

Islam And The Environment

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Abdullah Jawadi Amuli

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In this text Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli explains in detail the concept of living in a society and how we can play a vital role in uplifting our environment in the light of the Qur'an and Ahadith.

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Publishers' Preface

All-praise be to God, Who ordered the Supernal and the Created worlds in the best manner manifesting them in the most beautiful semblance and ordaining their relationship to correspond to the inner and the outer.

All that which is given to beauty and harmony in this natural world, possesses in the supernal world—the world of divine command and ordinance a superior splendor and perfection. The visible realm that of divinely beautiful and wholesome nature, is nothing but the reflection of the invisible realm; in such case, material icons and natural talismans [that compose the visible realm] are inspired by the supernal lights and the divine archetypes of the invisible world.

The travellers to the immaterial realm and the followers of the esoteric way profess great love for even the pebbles and dust of this world, as they envision with the eye of their hearts the ecstasy and esprit of the celestial realm here in this terrestrial one.

My pleasance with the world is, 'cause the world is His Pleasance.

The whole universe I love, as is *from* Him the world Whole. [1](#)

The man who honors the divine covenant, unlike the rebel who dishonors it, feels an affinity for the natural world. (Just as the soul is attached to and likes its body, it sees nature to be an extension of its body, such that nature's health, vivacity, and "pleasance" is tantamount to the vivacity and pleasure of the soul and spirit.)

Such a man sees himself as being responsible for the health of the environment. In the same way that he makes efforts for the health of his body and is troubled by any illness that afflicts it, similarly he becomes perturbed by injuries sustained by the environment and the consequent loss of its vitality and proceeds to take serious steps towards a remedy.

Undoubtedly, the noble man who holds the station of "divine vicegerency," is also the protector of all beauties and beatitudes as result from God's grace and majesty. In this divine view, man is beholden to make his environment inhabitable, wholesome, and full of vitality. Naturally then, it is the divine sages—as the professors of God's word and the establishers of His will—who are foremost and are the pioneers in the movement aiming at the purification of the environment, its cultivation, and its upliftment.

From the above it follows that environmental sciences belong more rightfully to the domain of metaphysics and the humanities, rather than the natural or experimental sciences. Environmental concerns are existentially coupled with the human condition itself, rising – as it were from man's origins, and hence to take an exclusively material or natural sciences approach towards them is to limit them and to ignore the noble human potentialities that lie therein.

As it is only religion that speaks to man as a whole in all his various aspects and existential potentialities the fact stands that all world religions contain apposite counsels and sublime teachings concerning the environment.

Consequently, the science of the environment and its protection is paramountly a human and religious science. Being so, all of the criteria that apply to the divine and Islamic sciences also apply to this particular religious science, including such things as the efficient cause and the final cause. This fact allows for a more comprehensive and a deeper appraisal of environmental issues.

In man's dealings with his environment – in his actions and their reactions – it must constantly be borne in mind that every human act has a direct impact on the environment, holding profound implications for its health or its sickness. The good acts of man in nature are the source of its growth and perfection, whereas the ugly behavior of man leads to the decline and destruction of the natural world.

Contemporary man, while he professes to love peace and yearns for a life of peaceful coexistence with all and sundry, cannot achieve anything of the sort without first coming to see things in this way. It is only after he begins to see reality in its totality and the comprehensive effects of human actions in that same connected whole that he can bring about a world that is truly at peace and full of wonder and pleasure.

International organizations which have commissions for the environment, human rights, etc, are in a situation that can be best described as paradoxical. This is because such global corporations are the creations of the world's superpowers and have as their implicit mandate the preservation and proliferation of those same nefarious powers.

It is clear that any hegemonic power which, by definition, sees its subsistence to lie in the defeat through

war and rivalry of other powers, cannot ultimately entertain the "luxury" of environmental concerns for too long.

On the contrary, when such environmental issues stand in the way of its hegemonic aims, the power in question does not hesitate to wreak havoc in nature polluting and destroying its pristine beauty in the process.

It is in this sense that it can be said that the true religion and the truly religious associations or individuals are precisely those who make noble efforts towards the protection of the environment and its real wholesomeness.

The present book has as its sources other written works and oral traditions which can be considered the summit of human learning and the epitome of divine teaching. It addresses the all-important subject of the environment from various human and religious perspectives. On the one hand it enters into discussions on the ontological basis of environmental sciences, while on the other hand it delves into the modalities of man's interaction and relationship with his surroundings.

