and family. Is it possible to introduce socialism in this field also, and to establish sexual communism? If this is possible, then why are the countries, which abolished private property long ago, still sticking to private family system? Suppose the natural family system is also socialized, what will be done about jobs, positions, prestige and honour? Is it possible to distribute these things also equally? What will be done about the physical and mental abilities of the individuals? These relationships are an integral part of the existence of every individual and are not separable from him.

3. Realistic Theory

According to this theory, what splits and divides man from individual and social point of view is neither man's relation with the things nor the relation of the things with man. Man's bondage neither originates from his ownership nor from his being owned. This theory gives first importance to such factors as education, training, revolution, thinking, ideology and spiritual freedom. It believes that man is neither a purely material being nor a purely spiritual being. This worldly life and the next worldly life are closely interconnected with each other. The body and the soul interact.

A struggle should be made against the factors causing psychological split with the help of faith and unity in worship, and a war should be waged against discrimination, injustice, deprivation, oppression, suffocation, and false gods.

This is the Islamic way of thinking. As soon as Islam appeared, it started a movement and began to bring about a revolution. But it never said that if discrimination and injustice were removed or private property was abolished, everything would be all right. Nor did it say if you reformed yourself from within, had nothing to do with the external world, and improved your moral qualities, society would automatically be reformed. Besides other things Islam raised the slogan of internal monotheism to be secured through jihad and a struggle against social inequities. The following verse which shines on the firmament of human unity and which was incorporated by the Holy Prophet in his letters addressed to the heads of various countries, manifests the all-round realism of Islam:

"Let us come to an agreement between us and you: that we will worship none but Allah, which we will associate none with Him." (Surah Ale Imran, 3:64).

Up to this point this verse deals with the unity of man through faith, a common ideal and attaining spiritual freedom. Thereafter it says:

"None of us shall take others as Lords besides Allah"(Surah Ale Imran, 3:64).

Should we act according to this teaching of Islam we will not be divided into masters and slaves, and will be able to forestall wrong social relationships that lead to discrimination.

Following the chaos and agitation during the caliphate of Uthman leading to his murder, people rushed to pledge their allegiance to Imam Ali, who was forced to accept the responsibilities of caliphate against his personal liking. It was his legal duty which compelled him to accept the caliphate. He describes his personal dislike and his legal duty in the following words:

"Had not the people gathered round me, had not the presence of the helper left me no choice and had not Allah taken a promise from the learned not to agree to a situation in which people were divided into the oppressors having too much and the oppressed having too little, I would not have cared who becomes a caliph and my attitude would have remained the same as it had been throughout". [1](#)

We all know that Imam Ali after taking over his assignment gave the foremost importance to two things. One was the spiritual and moral reform of the people and the dissemination of Divine knowledge, the examples of which we find in Nahjul Balaghah, and the other was his struggle against social discrimination. He was neither contented with inner reform nor regarded the mere social reform as adequate. Islam had in one hand the programme of educating the people and of preaching faith in Allah in order to secure individual and social unity of mankind, and in other it had a sword in order to sever the unbalanced human relationships, to break up class distinctions and to knock down the false gods.

The classless Islamic society means a just society in which there is no discrimination, no deprivation, no tyranny and no false gods.

It does not mean a society in which there is no disparity, for the absence of disparity is in itself a form of injustice. There is a difference between discrimination and disparity. In the creational system there exists disparity, which gives it variety and beauty, but there exists no discrimination in it. The perfect Islamic society is a society that is against discrimination, but is not opposed to disparity. Islamic society is a society of equality and brotherhood. But its equality is positive and not negative. It takes into consideration the natural differences of the individuals and does not deprive anyone of his acquired distinctions. It establishes positive equality by providing equal opportunities to all and by abolishing unjust eminence and imaginary superiority.

The negative equality is similar to the equality narrated in a legendary tale. A tyrant used to live in the hills. He received the passers-by as his guests. When the guest retired for the night, he was required to sleep on a particular bed. If by chance the body of the guest was equal to the size of the bed, it was all right. But woe to the poor guest if his body was not equal to it! If it was taller, the servants of the tyrant chopped off a part of it from either side and if it was shorter, they pulled it from both sides to make it fit in the bed. The result in both the cases can easily be imagined.

The positive equality is like the equal treatment meted out by an affectionate teacher to all his pupils. If in a test the answers of all of them are correct, he awards them equal marks. If their answers vary, he awards each of them as many marks as he deserves.

The Islamic society is a natural society. It is neither discriminative nor a society of negative equality. The Islamic principle is 'work according to one's ability, entitlement according to one's work'.

In a discriminative society relations of people are based on subjugation and forcible exploitation. But in a natural society there is no exploitation and nobody is allowed to live at the cost of others. The relations of people are based on reciprocal service. All work freely according to their ability and within the scope of their potentiality. All serve each other. In other words bilateral use of services is the rule. The more a man is capable and the more forceful personality he has, the more he attracts other forces to himself. For example, the more knowledge a man has, the more seekers of knowledge he attracts to himself and uses their services. The more technical know-how a man the more people have to work in accordance

with his instructions. That is why the Holy Qur'an which opposes the existence of the lords and the domineered in society, acknowledges the existence of natural disparity and different grades of capabilities created by Allah. It also supports the relationship of "bilateral" use of services. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Is it they who apportion their Lord's Mercy? We have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of the world, and raised some of them above some others in rank so that some of them may take labour from some others; and the Mercy of your Lord is better than the wealth they amass" (Surah az-Zukhruf, 43:32).

A very fine point which can be inferred from this verse is that the disparity in endowments is not unilateral. The people not divided into two classes, viz. one of these having natural endowments and the other of those bereft of them. Had it been so, Allah would have said: "We have raised some of them in rank so that they may take labour from others". But He has not said so. He has said that He has raised some of them in rank above some others, so that some of them use the services of some of others. That means that all have some or other endowments and all utilize the services of each other. In other words, both the endowments and services are bilateral

Another point is that the word '*Sukhriyya*' used in this verse begins with the vowel point of U(su) and means employment and utilization. The same word has been used at two other places in the Holy Qur'an with the vowel point of 'I' (si) and there, as the most of the commentators point out, means mockery.

This verse describes the natural and inborn relation of men in their social life, and says that their relationship is such that they all use the services of each other. It may be said that this is the most important verse from the viewpoint of the exposition of the social philosophy of Islam.

Bayzawi in his well-known commentary on the Holy Qur'an and following his example, Allam Fayz in his book *As-Safi*, explaining the verse says: "The verse, '***so that some of them may take labour from some others***'(43:32), means that all men utilize the services of each other to meet their needs. This relationship is a means of creating in men a spirit of good will and affection towards each other so that the affairs of the world may go on smoothly"

There is a hadith (tradition) also which says that this verse means that Allah has created men in such a way that they all are in need of each other.