The book is a treasury of the statements, speeches, and writings of Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli concerning the environment and its preservation. Other related topics, also from the Ayatullah, have also been added to complement and complete the discussion at hand. The resulting collection is an ordered and scholarly exposition on the subject of the environment and as such is a thought-provoking addition to the contemporary debate on the issue.

The work at hand is divided into an Introduction and five chapters. The Introduction speaks of beauty and its recognition, and posits the world as the creation of God "that was good" to be the manifestation of God the Beautiful. Chapter one names the cultivation, elevation, and "development" of the earth to be a part of the mandate of God's vicegerent.

Chapter two turns to the scientific appraisal of the environment and contends that beyond this natural-science and empirical approach lies a more fundamental one that gives value to man and counts environmental sciences to be a part of the humanities and the religious sciences.

Chapter three relates the good and bad actions of man to natural events and discusses such issues as the existence of evil, the best ordering of the universe, and the mutual relationship of man and nature.

Chapter four contends that one of the most influential factors in the preservation of the environment is proper human conduct and good work; it goes on to enumerate some of the criteria for the same, things such as: specialized knowledge, confidence, perseverance, moral uprightness, ingenuity, creativity, and purposefulness. The final and fifth chapter of the book also deals with the good and appropriate conduct of man in the preservation of the environment.

It is hoped that this valuable book, which looks at the issue of the environment in what will be considered

a "novel" way, will not only have played its part in changing popular culture for the betterment of the environment, but will have shed light on the metaphysical aspects of the issue such as are fundamental to the subject.

This metaphysical expose of sorts can certainly be a source of guidance for the concerned international organizations who deal with environmental concerns, and also the world at large giving them the necessary clarity, understanding, and correct belief regarding the issues at hand.

For it is on the one hand futile to "attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity", and on the other, it is paradoxical to envision a better humanity without taking into account man's Creator and His will which must be done "on earth as it is in heaven".

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[1.](#) Kulliyat Sa 'di, Ghazal 10.

Introduction

A wholesome environment is, on the one hand, a principal human right and, on the other, a human obligation. Thus, it is of importance to define the environment, to underscore the necessity of maintaining its health, to study the ways by which a healthy environment can be achieved, and, finally, to examine the genuine purposes of striving for such an environment all of which must be sought from the foundational humanistic disciplines and by tapping into human potentialities.

This requires a careful study of the orderly constitution of the human being and the cosmos and the interaction among human beings and their relation to the cosmos, so as to bring to light the necessity of striving for and maintaining a wholesome environment.

[The Beauty Of Creation As Manifest In The Human Being And The Cosmos](#)

The Noble Qur'an the most sacred religious scripture portrays creation as a screen of silk tapestry on which God's beauty and magnificence are displayed; the arrangement of the order of creation is seen as a source of peace for the human being; the expanse of the earth and the firmament is revered for its beauty. God created the world in the most beautiful fashion possible:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ

[God] made excellent all that which He created. (32:7).

He likewise created the human being in the most excellent condition:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

Verily We created the human being in the most excellent constitution. (95:4)¹.

All creatures are by nature excellent. The human being, however, possesses additional excellence by virtue of the potential in him to attain to the status of God's viceroyalty. It is this distinctive quality that other creatures lack. It is in this light that the Qur'an, after enumerating the phases of human creation, proclaims,

فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ

So blessed is God, the best of creators. (23: 14).

If there were another creature that exceeded the human being in excellence, this praise would have been said in reference to it. But since ultimate excellence lies in the fusion of intellectual perfection and sensuous beauty, no other creature can contend with the human being.

The excellence and beauty of creation consists in its orderliness. Every creature that comes into being possesses internal harmony, a specific end, a specific path, and a specific guide. Thus, its efficient causality is grounded on knowledge; its final causality on wisdom; its internal arrangement on intelligence. The Noble Qur'an asserts,

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

Our Lord is He Who gave everything its creation and then guided it. (20:50).

That is, our Lord molded the constitution of every creature in proportion to its inherent capacity and purpose and then set it on the Right Path, guiding it to its appropriate end.

This blessed trio—efficient causality, final causality, internal harmony guarantees the beauty in everything so long as the scientific and empiric principles observed conform to it. The lack of this conformity damages a creature's constitution, hindering its progress toward its genuine end and depriving other creatures of its fruits.

Such hindrance and deprivation distort the beautiful face of creation, and any distortion of creation detrimental to the health and safety of humankind is the work of Satan. For, he works his stealthy devilry within the framework of existential elements, one of which is the purposive constitution of the human being or any creature, for that matter:

وَمَنْ يَتَّخِذِ الشَّيْطَانَ وَلِيًّا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا مُّبِينًا

and I (Satan) will prompt them (humankind) to alter God's creation. (4: 119).