Though men depend on each other to satisfy their natural needs, there is still an adequate scope of free competition in society. In contrast, the life of the gregarious animals is based on a compulsory relationship. Therefore man's sociality is different from that of the bees or the termites. Their life is governed by inexorable laws, and provides no field for competition. They have no possibility of going up or coming down. Man, besides being social, is endowed with a sort of freedom.

Human society is a field of competitive progress and development. Any restrictions placed on the

individual freedom in this respect prevent the blooming of human faculties.

The model man of the materialistic school, though has few external restrictions, is unable to attain inner freedom. He is like a bird which has no feathers though not confined within a cage, and as such is unable to fly. The model man of the idealistic school has inner freedom but is tied externally. He is like a bird having feathers, but the feet of which are tied firmly. But the man of the realistic school is like a bird which has feathers, the feet of which are free and which can fly without any difficulty.

It is clear from the above that practical monotheism, whether it is individual or social, means to be unitarian in the worship of Allah and to reject every other kind of heartfelt adoration such as the adoration of one's base desires, adoration of money, adoration of honour and privileges etc. In the case of society it also means to be unitarian in the observance of fair play and justice and the rejection of all false values, discrimination and unfairness. So long as the individual and society are not unitarian, they cannot attain happiness and prosperity, and they cannot be unitarian unless they are righteous. The Holy Qur'an describes the division of man's personality and his bewilderment under the polytheistic system and his attainment of unity and purpose under the monotheistic system in the following words:

"Allah coins a similitude of a man who is owned by several part-owners, quarrelling, and another man belonging wholly to one man. Are these two alike?" (Surah az-Zumar, 39:29)

Under the polytheistic system man is like a straw being tossed every moment by the waves of a sea in a different direction. Under the monotheistic system he is like a boat fully equipped with guiding apparatus, moving in a regular manner under the command of a well-intentioned captain.

[1.](#) Nahjul Balaghah, Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1984, Sermon 7.

Chapter 5: Degrees Of Polytheism

As monotheism has degrees, so has polytheism. By comparing the two we can know both monotheism and polytheism better, for comparison of opposites makes the things clear. History shows that different kinds of polytheism have always existed side by side with monotheism preached by the Prophets.

1. Belief In The Plurality Of Divine Essence

Certain nations have had belief in two (dualism), three (trinity) or more original and eternal sources independent of each other. They have believed that the world is multi-polar and multi-centred. What has been the root of such ideas? Is each one of these ideas a reflection of the social conditions of the people concerned? For example, when the people believed in two original and eternal sources and two original orbits of the world, their society was divided into two different segments, and when they believed in three

sources and three gods, their social system was trilateral. In other words, in every case the social system has reflected on the minds of the people in the form of a doctrine. Is it also a fact that the Prophets preached monotheism only when the social system tended to be uncentered?

This view stems from a philosophical theory which we discussed earlier. According to this theory, spiritual and intellectual aspects of man and the moral and conventional tendencies of society such as sciences, law, philosophy, religion and art are subordinate to man's social systems, especially to his economic system, and have no independent position. We have already refuted this theory. As we believe in the intrinsic value of thinking, ideology and humanity, we consider such sociological views in respect of monotheism and polytheism to be baseless.

Anyhow, there is another question which should not be confused with this theory. Sometimes a religious creed is mis-used in a social system. For example, the idolatry system of the pagan Quraysh was a device of safeguarding the interests of the Arab usurers. The Abu Sufyans, the Abu Jahls and the Walids Ibn Mughirah did not have the slightest belief in the idols. They defended them to preserve the existing social system only. When the anti-usury monotheistic system of Islam emerged their defence of the idols took a serious turn. As the pagan usurers became apprehensive of their own ruin, they advanced the plea of the sanctity of the popular beliefs. The Holy Qur'an has alluded to this point at a number of places, especially in the story of Fir'awn and Prophet Musa. Anyhow it must be understood that this question is quite different from the view that economic system is the infrastructure of any doctrinal system and every intellectual system is the reaction of an economic and social system.

What the school of the Prophets vehemently rejects is the idea that every ideology is necessarily a crystallized form of the social desires which in turn are created by the economic conditions. According to materialistic theory, the monotheistic school of the Prophets is in itself a crystallized form of the social desires and was produced by the economic needs of the time of the Prophets. The development of the implements of production originated a number of social desires which were explained through the monotheistic idea. The Prophets were in fact the expounders of this social and economic need. There is a universal rule that every idea and every belief has an economic infrastructure. This rule applies to the idea of monotheism also.

As the Holy Qur'an believes that the innate nature of man is a basic dimension of his existence, and maintains that this innate human nature initiates a number of desires which can be met only by monotheism, it considers the monotheistic call of the Prophets to be meeting a great human need. It does not believe in any other infrastructure of monotheism, nor does it regard the class conditions as a factor compelling the emergence of any idea or a belief. Had the class conditions been the infrastructure of man's belief, everybody would have been bound to incline to the direction that his class position required.

In this case there would have been no choice in the matter of belief for anybody. Neither the Fir'awns could be blamed nor their opponents could be praised, for a man can be blamed or praised only when

he has a choice to be what he is not. Otherwise he can neither be blamed nor can he be praised. A black or a white man cannot be blamed or praised for the colour of their skin. But we know that man is not bound to think in accordance with his class. He can revolt against his class interests, as Prophet Musa did, though he was brought up under Fir'awnic luxuries. This proves that the question of any infrastructure and superstructure besides depriving man of his humanity, is no more than a myth.

Anyhow, this does not mean that material and intellectual conditions do not affect each other. What is denied is their being infrastructure and superstructure respectively. Otherwise the Holy Qur'an itself says:

"Surely man is rebellious when he thinks that he is independent." (Surah 'Alaq, 96:6-7).

The Holy Qur'an accepts that the rich and the powerful play a special role in opposing the Prophets whereas the downtrodden and the underprivileged play their role in supporting them. But because of their human nature, they all are capable of accepting the truth.

From spiritual point of view the only difference is that one group in spite of its human nature, has to cross a great barrier before it may be persuaded to accept the truth for it has to relinquish its existing material gains and unjust distinctions, whereas the other group has no such obstacles. In the words of Salman, (the distinguished companion of the Holy Prophet) those who have a light burden are saved. Not only that, but the latter group has a positive incentive. Consequent to its accepting the truth its living conditions improve and its life becomes easier.

That is why the majority of the followers of the Prophets has consisted of the underprivileged. Anyhow, the Prophets have always been able to recruit some of their followers from the privileged classes and have been able to persuade them to fight against their own class and its class interests. The Holy Qur'an does not think that the Fara'ina and the Abu Sufyans defended the polytheistic system of their times and provoked the religious sentiments of their people against Prophet Musa and the Last Prophet simply because they on account of their class position could not think of doing otherwise or because their class requirements had crystallized in the form of polytheistic beliefs. The Holy Qur'an maintains that they were perfidious. By virtue of their Divine innate nature they believed in Allah and realized the truth, but still they rejected it and opposed it. The Holy Qur'an says:

"They denied Our signs, though their souls acknowledged them." (Surah an-Naml, 27: 14).

The Holy Qur'an describes their disbelief as the denial of what their hearts believed. In other words, their denial was a sort of revolution against their own conscience.

In this connection there exists a great misunderstanding. Some people maintain that the Holy Qur'an endorses the Marxist theory of historical materialism. We will discuss this question in detail when we undertake the study of society and history in another section of this book. This theory is neither in conformity with the actual reality of history, nor is defensible from scientific point of view.

Anyway, a belief in several sources is a belief in the plurality of the Divine essence, and is diametrically opposed to the belief in its unity. Advancing an argument in this connection the Holy Qur'an says:

"If there were therein deities besides Allah, then surely the heavens and the earth would have been disordered." (Surah al-Anbiya', 21:22)

A belief in the plurality of the Divine essence puts the holder of such a belief outside the pale of Islam which totally rejects this belief in every form of it.

2. Plurality Of Creatorship

Some people acknowledge that Allah is peerless. They recognize Him to be the only source of the world. Nevertheless, as far as His creatorship is concerned, they associate some creatures with Him. For example, some of them hold that evils have been created by some other beings, not by Allah. This kind of belief is also tantamount to the belief in the plurality of creatorship, and is diametrically opposed to the doctrine of the unity of Divine actions. Anyhow, a belief in the plurality of creatorship has several degrees. Some of them do not amount to open polytheism and as such do not put the holders of the belief concerned outside the pale of Islam.

3. Plurality Of Divine Attributes

This being a subtle question is not raised by the common people. Only some thinkers lacking deep insight have given a consideration to it. Among the scholastic theologians the *Asha'irah* believe in the plurality of the Divine attributes. As this belief does not amount to open polytheism, it does not put its holders outside the pale of Islam.

4. Plurality Of Worship

There have been many peoples which have worshipped pieces of wood, stone or some metal or they have worshipped an animal, a star, a tree or a river. Formerly this kind of polytheism was common. It is still found in several parts of the world. The plurality of worship is the opposite of the unity of worship. All the degrees of polytheism mentioned previously were the various kinds of theoretical polytheism. They may be described as false cognition. The plurality of worship is practical polytheism. It is a sort of false 'being' and false 'becoming'.

Anyhow, practical polytheism also has so many degrees. The highest of them is that which puts a man outside the pale of Islam. It is called plain polytheism. But there are many kinds of hidden polytheism. Islam in the course of its programme of practical monotheism fights against all of them. Certain varieties of polytheism are so minute and hidden that they can hardly be observed. The Holy Prophet has said: *"Polytheism is more imperceptible than the crawl of an ant on a smooth stone in the darkness of night. The slightest degree of it is to prefer any act of injustice to an act of justice."*

Religiousness is nothing but to love and hate for the sake of Allah. Allah says:

"If you have love for Allah, then follow me so that He may love you." (Surah Ale Imran, 3:31).

Islam regards any kind of self-indulgence, love of position, honour and money as well as hero-worship as a sort of polytheism. In the story of the conflict between Prophet Musa and Fir'awn the Holy Qur'an describes the tyrannical rule of Fir'awn over the children of Isra'il as the imposition of devotion and slavery. Prophet Musa is described to have said in reply to Fir'awn:

"The favour for which you reproach me is that you have enslaved the children of Isra'il (and imposed on them the devotion to you)." (Surah ash-Shu'ara, 26:22).

It is evident that the children of Isra'il neither worshipped Fir'awn nor were they his slaves. They were only under his tyrannical domination as in another place Fir'awn himself is described to have said: "Surely we have full power over them". Still at another place Fir'awn is described to have said: "Their people (the people of Prophet Musa and Harun) are our slaves and devoted to us". In this verse the word 'our' is significant.[1](#)

Even if we presume that the children of Israil were forced to worship Fir'awn, it is unimaginable that they worshipped all his people.

They were forced only to submit to and obey Fir'awn and his nobles.

In a sermon Imam Ali, describing the pitiable plight of the children of Isra'il under the tyrannical rule of Fir'awn, says: *"The Fir'awn had enslaved them"*. He explains their enslavement in the following words: *"They tortured them and made their life bitter. The children of Isra'il lived under most oppressive conditions and could find no way to escape from persecution and humiliation or to defend themselves"*.[2](#)

The verse that promises vicegerency of Allah to the believers is the most express one in this connection. It says:

"Allah has promised to make those of you who believe and do the good deeds, successors in the land, as He had made those before them, and will establish their religion which He has chosen for them and change their fear into security. They will worship Me, and ascribe nothing as a partner to Me. Those who disbelieve henceforth are the wicked indeed." (Surah an-Nur, 24:55).

This verse shows that when a rightful government and Divine vicegerency are established, the believers get rid of the obedience of every tyrant. The verse says that they worship Allah alone and ascribe no partners to Him. This shows that from the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an the obedience of the ruler is an act of the worship of Allah provided he is obeyed for the sake of Him. Otherwise it is a polytheistic act.

It is astonishing that forced obedience which is not morally regarded as an act of worship, is considered to be so from a social angle. The Holy Prophet says:

"When the number of the children of al-'As (ancestor of Marwan Ibn Hakam and most of the Umayyad caliphs) reaches thirty, they will seize the property of Allah and turn it into their private property, will enslave the bondmen of Allah, and will interfere in His religion".

Here the Holy Prophet has hinted at the oppression and despotism of the Umayyads. Evidently the Umayyads did not ask people to worship them, nor did they make them slaves of theirs. They only imposed on them their despotic rule. The Holy Prophet through his Divine foresight calls this position enslavement and a sort of polytheism.

Boundary Between Monotheism And Polytheism

What constitutes the line of demarcation between monotheism and polytheism (including both theoretical and practical forms of them)? Which idea is monotheistic and which is polytheistic? What kind of action constitutes practical monotheism and what kind of it constitutes practical polytheism?

Is it polytheistic to believe in the existence of anything other than Allah? Does the unity of His essence require us not to believe that there exists anything in any form besides Him not even as His creation? (a sort of ontological monism)

It is obvious that the created things are the work of Allah. They cannot be considered to be His rivals. Allah's creations are the manifestation of His exuberant power. A belief in the existence of a created thing as a thing created by Allah is, not contrary to monotheism. It is rather complementary to it. Hence the line of demarcation between monotheism and polytheism cannot be the existence or the non-existence of anything other than Allah.

Does a belief in the causation of the created things amount to polytheism or the plurality of creatorship? Does a belief in the unity of the Divine work necessarily imply that we should reject the system of causation and ascribe every effect direct to Allah? For example, should we believe that fire has no role in burning, water has no role in quenching thirst, rain has no role in making plants grow and medicines have no role in curing, and that it is Allah direct who burns, quenches thirst, makes the plants grow and cures the diseased. Is it true that the presence or absence of other factors makes no difference?

At the most it can be said that Allah usually performs His acts in the presence of certain factors. If a person has the habit of putting a cap on his head when he wants to write a letter, it cannot be said that the presence or absence of a cap has any effect on his letter writing. The only thing is that he does not like to write a letter without a cap. According to this view, the same is the nature of the presence and the absence of the things called causes and factors. Should we believe otherwise, we will be ascribing partners to Allah in His work. That is the view of the Asha'irah and the Predestinarians.