Those deceived by Satan—who through enticements, false embellishments, and diminishing the intelligence leads human beings astray and incites them to rebel have, with the excuse of safeguarding industry, spoiled the beauty in nature's norm by introducing deviations, deranging the graceful system of create on with chaos and pollution. The Quran's message to those who thus fail to appreciate the natural environment in which they dwell is,

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of people's hands that He may make them taste a portion of what they have done, so that they may come back. (30:41).

The heavenly instructions of the Qur'an affirm that the beautiful tableau of creation has been entrusted to us by God. As such, the industries are duty bound to direct their efforts at securing the felicity and health of all humanity, even as they must honor the natural rights of all creatures, never acquiescing in the destruction of the progeny of humankind or the fruits of the earth. The Qur'an denounces those who harm humankind socially, economically, or politically:

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ

And should the [disbeliever] yield authority, he would try to cause corruption in the land and to ruin the crop and the [human] stock, and God does not like corruption. (2:205).

A person's value is contingent on his deeds; when corruption is despised, one who corrupts is despised as well.

The Human Being's Spiritual Nobility And Divine Viceroyalty

The beauty of the human being lies in besides the element of harmonious constitution, which is true of all creatures—his nobility (kiramah). The heavenly scriptures, particularly the Qur'an, glorify the human being's existence as a noble creature. In this regard the Qur'an says,

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

Certainly We have acknowledged the nobility² of the children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference. (17:70).

The human being's nobility is, in turn, due to his status as God's viceroy; the representative of a noble authority must be noble. This nobility is the exclusive honor that the human being alone enjoys. It is on account of this distinction that the following well-known hadith addresses the human being:

Whosoever comprehends his self certainly comprehends his Lord.³

Knowledge of the human soul as God's viceroy—which is an existential, not contractual, status—will certainly result in knowing God. If the latter does not come about, it is an indication that an adequate knowledge of the human soul has not been realized.

It is true, of course, that we may come to realize the existence of God or one of His attributes by reflecting on other creatures in so far as they are contingent in their essence⁴ or in their existence⁵, or in so far as they are temporal, moving, orderly, etc. But this is different from knowing God immediately, which can be acquired only by way of self-knowledge.

Thus, the human being's nobility rests on his status as the divine viceroy. To be a proper viceroy is to follow the king in all practical and theoretic issues: to perceive as he perceives and to will as he wills. To claim divine vicereignty without conforming in perception and will to God is, in essence, to usurp that office while really obeying another authority

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ

Have you seen him who takes his ego to be his god. (45:23).

Such an egoistic and hedonistic individual cannot attain to the lofty status of divine vicereignty and consequently remains bereft of the nobility it confers.

¹. In this regard see also 40:64 and 64:3.

². Karamna in the Arabic of the verse is commonly, and correctly, translated into English as "honored." I, however, changed that to "acknowledge the nobility" so as to underline the meaning of kiramah or nobility. [Tr.]

³. Ghurar al-Hikam vol. 5, p. 194.

⁴. This is based on the Peripatetic school of Islamic philosophy, which upholds the objectivity of essence. [Tr.]

⁵. This is based on the Sadrian metaphysical system, which postulates the objectivity of existence. [Tr.]

Chapter 1: A Flourishing Earth And An Ideal State

God adorned the well-proportioned constitution of the human being with the attire of divine viceroyalty

قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ

Indeed I (God) am going to set a viceroy on the earth (2:30).

an attire whose warp and woof are knowledge of the Perfect Names of God and building the province of viceroyalty. Thus, divine viceroyalty entails two aspects: theoretical and practical. In expressing the theoretical aspect, the Qur'an says,

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا

And [God] taught Adam the Names, all of them. (2:31).

And in reference to the practical aspect, which involves developing the earth as the province of viceroyalty and cleansing it from the pernicious influences of demons, the Qur'an states,

هُوَ أَنشَأَكُم مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاسْتَغْفِرُوا لَهُ ثُمَّ تَوْبُوا إِلَيْهِ

[God] brought you forth from the earth and delegated to you its development¹, so beseech His forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently. (11:61).

It was God (immaculate is He) who originated and generated the human being from the earth. The human being's creation is purposeful, and he did not come about haphazardly. God made the human being His viceroy; a viceroy is obliged to conduct the affairs of the authority whom he represents.

In order to prepare the appropriate environment for human habitation, God (immaculate is He), on the one hand, furnished the raw material in nature and, on the other hand, endowed the human being with intelligence, talent, technology, and innovation, so as to enable him to benefit from the raw material in the best manner possible.