This view again is not correct. Just as a belief in the existence of a created thing is not tantamount to the belief in the plurality of the Divine essence, but is complementary to the belief in the oneness of Allah, similarly a belief in the causation system is not tantamount to the belief in the plurality of creatorship. As

the created things are not self-existing, similarly they are not independent with regard to their effectiveness. As all existing things depend on Allah for their existence and effectiveness, there is no question of the plurality of creatorship.

The belief in the causation system is actually complementary to the belief in the creatorship of Allah. It certainly would have amounted to polytheism if we believed that the created things were independent from the viewpoint of their effectiveness, or believed that the relation between Allah and the world was that of a manufacturer and the things manufactured.

A vehicle initially needs a manufacturer to manufacture it, but when it is completed, it operates according to its own mechanism. Even if the maker dies, the vehicle will continue to work. Should we think that the relation of the natural factors, such as water, rain, energy, heat, earth, plants and man to Allah is of a similar nature, as sometimes the Mu'tazilah tend to think, the idea would certainly lead to polytheism.

The created things depend on their Creator for their effectiveness as much as they depend on Him for their origin, existence and survival. The world is His creation and a blessing from Him. It depends on Him totally. Hence the effectiveness of the created things is actually the effectiveness of Allah and their creativeness is His creativeness and an extension of His work.

Even it may be said that to describe the belief that the created things have a role in the affairs of the world as a polytheistic idea, is in itself a polytheistic idea, for it implies an unconscious belief in the independence of the existing things, as is betrayed by the presumption that a belief in their effectiveness will amount to the belief in two centres. Anyhow, a belief or an unbelief in the causation of the things besides Allah is not the line of demarcation between monotheism and polytheism.

Is a belief in the supernatural power of an existing thing whether an angel or a man such as an Imam or a Prophet polytheistic, while a belief in the power and effectiveness of a Prophet or an Imam etc. within the normal limits is not so? Similarly is it also a polytheistic idea to have a belief in the power and effectiveness of a man who has died, for a dead man is apparently nothing more than inorganic matter? Obviously from the viewpoint of natural laws inorganic matter has neither consciousness, nor power nor will. As such to believe that a dead man has perception or to greet a dead man, to show respect to him, and to call and implore him for anything, all should be polytheistic acts, for they mean ascribing supernatural power to a being other Allah.

Similarly it also should be polytheistic to believe that the earth of a particular place is effective in curing diseases or that prayer is granted at a particular place, for such a belief is tantamount to believing in the existence of a supernatural power in a lifeless thing. As all that is natural, is identifiable, experimentable and perceptible, to believe in the effectiveness of the things cannot be polytheistic as supposed by the Asha'irah, but it is certainly polytheistic to believe in the supernatural power of the created things.

Existence has two sectors: physical and metaphysical. The metaphysical sector is the exclusive domain of Allah, while the physical sector is the exclusive domain of the created things or is a domain common

to Allah and the created things both. A number of functions having a metaphysical aspect, such as giving life, causing death, providing means of living etc., along with some normal and ordinary functions, fall within the exclusive domain of Allah. That is the position as far as theoretical monotheism is concerned.

As for practical monotheism, any spiritual, which is non-physical, heed paid to a being other than Allah with a view to establish a spiritual relation with him, to draw his attention or to seek response from him, constitutes polytheism, and amounts to worshipping him. As the worship of a being other than Allah is neither allowed by reason nor by Islamic law, it puts such a worshipper outside the pale of Islam. Further, the nature of any rite, involving such a heed is not different from that of the rites performed by the idolaters in respect of their idols. The performance of such rites means to ascribe metaphysical power to the personage involved in them (for example an Imam or the Holy Prophet). The above is the view that is held by the *Wahhabis* and the semi-*Wahhabis* of our age.

In our times this view has gained considerable currency and in certain circles it is considered to be a sign of clear thinking.

But from the monotheistic point of view, it is as polytheistic as the theory of the Asha'irah. In fact it is the worst theory from the viewpoint of the unity of creatorship and the unity of Divine work.

While refuting the theory of the Asha'irah, we said earlier that they denied the causation system on the plea that a belief in the effectiveness and causation of the created things would amount to a belief in the existence of several sources and origins besides Allah. We pointed out that the things could originate sources only if they were self-existing and were independent of Allah. Asha'irah appear to have unconsciously believed in some sort of the independence of the created things. This belief is evidently polytheistic as it amounts to the denial of the unity of the Divine essence. Anyhow, they did not realize the consequences of their theory. They wanted to affirm the unity of creatorship, but unwittingly ended in supporting the plurality of the essence.

The same criticism is applicable to our own semi-*Wahhabis*. They also unwittingly accord a kind of self-independence to the created things, for they think that to believe in any supernatural factors is tantamount to believing in a power rival to Allah. These people overlook the fact that the supernatural deeds of a being whose entire existence depends on Allah and who has no independent status of his own, are in fact attributable to Allah before being attributed to him. He is nothing more than a medium through which Divine favour is conveyed. Is it polytheistic to believe that the angel Jibril is the medium of revelation and knowledge, Mikail is the medium of the means of living, Israfil is the medium of Resurrection and 'Izrail is the medium of carrying away the souls?

From monotheistic point of view, this theory leads to the worst kind of polytheism, for a belief in it amounts to a sort of the division of work between the Creator and the created. According to this theory the supernatural deeds fall within the exclusive domain of Allah and the natural deeds fall either within

the exclusive domain of the created or are common to the domains of the Creator and the created. To believe in an exclusive domain of the created means a belief in the polytheistic idea of the plurality of work. Similarly to believe in a common domain is another kind of polytheism.

Contrary to the current conception, Wahhabism is not only a doctrine opposed to Imamate, but it is also opposed to monotheism and humanity. It is anti-monotheistic because it believes in the division of work. As explained above Wahhabism is a sort of disguised polytheism. It is anti-human in the sense that it does not give any credit to human talent and ability which have made man superior even to the angels. As expressly mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, man is the vicegerent of Allah and the angels were ordered to prostrate themselves before him. But Wahhabism still want to degrade man to the level of a wild animal.

Further, to make such a distinction between the living and the dead as to say that the dead are not alive even in another world and that the entire personality of man consists in his body, which turns into inorganic matter after his death, is a materialistic and ungodly idea. We will deal with this question later when we discuss about the Day of Judgement.

To make a distinction between the unknown mysterious effects and the known effects of the things and to regard the first as metaphysical in opposition to the second, is another kind of polytheism.

Now we can comprehend what the Holy Prophet meant when he said that infiltration of polytheism into belief is so quiet and imperceptible as the crawl of an ant on a smooth stone in the darkness of night.

The fact is that the dividing line between monotheism and polytheism is the relationship between Allah on the one hand and man and the world on the other. This relationship is that of "from Him" and "to Him". In the theoretical monotheism the line of demarcation is "from Him". "We all are from Allah".