Furthermore, He made the intellect the inner guide and Revelation the external guide that he may be aware of the raw material and instructed in how to use it to promote the development of the earth and the wholesomeness of the environment. Thus, He ordered the human being to develop the earth and to

make it a suitable environment for his habitation.

The important question is, who can be successful in this task?
Regarding the building of religious sanctuaries, the Qur'an says,

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ

Indeed, only those who believe in God and the Last Day...shall construct God's mosques. (9: 18).

Even as the building of religious sanctuaries including the Ka'bah (which is the heart of all religious sanctuaries and the center around which Muslims circumambulate) and all other mosques is an honor that can be achieved only by the believers, so too the development of the earth can be accomplished only by them. Nonbelieving rulers, despotic heads of state lead societies to corruption.

War and aggression afflict East and West equally. The seed of the human being and of the earth are being destroyed, and the environment is plagued with pollution and insecurity. The creatures of the seas and the deserts are also victim to this global corruption perpetrated by nonbelieving rulers.

قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعْرَآءَ أَهْلِهَا آذِنًا وَكَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ

Indeed, when kings enter a town, they devastate it and reduce the mightiest of its people to servility. (27:34).

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ

And when [the disbeliever] wields authority, he strives to corrupt the earth and to ruin the crop [of the soil] and the stock [of man], and God dislikes corruption. (2:205).

In the same way that believers are opposed in their efforts to establish mosques

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ مَنَعَ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسَعَى فِي خَرَابِهَا

Who is more evil than he who prevents the remembrance of God's name in God's mosques and tries to ruin them. (2: 114).

Those working to develop the earth also have enemies whose purpose it is to desolate the environment and to proliferate corruption.

Islam's Instruction To Believers To Profit From The Natural Resources

With such statements as,

وَابْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ

And seek God's grace (62: 10).

and,

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ ذَلُولًا فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِهِ

It is [God] who made the earth tractable for you, so walk on its flanks and eat of His provision (67: 15).

The Noble Qur'an exhorts humankind to make good use of natural resources. The fulfillment of this divine order involves mining, agriculture, and, generally, any productive form of benefit from the raw material available in nature. But this is no easy task; it requires diligence and resolution. God has spread provisions throughout the earth: in the deserts, in the seas, under the mountains; and the human being must strive to benefit from them.

God provided the necessary requirements of life before He created the human being. First, He created the earth and established the appropriate environment, and only then did He create humankind. This resembles the natural mechanism inherent in the human child. The infant, unable to digest other food, is nurtured by the mother's breast, but when old enough to eat and to work, his food and work are determined. Likewise, God bestowed upon the human being intelligence and provided him with the necessary instruments and ordered him to strive to develop the earth, guaranteeing that He will facilitate his progress:

تَمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسْرَةً

Then He made the way easy for him. (80:20).

God (immaculate is He) made the human being master of all creatures the human being did not master other creatures; rather it was God who made him master):

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ ۗ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْفُلْكَ

لِتَجْرِيَ فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ ۗ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ الْآنَهَا

It is God who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water from the sky and with it brought forth crops for your sustenance, and He subdued the ships for you so that they may sail at sea by His command, and He subdued the rivers for you. (14:32).

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ دَائِبِينَ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمْ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ

And He subdued the sun and the moon for you, constant in their course, and He subdued the night and the day. (14:33).

In this verse, the verb *sakhkhara*² occurs four times, and *for you* also appears a number of times. Although subdue is a univocal concept in the mind, yet in reality its instances are varied: the sun and the moon are subdued differently from night and day, just as the sea is subdued differently from the river.

Thus, every creature possesses a distinct way of being subdued as well as a distinct existence, and for this reason, every creature is necessarily exploited differently. But what is important is that all creatures are subservient to the human being, and this obliges him to employ them in the best possible manner, for to do otherwise would be ingratitude.

One of God's bounties is the sea. To make primitive use of this bounty would put the human being on the same plane with marine creatures and sea birds and thus would not be an instance of the sea's subservience.

But should the human being seek more than merely using its water and navigation; should he dive into its depth, conduct scientific experiments, and offer its mineral resources and wealth to humanity it is only then that he has truly profited from the subservient sea.

Likewise, if he limits his benefits from the sun to the minimum of its light and heat, he is no different in this respect from other creatures. We can claim to have observed the above verse only if we succeed in determining a wide range of benefits from it including those that promote the health of the environment—and making them available to all humanity.