So long as we recognize every truth and every existing thing to be having the quality of being from Him in its essence, its attributes and its work, we identify it correctly from the monotheistic point of view. It is immaterial whether it has one single effect or several effects or no effect at all, and whether it has or has not any supernatural effects. Allah is not the Lord of the metaphysical world alone. He is the Lord of the whole world. He is as close to the physical world as to the metaphysical. He is with everything and sustains everything. If a thing has any metaphysical aspect, which does mean that it has an aspect of Godship. As we said earlier, in accordance with Islamic conception of it, the world has the nature of being "from Him". The Holy Qur'an in a number of verses ascribes to the Prophets such miraculous acts as bringing the dead to life and restoring the sight of the born blind. Anyhow, it always adds the phrase: "With His will". This phrase indicates the nature of these acts and shows that they were from Him. Nobody should have the notion that the Prophets were self-dependent. A belief in any existence that is not "from Him" is polytheistic. Similarly a belief in the effectiveness of an existing thing, if that effectiveness is not "from Him" is again an act of polytheism. It is immaterial whether its effect is supernatural like creating the earth and the heavens or is so trivial as overturning a leaf.

In the case of practical monotheism the line of demarcation between monotheism and polytheism is 'to Him'. 'We shall return to Him', as the Holy Qur'an says.

A heed, whether spiritual or otherwise, made to an existing thing with a view to proceed towards Allah and not as a goal in itself, is a heed to Allah. The existing things are to be regarded only as signs and milestones on the way towards Him, Who alone is the goal and destination.

The Prophets and the Imams have been described as *'the main routes and the straight path, the sign-posts for the people, the light houses in the land, the guides to the way of Allah, the preachers of His message and the proclaimers of what He likes'*.³

Hence the question is not that to seek the intercession of the Imams, to invoke them or to expect them to perform supernatural deeds is polytheistic. The real question is something else. First we should be certain whether or not the Prophets and the Imams have actually gained such a proximity to Allah that they have been blessed with supernatural powers and qualities. The Holy Qur'an indicates that Allah has favoured some people with such a position.

Another question is whether the people who seek the intercession of the Imams and the saints, visit their tombs and make supplication to them, have or have not from monotheistic point of view a correct understanding of what they do. Do they have the idea of 'to Him', in their mind, when they go to the shrines? Or are they oblivious of Him and think that the Imam or the saint whose shrine they visit is himself the goal. There is no doubt that most of the people instinctively have Allah in their mind. Some people, may be totally devoid of the monotheistic view. They should be reminded of it. Anyhow, there is no reason why visiting the shrines should be declared polytheistic.

The third point is that it is a form of polytheism to glorify and praise any being other than Allah in a manner that is worthy of the absolutely perfect and self-existing being. Allah alone is far above every defect and deficiency. It is He alone to Him all praise is due. He alone is All-powerful. To ascribe such attributes by means of words or action to anyone other than Allah is polytheistic. We have already discussed earlier what actions constitute worship and adoration.

Fidelity And Earnestness

The cognition of Allah automatically influences the entire personality, spirit, morals and the conduct of man. This influence is proportional to the degree of his faith. The stronger the faith of a man the more intense the influence of the cognition of Allah on him.

The effect of the cognition of Allah on man has many degrees and stages, and according to their variation human perfection and man's proximity to Allah varies. These degrees are called the degrees of fidelity and earnestness.

As stated earlier, when we turn to Allah and worship Him, we show that He alone deserves obedience

and we absolutely submit ourselves to Him. This kind of worship and the expression of total submission is not permissible in respect of anyone except Allah. As for the question how far we are earnest in our total submission to Allah and non-submission to any other being, which depends on our faith. Evidently all are not alike from the viewpoint of fidelity and earnestness.

Some people make such a progress that inwardly and outwardly they are controlled only by the commandments of Allah. No personal desires can swerve them this side or that side, nor can any human being bring them under his absolute control. They allow their desires to operate only in accordance with the pleasure of Allah. Obviously to seek the pleasure of Allah is the only way to attain perfection. Such people obey their parents, their teachers etc. for the sake of Allah and only within the limits allowed by Him. Some go even a step further. Their sole love is Allah. They love His creatures for being His signs and mementos. A few go even further from this stage also. They do not see anything except Him and regard everything else as His manifestation. They find Him in every thing.

Imam Ali says: *"I have never seen anything, but saw Allah before it or along with it"*

If a worshipper tries to give a concrete shape in his life to what he communicates to his Allah in the course of his worship, he attains perfection and reaches the stage of fidelity.

For a worshipper his worship is a real contract by the conditions of which he has to abide in his life. This contract has two main conditions. The first is freedom from the obedience of every one and every thing else including his own desires, and the second is a complete submission to the commandments of Allah and their unqualified acceptance.

For a worshipper the correct way of worship is the basis of his education and spiritual development. It is a systematic instruction in liberal-mindedness, self-sacrifice, love of Allah, love of humanity, association with the right-thinking people, virtuousness and service to mankind.

It is clear from what we have said that Islamic monotheism does not accept any motive other than gaining the pleasure of Allah. The evolutionary reality of man and the world is "to Him". Anything which is not oriented to Him is false and opposed to the natural evolutionary course. From Islamic point of view whatever a man does, whether he does it for himself or for others, is for the sake of Allah. It is wrong to say that 'for the sake of Allah' is identical with 'for the sake of humanity' and that to do a thing for the sake of Allah minus humanity is nothing but mysticism and pedagogism.

From the viewpoint of Islam the only way is that of Allah and the only objective one should aim at is to please Him. Anyhow, the way of Allah passes through the people.

To do a thing for oneself is egoism, to do a thing for the people is idolatry, and to do a thing for Allah and the people both is polytheism and dualism.

The true monotheism is to serve oneself and others for the sake of Allah. According to Islam the

monotheistic way is to begin things in the Name of Allah, not in the name of the people or jointly in the Name of Allah and the people both.

An interesting point may be derived from the Surah al-Ikhlās of the Holy Qur'an. The point is that there is a difference in being *mukhlis*, which is to do things purely for Allah, and being *mukhlas*, which is to be pure in oneself.

Unity And Singleness Of The World

Does the entire universe that is the temporal and spatial creations of Allah really form one unit? Does the oneness of Allah, which is the unity of His essence, the unity of His attributes and the unity of His work, necessarily require that His creation also should have some sort of unity. If the universe is a well-knit and coherent unit, what is the nature of its coherence? Is it organic in the sense that the various parts of the universe stand in the same relation to the whole of it as the various limbs to a body, or is it mechanical and the various parts of the universe are like the various parts of a machine?

We have discussed the nature of the unity of the world in our book, Principles of Philosophy. In another book of ours, named Divine Justice we have stated that nature is an indivisible whole, the non-existence of a part of it being tantamount to the non-existence of the whole of it, and that the annihilation of the so-called evils will amount to the annihilation of the entire nature.