The earth too God subdued so that humankind could dwell on it with tranquility; so that they could till it to produce crops; so that they could drill deep into its abyss to exploit its mines, to conduct scientific investigations for such purposes as determining faults in the earth's crust and locating active earthquake zones so as to promote the welfare and security of human society. But if we confine our benefits from the earth to merely a shelter and a simple life, we would be on a par with the other animals that also partake of such benefits. That, however, would be incorrect.

Not only should the human being exploit the earth, tapping into oil and gas and other underground

reservoirs, he must extend his control into outer space and take appropriate advantage of its creatures. For, to be content with the primitive benefits of God's bounties is to neglect the subservience of all creatures to the human being. The Qur'an says,

﴿ وَالْخَيْلَ وَالْبِغَالَ وَالْحَمِيرَ لِتَرْكَبُوهَا وَزِينَةً ﴾

And horses and mules and asses for you to ride them (16:8).

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الطَّيْرِ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ فِي جَوْ السَّمَاءِ

Have they not regarded the birds subdued. (16:79).

To fail to profit duly from God's creatures would be an instance of ingratitude, rendering the human being subject to the Qur'an's censure as expressed in the following two verses:

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ بَدَّلُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ كُفْرًا وَأَحَلُّوا قَوْمَهُمْ دَارَ الْبَوَارِ

Do you not regard those who distorted God's blessing by way of ingratitude and brought on their people confinement to the abode of ruin (14:28).

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَظَلُومٌ كَفَّارٌ

Indeed the human being is most unfair and ungrateful. (14:34).

Thus the human being is duty-bound to exert himself to fulfill God's command to develop the earth. As such, those who are in a position to contribute to this end by way of agriculture, industry, craftsmanship, and other such useful activities but refrain therefrom, either out of affluent carelessness or due to sloth, are, in addition to being in violation of the command expressed by the Qur'an, flouting the word of all divine prophets.

As all prophets are appointed by God; they derive their knowledge from the same Mysterious Source, and so their word is one. All prophets exhort people to acknowledge the Origin (God), the End (the return of all things to God or, in other words, the Day of Judgment), Revelation, the angelic order of beings, the righteous way of life, and the like.

Of course, they are of different degrees, and, for this reason, the particulars of their message in practical matters differ. Nevertheless, the general guidelines offered by all prophets and religions are the same.

A prophet possesses two identities: a personal identity and a prophetic identity. The personal identity of each prophet is unique, but his prophetic identity, which is his ministry as entrusted by God, is shared by all prophets. God (immaculate is He) thus addresses the Noble Prophet (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and his household):

مَا يُقَالُ لَكَ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ قَبِلَ لِلرُّسُلِ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

Nothing is said to you except what has already been said to the prophets before you. (41:43).

Although Prophet Muhammad is distinguished in being the "guardian³" over all other prophets, nevertheless they, like him, were possessed of the essence of Revelation and prophethood. It was in this light that the Prophet was told to say,

مَا كُنْتُ بِدَعَا مِنْ الرُّسُلِ

I am not a novelty among the prophets. (46:9).

Neither the Prophet's ministry nor the slander he received from the disbelievers was unprecedented. All the prophets were entrusted with the mission to summon humankind to acknowledge God's unity and to worship Him exclusively:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ

We did not send any prophet before you but We revealed to him, 'There is no god except Me, so worship Me.' (21:25).

The expression "There is no god but God," which conveys absolute unity (*tawhid*), is the invaluable gift that God's prophets have presented to us. For this reason, Prophet Muhammad said,

*Neither I nor those before me have said anything on a par with 'There is no god but God.'*⁴

Based on this understanding, to deny the ministry of one prophet is tantamount to denying all prophets. Believers must proclaim,

﴿ فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ ﴾

We do not distinguish between one and another of them. (2: 136).

As far as the position of prophethood is concerned, all the prophets are alike. God (immaculate is He)

says,

وَلَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أَصْحَابُ الْحِجْرِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

Certainly the inhabitants of Hijr denied the prophets. (15:80).

The verse says that the people of Hijr denied all the prophets, while they disobeyed only the one prophet that was among them. As such it indicates that the message of the prophet of Hijr was the message of all prophets, past and future. (Of course there is another dimension to the meaning of the latter verse, which is that often a prophet would recount the stories of the prophets who preceded him.

So when a people rejected their prophet, they were in fact rejecting all the prophets whose stories and words they had been told of.) This point is expressed again in the stories of the Tribes of Thamud and Lut⁵.

In this light, every believer in God and His prophets should heed Prophet Salih's words regarding the development of the earth:

هُوَ أَنْشَأَكُم مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا

[God] brought you forth from the earth and delegated to you its development. (11:61).

As such we are all duty-bound to develop the world, outwardly (developing the earth) as well as inwardly (developing the environment and reforming human society).

All of God's decrees are vivifying, and so to neglect them would entail hardship and anguish. The Master of the Faithful is reported to have said,

*Whosoever obtains water and soil but remains impoverished, God banishes him [from His mercy]*⁶

People who possess abundant water and arable land but fail to control their water sources and to cultivate their land due to an unwillingness to make the necessary effort or due to mismanagement, and as a consequence become dependent on others, are deprived of God's mercy. It would be wrong to assume that this truth is exclusive of the ancient nations whose stories are told in the Qur'an.

Violating the commands of God and His prophets results in being deprived of God's mercy, and this holds true of any age. Thus, should we neglect the instructions of the Noble Qur'an and the infallible Imams (who are perfect human beings and the counterpart to the Qur'an) that shed light on how to reform human community and ensure a wholesome environment, we would inevitably fall into disfavor with God.

Islamic Development Versus. Imperialist Exploitation

Isti'mar⁷, which is now commonly indicative of a wicked and deplorable concept, is a sacred term in the Qur'anic vocabulary. Western imperialist powers misused this word, and as a result it is now associated with such negative terms as despotism, exploitation, and colonialism. But in the Qur'an, God is described as a musta'mir (lit., one who seeks development) Who placed in nature the primary material of all celestial and terrestrial creatures.

God created the human being from clay, then breathed into him of His Spirit:

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَتَفَخَّتْ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي

And [I] breathed into him of My spirit. (15:29).

Thus the human being was born as an amalgam of the earth (mulk) and the angelic spirit (malakut), that he may serve as God's viceroy on the earth. Human society will be prosperous and the human environment wholesome only when humankind realize their position as God's viceroy, for whose sake He created the raw material in nature.

By granting the human being intelligence, He enabled him to exploit nature. But He also appointed prophets to instruct humankind in how to exploit it so as to produce the food necessary to achieve spiritual as well as material perfection.

To promote their own self-serving purposes, Imperialist powers use development as a pretext to exploit aggressively the impoverished nations while in reality despoiling their natural resources. Imperialist powers do occasionally help in making developments, but only when such achievements are instrumental in securing their own interests.

As the corrupt heads of global domination seek ever increasingly to exploit natural resources and the environment, they prefer discarding the surplus of their agricultural production rather than donating it to impoverished nations. Affluent nations live wastefully and extravagantly while the poor of the impoverished nations scavenge the garbage of the rich for food. This is while some of these impoverished nations possess invaluable mines, abundant water, and arable land.

If the politics of global domination make it necessary, the imperialist powers impose economic embargo on countries, using wheat as if it were a nuclear weapon. Economic embargo is among the imperialists' most effective weapons.

They employ it as a means to break the economic backbone of any country that dares oppose them. As such if they occasionally attempt to bring about some developments in a region, it is certainly to promote their interests and to harm those of other nations. It is as though they had a monopoly over

development.

They aid only in the development of those regions that contribute to their interests; they neglect as far as possible the development of all other regions; they enthrall the people of those regions where they've ostensibly helped to develop, robbing them of their natural resources.

The Role Of The Imperialists In Polluting The Environment

The wholesomeness of the environment is closely connected with social well-being. As prevention of a disease is more effective than curing it, so securing a wholesome environment is more convenient than dealing with the damages affected by environmental pollution. Securing a wholesome environment requires that we respect the natural rights of the earth, the air, the water, the desert, the mountain, the plant, the animal, and other creatures and environmental phenomena.

Securing the well-being and sanitation of the environment is among the primary necessities. People and officials must do their utmost to fulfill this end. Unfortunately, however, the reality is that there are a few who, in order to satisfy their own interests, are willing to flout all environmental principles without respect for any legitimate bounds.

As explained above, it is only the believing people who can protect the well-being of the environment, for in the absence of belief there can be no true sense of obligation in respect to nature. We are today witness to the numerous nuclear and non-nuclear experiments that "developed" countries conduct at sea and on land, which pollute our environment in a variety of ways.

Imperialist powers devour the oil reservoirs of others with such insatiable greed that they usually fill their crude carriers beyond capacity. When occasionally these ships capsize, a great amount of oil leaks into the sea or ocean in which they navigate, creating many a grave problem for the human environment, not to mention the lives of the innumerable marine creatures they jeopardize by polluting the water.