The modern philosophers, especially the great German philosopher Hegel has supported the view that the relation between nature and its different parts is that of a body and its limbs. Anyhow, the acceptance of the arguments he has put forward depends on the acceptance of all the principles of his philosophy. The supporters of dialectic materialism have followed him in holding this view. They defend it vehemently under the principles of reciprocal effect and interdependence of contradictories, and claim that in nature the relation between a part and the whole is organic, but when they put forward their arguments, they can prove only mechanical relationship. The fact is that on the basis of materialistic philosophy, it is not possible to prove that the world as a whole is like a body, and the relation of its parts to the whole is that of the limbs to a body. Only the Divine philosophers who have from the time immemorial held that the world is the macro-man and man is the microcosm, have visualized this relationship correctly. Among the Muslim philosophers *Ikhwanus Safa* (the Brethren of Purity) have laid much stress on it. Even more than the philosophers the Muslim mystics look at the universe as one unit. According to their view the whole cosmo is one single manifestation of the Divine Reality.

The gnostics call all that is besides Allah "sacred overflow" and talking in similitudes say that it is like a cone, the pointed head of which having contact with Allah is simply imperceptible and the base of which is immensely extensive and outstretched.

At present we do not propose to deal with any of these statements of the philosophers and the Muslim gnostics, and again take up the point we were discussing earlier. As we said, the reality of the world is

'from Him' and 'to Him'. It is an established fact that the world is not merely a moving and a flux reality, but is in itself an embodiment of movement and fluxion. This is a fact which Islamic philosophy alone has been able to prove. In the course of the study of motion it has also been established that the unity of the beginning, the unity of the end and the unity of the course confers a sort of unity on the movements. Therefore, in view of the fact that the universe has one beginning, one end and one evolutionary course, it is obvious that it is a sort of one single unit.

Visible And Invisible

According to the Islamic conception of the cosmos, the world is an aggregate of the visible and the invisible things. This conception divides the universe into the world of the visible and that of the invisible. The Holy Qur'an itself has repeatedly mentioned the visible and the invisible, especially the invisible. To believe in the invisible is an article of faith in Islam. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Those who believe in the unseen." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:2).

"With Him are the keys of all that is hidden. None but He knows them." (Surah al-An'am, 6:59).

There are two kinds of the invisible or the hidden: the relatively hidden and the absolutely hidden. The relatively hidden is that thing which a person cannot perceive by means of his senses because it is at a long distance from him. For example, for a person who is in Tehran, Tehran is visible and Isfahan is invisible. But for him who is in Isfahan, Isfahan is visible and Tehran is invisible.

In the Holy Qur'an at several places the word '*ghayb*' (invisible or hidden) has been used in this very relative sense. The Holy Qur'an says:

"These hidden (unknown) events which We have revealed to you, were neither known to you nor to your people so far." (Surah Hud, 11:49).

Evidently the events of the people of the past are 'hidden' as far as the present day people are concerned, though they were 'visible' for those who witnessed them.

At another place the same word '*ghayb*' has been applied by the Holy Qur'an to the realities which are absolutely invisible. There is a difference between the realities which are perceptible through the external senses, but are not visible on account of great distance, and the realities which are imperceptible and invisible because they are not corporeal and finite. Evidently when the Holy Qur'an says that the faithful believe in what is invisible, it does not mean what is relatively invisible, for everybody, irrespective of his being faithful or infidel believes in that. Again when it says that with Allah alone are the keys of all that is hidden, it means all that is absolutely hidden, for the meaning of the verse does not fit in with what is relatively hidden. The same is the case with those verses in which the visible and the invisible have been mentioned together. For example, the Holy Qur'an says:

"He is the knower of the visible and the invisible; and He is the Beneficent, the Merciful." (Surah al-Hashr, 59:22).

This verse also refers to the absolutely invisible and not to the relatively invisible.

How are these two worlds, the visible and the invisible related to each other? Has the visible world any boundary line beyond which the invisible world is situated? For example, is it that from the earth to the sky there is the visible world and beyond that there is the invisible world? Obviously such a conception is vulgar. Should we suppose that there is a physical boundary line which separates the two worlds, which would mean that both the worlds are physical and material.

The relation between the visible and the invisible cannot be explained in material terms. At the most what we can say to make their relationship understandable is that they stand in almost the same relation as a main body and a branch of it or a body and its shadow. In other words this world is a reflection of another world. The Holy Qur'an indicates that whatever there is in this world is a 'lowered form' of the things existing in another world. What has been called 'keys' in the verse quoted above, has been named 'stores' in another verse. The Holy Qur'an says:

"There is not a thing but with Us are the stories thereof; but We do not send it down except in an appointed measure." (Surah al-Hijr, 15:21).

It is on this basis that the Holy Qur'an regards everything, even stones and iron, as having been sent down.

"We send down iron." (Surah al-Hadid, 57:25).

This does not mean that all things including iron have been shifted from a higher place to a lower place. In fact, whatever there is in the world, has its 'root' and its 'essence' in another world, the world of the invisible and whatever there is in that world, has its 'shadow' and a 'lowered form' of it in this world.

The Holy Qur'an makes it obligatory to have faith in the unseen. The same point is described in another way, when faith in the angels, the Prophethood and the revelation is enjoined. The Holy Qur'an says:

"The Messenger believes in that which has been revealed to him by his Lord, and so do the believers. They all believe in Allah, His angels, His Books and His Messengers." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:285).

"He who disbelieves in Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers and the Last Day, certainly has gone far astray." (Surah an-Nisa, 4:136).

In these two verses the Books of Allah has been mentioned separately. Had they signified the Scriptures revealed to the Prophets, the mention of the Messengers would have been enough. That is an indication that here the books signify some different kind of realities. The Holy Qur'an itself has referred to some

hidden truths and given them the name of 'an explicit book' 'a protected tablet', 'the mother book', 'a written book' and 'a hidden book'. A faith in this sort of metaphysical books is a part of Islamic creed.

The Prophets have come basically to enable mankind to have, as far as possible, a general view of the entire creational system. The creation is not limited to the perceptible and palpable things which come under the purview of the experimental sciences. The Prophets want to raise the outlook of man from what is perceptible to what is understandable, from what is visible to what is invisible and from what is finite to what is infinite.

Unfortunately, the wave of the materialistic and limited thinking which has risen from the West has spread to such an extent that a section of the people insists to bring down the vast and high Islamic conception of the world to the level of the perceptible and material things.

This World And The Next World

Another basic principle of the Islamic conception of the cosmos is the division of the world into the present and the next. What we said earlier concerning the visible and the invisible pertained to a world preceding this world – a world giving form to this world. Though from one angle the next world is the invisible world and the present world is visible, yet in view of the fact that the next world is subsequent to this world and it is a world to which man returns, it deserves to be dealt with separately. The invisible world is that from where we have come and the next world is that to which we shall go. That is what Imam Ali meant when he said: *"May Allah bless him who knows from where he has come, where he is and where he will go"*.

Imam Ali did not say: May Allah bless him who knows from what he has come, in what he is and to what he will go. Had he said so, we would have taken that to mean that we have been created from dust, we will go into dust and we will be raised again from dust. In that case he would have referred to the following Qur'anic verse which says:

"From it (the earth) We created you, to it We will return you and from it We will bring you forth once again." (Surah Ta Ha, 20:55).

What Imam Ali has said here refers to some other verses of the Holy Qur'an and represents a higher conception. He meant "the world from where we have come, the world in which we are at present and the world to which we shall go".

From the viewpoint of the Islamic conception of the world, like the visible and the invisible, the present and the next world also have an absolute, not a relative sense. What is relative is the deeds which are performed. If something is done to satisfy one's own desire, it is a worldly act. In many cases if the same thing is done for the sake of Allah and to gain His pleasure, it becomes the next worldly act. We are going to discuss this world and the next in detail later under the heading 'Eternal Life'.

[1.](#) See Surah al-A'araf:

وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ أَتَدْرُ مُوسَى وَقَوْمَهُ لِيُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَيَذَرَكَ وَإِلَهُنَّكَ ۗ قَالَ سَنَقْتِلُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَنَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّا فَوْقَهُمْ قَاهِرُونَ

And the chiefs of Fir'awn's people said: Do you leave Musa and his people to make mischief in the land and to forsake you and your gods? He said: We will slay their sons and spare their women, and surely we are masters over them. (7:127).

[2.](#) Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 192.

[3.](#) Ziyarat Jamiah.

Chapter 6: Profound Wisdom And Divine Justice

In connection with the Divine conception of the world several questions pertaining to the relation between Allah and the world, such as the transience and the eternity of the world, origin of the existing things and similar other questions are discussed in the science of divinity.

Anyhow, it is in the fitness of things that it may be mentioned here that the questions of profound wisdom of Allah and Divine justice are closely related to each other.

With reference to the question of profound Divine justice, it may be said that the existing system of the world is the most wise and judicious system. It is not only based on knowledge, consciousness and will but is also the healthiest and the best possible system. No better system is possible. The existing world is the most perfect.

Here a pertinent question arises. We observe that there are many phenomena of the world which may be described as defective, vicious, ugly or useless. Divine wisdom demands that perfectness instead of defectiveness, virtue instead of vice, beauty instead of ugliness and usefulness instead of futility should have prevailed. Genitive defects and malformations in the body of man and animals, natural calamities and misfortunes and repulsive and obnoxious scenes, all appear to be contrary to Divine wisdom. A system can be called just only if therein pain, distress and undue discrimination are not found and calamities and misfortunes do not exist. Annihilation and destruction should have no place in a just system, for it is unjust to debar a being from the enjoyment of perfect conditions after he has been brought into existence.

If the present system of the world is just, then why do all these discriminations and deprivations exist? Why is it that one is white and another is black; one is ugly and another is beautiful; one is healthy and another is sick? Why has one been created a man and another a sheep, a scorpion or an earthworm? Why has one been created a devil and another an angel? Why have all not been created alike or in some other way different from what they are? For example, why has the one who is white, handsome or healthy not been created black, ugly or sick? These and similar other questions about the world appear

to be puzzling. The monotheistic conception which considers the world to be a work of Allah, the wise and the absolutely just, must answer these questions.

In view of the fact that a detailed answer to these questions require a detailed and voluminous book and furthermore, we have dealt with this subject in our book, Divine Justice of which several editions have appeared, here we content ourselves with mentioning some basic principles, the knowledge of which should facilitate the solution of this problem. After getting acquainted with these principles the reader will be able to draw his own conclusion.

A) Principle Of The Self-Existence And Perfection Of Allah

As Allah is absolutely self-existing and does not lack any excellence or ability, He does not do anything to achieve any object of His own or to make up any deficiency in Himself. His wisdom does not mean that he chooses the best goals and employs the best means to secure them. This sense of wisdom applies to man only and not to Allah. His wisdom means that He works to enable the existing things to reach the goal of their existence. He brings the non-existing things into existence and leads them to their inherent perfection.

The questions and objections raised in this respect are partly due to the comparison of Allah to man. A person who questions as to the wisdom and the use of a particular creation, presumes that Allah like man does a thing to achieve some object and goal of His own. Most of the queries of the questioner would have automatically been answered if he had kept in mind from the beginning that what Allah does no doubt has some purpose, but Allah Himself has no aim or purpose of His own. The purpose of every creation is inherent in its own nature, to which Allah leads it.

B) Principle Of Sequence

Existence is a Divine favour that pervades the entire universe. It has a special order. All existing things stand in an inexorable relation of precedence and posteriority and cause and effect to each other. No existing thing can move from its appointed position, nor can it occupy the place of something else. Existing things have varied grades of existence, and vastly differ from each other from the point of view of defectiveness and perfection and strength and weakness. This variation is an essential part of the grading of existence. It is no discrimination and cannot be considered to be contrary to justice or wisdom. Discrimination presupposes the existence of two beings of equal potentialities on one of which a favour is bestowed and from the other it is withheld. But where the disparity is due to any inherent deficiency, the question of discrimination does not arise.

C) Principle Of Generality

There is another misunderstanding which is the result of man's comparing Allah with himself. A man

takes a decision at a particular time, at a particular place and under particular circumstances. Suppose a man decides to build a house. In order to build it he joins together by artificial means a certain amount of bricks, mortar, cement and steel, which have no inherent link with each other. The final result is the construction of a house.

Does Allah also accomplish His work in the same way? Does His creation lie in the combining and joining together of several things, having no connection with each other?

The creation of such artificial ties and bonds is the work of a created being like man, who himself is a part of the world system and can utilize within a limited scope only the forces and the qualities of the existing things. Man does not create a thing. He only produces a motion in an already existing thing.

Even the motion produced by him is forced and not natural. In contrast, Allah is the Creator of all things and all their forces and qualities.

Man makes use of fire and electric which already exist. He makes such an arrangement that he may use them when required, and in order to save himself from their harmful effects, may put them off when not required. In contrast, Allah is the Creator of fire, electricity and all their effects and qualities. Their very existence means that they should generate heat and motion and should burn. Allah has not created them for any particular person or for any particular occasion. Fire heats the hut of a poor person, but it also burns his clothes if they fall in it, because Allah has created it with the property of burning. If we look at fire in the context of the whole system of the world, we are bound to find it useful and necessary. It is immaterial whether in the case of any particular person or in a particular instance, it is beneficial or not.

In other words, in the case of Divine wisdom the ultimate object and purpose relates to the doing, not to the doer. Allah is wise in the sense that He has created the best system to enable the existing things to achieve objects for which they have been created. His wisdom does not mean that He has arranged the best means to make up His own deficiency, to give a practical shape to His potential ability or to achieve His own evolutionary objects. Further, we must remember that the Divine acts aim at securing general and not particular purposes. Fire has been created to burn in general. It has not been created to burn any particular thing on any particular occasion. Hence from the viewpoint of Divine wisdom it is immaterial whether it is beneficial or harmful in any individual case.