The Role Of The Imperialists In Perpetrating Environmental Insecurity

The imperialist powers of the world, in securing ever more thoroughly their interests, exploit other nations and prevent their progress. Now by deploying military troops, now by implementing deceptive imperialistic schemes, they cause other nations to engage in conflict. And when it is in their best interest, they wage war themselves. But in every case, the result is making the environment insecure for other nations.

Currently, to the east and the west of our Islamic Republic, imperialists wield dominion. The fruits, however, of this dominion are but devastation, insecurity, and intrusion on the fundamental rights of the people. Not only have they obstructed the progress of these nations by despoiling them of their natural

resources and national wealth, they have made the human environment insecure and harmed "the crop of the soil and the stock of man":

وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ

And when [the disbeliever] wields authority, he strives to corrupt the earth and to ruin the crop [of the soil] and the stock [of man], and God dislikes corruption (2:205).

إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِهَا أَذِلَّةً

Indeed when kings enter a town, they devastate it and reduce the mightiest of its people to servility. (27:34).

The Imperialists False Claim To Authority

The second most important function of divine vicereignty, following the acquisition of sacred knowledge, is developing the earth and cleansing it of any form of dissolution and darkness. Of course, in this context earth signifies the expanse of human environment, which encompasses the depths of the oceans and the zenith of the firmament.

Thus, in Islam environmental issues are related to the lofty position of divine vicereignty. Those who assume to be sovereigns of the world yet feel free to wipe out trees and to pollute sea and land actually defile the title of sovereign, for sovereignty belongs rightfully to God's viceroy, who develops the earth while observing the rights of nature.

Developing the earth means establishing the environmental principles that promote humanity. That is, God's viceroy endeavors to enhance not people's vegetative and animal aspects (which are the only concerns in secular societies), but their humanity, which, of course, subsumes the vegetative and animal aspects.

In so doing, he guards nature against pollution and the environment against moral dissolution. Under his sovereignty the body enjoys healthiness and the soul exults in the divine breath, and thus the human being attains to "ease, abundance, and a garden of bliss.⁸"

The Weighty Obligation Of A Ruler In Securing A Wholesome Environment

True beauty as opposed to illusory beauty is of the nature of being. Being is a gradational reality, subsuming a multiplicity of hierarchical degrees. Human beauty derives from divine vicereignty, and as

the degree of divine vicereignty is greater in rulers, they have a greater responsibility to bring about a wholesome environment.

For, it is only they who can take measures on a large scale; it is only they who are capable of, for instance, making plans for outer space, for the seas, or, on the negative side, creating such destructive weapons as chemical and nuclear bombs.

What currently threatens to destroy human environment with death and disease is the unmitigated hegemony of those powers who own nuclear technology. They wish to appropriate all God-given bounties to their own advantage and to the detriment of other peoples, acting as mad chieftains of the modern clan.

The Noble Qur'an (which is the quintessence of all sacred scriptures) thus describes despotic rulers:

قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِهَا أَذِلَّةً

Indeed when kings enter a town, they devastate it, and render dishonored the noblest of its people (27:34).

Unjust sultans, bullying rulers, and despots tend to corrupt the domain of others on which they encroach. But unlike the past, when physical presence was necessary to perpetrate such corruption, in modern times, technology has made remote-controlled corruption possible.

If imperialist powers were sincere in their claims to humanitarian causes, they would not so readily take to bloodshed:

He whom is pained by religion⁹

His body is not a [human] body but rather a monster¹⁰.

Those who are possessed of greater power carry a proportionately heavier burden: the broader one's sphere of influence, the greater one's responsibility is to better the environment.

The Islamic Government's Responsibility In Securing A Wholesome Environment

Defining the duty of the ruler, the Prophet said,

*Whosoever takes on some authority over other Muslims but fails to secure for them that which he secures for himself will not inhale the perfume of Heaven*¹¹.

To be entrusted with an office in the Islamic government entails the responsibility to secure for the

community those factors which one wishes for oneself to enjoy. An official in the Islamic government must strive to improve life, health, and social stability for all constituents; as he wishes to have a wholesome and hygienic environment, so he must wish to provide such an environment for the community.

The above administrative instruction by the Prophet finds expression also in the words of his successor, the Master of the Faithful. In a letter to one of his officers, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib writes,

*Your concern for the development of the country should take precedence over your concern for the collection of taxes, for the latter would be of no avail without development*¹²

As clearly pointed out in this instruction, in a degenerate environment, natural and human resources would all go to waste.

The study of government and politics constitutes a primary branch of the humanistic disciplines. An understanding of the humanistic disciplines presupposes knowledge of the human being. The microcosm and the macrocosm, as two interconnected realities, derive their existence from a source beyond themselves.