(iv) For the materialization of a reality it is not enough that Allah is All-Powerful and Beneficent. In order to come into being the thing concerned must have the capacity of receiving His favour. In many cases the incapacity of some of the existing things is the cause of their being deprived of some advantages and good points. From the viewpoint of the general system and its connection with the Self-existing Being, the secret of the appearance of certain defects like ignorance and disabilities lies in the incompetence of those having such defects.

(v) As Allah is necessarily existing in regard to His essence, so He is in regard to all His attributes. Hence it is impossible that a thing be fit for existence and the conferment of existence on it be withheld

by Him.

(vi) The evils and vices either mean the non-existence of a quality, as the case is with ignorance, disability and poverty, or they are bad because they cause destruction, as is the case with earthquakes, disease-causing germs, floods, hailstorms etc. The things which cause destruction, their mischief is relative and only in reference to other things. Anything bad is not bad in itself, but it is bad for something else. The true existence of everything is its own existence. Its relative existence is only conceptual and derivative, though an integral part of its real existence.

(vii) Good and bad are not the qualities independent of each other. The evil is an integral quality of the good. The evils and vices which indicate the non-existence of a quality represent the unfitness of a thing potentially fit. As soon as it becomes practically fit, Divine favour to it is inevitable. As for the evils—which do not constitute negative qualities, their root lies invariably in the good.

(viii) There exists no pure and unadulterated evil. Non-existence is a prelude to existence and perfection. Evils are a stage of evolution. It is true that every dark cloud has a silver lining.

(ix) Laws and Norms: This world is governed by a causation system, and as has been pointed out earlier, this system is based on universal laws and norms. The Holy Qur'an expressly confirms this fact.

(x) The world besides having an unexceptionable system, is in itself one indivisible unit and constitutes one single body. Hence evils are not separable from all that is good. The evils and nonexistences not only cannot be separated from virtues and existences, but they also form one single 'manifestation'.

On the basis of these ten principles, there are only two possibilities. Either the world should exist with its peculiar system or should not exist at all. It is not possible that the world should be existing, but it should not be having its peculiar system or it should be having some other system, in which, for example, the causes may take the place of the effects and the effects may take the place of the causes. Therefore what is possible from the viewpoint of profound Divine wisdom is that either the world should exist with its entire present system or nothing should exist at all. Evidently wisdom demands that existence should have preference over non-existence.

As the things cannot exist except with all their essential and inseparable qualities, it is unimaginable to think that virtues can be separated from evils or that non-existence can be separated from existence. From this point of view also Divine wisdom can either demand the existence of evils and virtues simultaneously or their non-existence altogether. It cannot require the existence of virtues and the non-existence of evils.

Also what is possible to exist is the entire world in the form of one unit. The existence of one part of it and the nonexistence of another part of it is not feasible. Therefore from the viewpoint of Divine wisdom the question which may be considered is the existence or the non-existence of the whole of it, not of any part of it.

The above principles, if digested well, are enough to remove all doubts and difficulties concerning Divine wisdom and Divine justice. We again refer our readers to our book, Divine Justice and seek their indulgence for finding it necessary to raise here the questions which are of a level higher than that of this book.

In the end, in view of the fact that the question of Divine justice has a special history and is considered by the Shiah to be one of the articles of their faith, it will not be improper to touch briefly on its history also.

History Of The Principle Of Justice In Islamic Culture

The Shiah believe the doctrine of justice to be an article of their faith. In the preface of the Divine Justice, we have stated that the doctrine of justice has two aspects: Divine Justice and Human Justice. Divine Justice is again divided into two parts: (i) Creational and (ii) Legislative Human Justice.

Legislative Human Justice also has two phases: (i) Individual justice and (ii) Social Justice.

The justice which is considered to be the characteristic of the Shi'ah creed and is believed by the Shi'ah to be an article of their faith is Divine justice.

It is this justice which is an integral part of the Islamic conception of the world.

Divine justice means that Allah does no injustice and in both of His creational and law-making systems acts according to what is right and fair. The reason why the principle of justice became an article of faith among the Shi'ah was that a section of the Muslims denied it in a way that was totally contrary to human freedom. They denied the working of the principle of causation in the world system as well as human affairs, and maintained that Divine destiny operated direct and not through the media of cause and effect. According to them, fire did not burn. It was Allah who burnt it. Similarly a magnet had no role in attracting iron towards it. It was Allah who attracted iron to it. Man did not perform good or bad deeds. It was Allah who accomplished them direct through the agency of human beings.

Here an important question arises: If the system of causation did not exist and man had no power of choice, why should an individual be recompensed for evil or good done by him? Why does Allah reward some people and send them to Paradise and why does He punish some others and despatches them to Hell, when He Himself performs all good and bad deeds? If the human beings have no freedom and no choice of their own, it is unjust and contrary to the indisputable principle of Divine justice to punish them for the deeds over which they have no control.

Most of the Shi'ah and a section of the Sunnis, known as the Mu'tazilah reject the theory of human compulsion and direct operation of Divine destiny in the world. They consider this view to be contrary to the principle of justice, and besides advancing arguments based on reason quote from the Holy Qur'an and the hadith in support of what they maintain. That is why they have come to be known as *'Adliyah*,

which is the supporters of the justice.

From the above it is evident that notwithstanding the fact that the principle of justice is a Divine principle and is related to one of the attributes of Allah, it is also a human principle, because it equally concerns human freedom and power of choice. Therefore a belief in the principle of justice on the part of the Shiah and the Mutazilah means a belief in human freedom, human responsibility and the constructive role of man.

The question which often disturbs the minds in connection with Divine justice, especially during modern times, concerns certain cases of social inequality.

It is asked how is it that some individuals are ugly, while some others are handsome; some are healthy while some others have poor health; some are well-off and influential, while some others are poor and of little consequence?

Is this inequality not contrary to the principle of Divine justice? Does not Divine justice demand that all individuals should be equal in regard to wealth, duration of life, number of children, social position, fame and popularity, and there should be no disparity among them in regard to these things? Can the disparity in respect of these things be explained by any means other than believing in Divine destiny?

The root of this question lies in not paying attention to the way the Divine destiny operates. It appears that the questioner thinks that Divine destiny works direct and not through the medium of causes, and that health, beauty, power, position, popularity and other bounties of Allah are distributed to the people at their doorsteps by a hidden hand direct from the Divine treasures.

Enough attention has not been paid to the fact that no bounties, whether material or spiritual, are distributed direct. The Divine destiny has set up a system and appointed a number of laws and norms. Whosoever wants something he should seek it through that system and according to those laws.

Another cause of misunderstanding is that due attention is not paid to the position of man as a responsible being who makes struggle to improve the condition of his life, combats the natural factors and strives against social evils and human tyranny.

If there exist inequalities in human society and if there are some who have everything at their disposal and there are others whose lot is only to struggle for their subsistence every moment, the responsibility for this situation does not lie with Divine destiny. Man, who is free is himself responsible for the inequity.

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