As such, to come to a true understanding of the human being is impossible without first understanding the Origin, whose essence is identical with its existence and who bestows existence on the microcosm and the macrocosm and puts them in a harmonious arrangement. And, in turn, without a true understanding of the human being, knowledge of government and politics would be unattainable.

Islam portrays the human being as simultaneously the head of three orders (orders which secular ideologies naturally deny): the efficient order, the internal order, and the teleological order.

The efficient order consists of the originating and nurturing causes, which are of course all created by the one God. He is the origin from which the microcosm and the macrocosm issue. And thus no other agent is independent in originating or nurturing the human being.

The internal order is the reality that is the combination of an immaterial soul and a material body. That is, the human being is neither, like the angel, incorporeal nor, like inanimate objects and plants, merely corporeal. But that which defines the human being's humanity is his imperishable soul, which accompanies the perishable, earthly body.

The teleological order is that which abides even after the death of the material body which lives on perpetually, passing from the mundane world into the everlasting world of the Hereafter. In that world, the human being subsists with a body suitable to that everlasting abode with his beliefs, thoughts, dispositions, characteristics, and deeds as accumulated in this world ceaselessly accompanying him along the way.

Secular ideologies deny the efficient and the teleological orders altogether and conceive of the internal

order as merely consisting of matter. According to such ideologies, soul must be understood in a way that would conform to the material conception of the world.

The Noble Qur'an, as the most perfect interpreter of the microcosm and the macrocosm, affirms the three orders in a number of verses. One of the most comprehensive of such verses, in which all three orders are expressed, is Surah Ta Ha, verse 50

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it. (20:50).

"Our Lord" in this verse signifies the efficient order, "guided it" the teleological order, and "gave it its creation" the internal order, which is distinctive in every creature and suitable to its peculiar nature. The distinct internal order in the human being, however, is expressed in the following verses:

إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ

When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I will create a human being out of clay. (38:71).

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him. ” (38:72).

فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ

Thus the angels prostrated, all of them together. (38:73).

Nurturing Divine Viceroyalty And Establishing The Ideal State As The Primary Objectives Of Islamic Government

The two most important objectives that Islamic government pursues correspond to the three orders mentioned above (efficient, teleological, internal); they are, first, to guide humankind to actualize divine viceroyalty through furnishing the necessary means for achieving this end and, second, to establish the ideal state by explicating the requirements of the rightful civilization and the principles that should determine the domestic and international relations among societies.

Doctrinal sources, whether the Qur'an or the corpus of hadith or the example of the Infallibles, though encompassing a great abundance of edifying instructions, can be said to be distilled into the above two principles. Actualizing these two principles requires the engagement of both the body and the soul (though the soul is the dominant element, guiding and employing the body).

Therefore, we are in need of attending to the body—a task which the science of medicine addresses—as well as the soul—which requires a spiritual medicine so as to ensure spiritual wellbeing and prevent any harm that may be incurred on account of erroneous beliefs, moral vice, or evil conduct.

The Establishment Of The Ideal State By The Perfect Human

Being

The purpose of establishing the ideal state is to cultivate individuals who wish to embark on the path of divine viceroyalty. In this light, of the two aforementioned principles, preeminence belongs to divine viceroyalty.

For, even the healthiest of bodies perish, while the soul survives eternally. In the same vein, the ideal state, though possessed of the loftiest civilization, will in time fall to ruin, while God's viceroy, who is the perfect human being, remains imperishable.

As such, the ideal state is as the body and God's viceroy is as its soul. Just as it is the soul that maintains the body, so it is God's viceroy who establishes and secures the ideal state.

Defining Some Of The Qualities And Conditions Of The Ideal

State

An ideal state has certain qualities and conditions some of which pertain to the environment and some to the individuals that inhabit it. (It should, however, be pointed out that all the qualities and conditions of the ideal state, even those that are in this division attributed to the environment, depend on the extent to which the individuals grow in knowledge and advance in practice.) The qualities and conditions of an ideal state are numerous. Here a brief explanation of some of these qualities is in order.

1. Cultural Growth

The ruler in an Islamic state is responsible for the education of his people. This responsibility is expressed in the following Qur'anic verse:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] a prophet from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error. (62:2).

The cause of ignorance in modern as well as ancient society has always been a lack of understanding of the principles of true civilization or, when understood, the failure to conform thereto. Ignorance and deviation are the two decisive factors leading to social degeneracy.

As such, the most important function of Islamic government in the realm of culture (here intended in a broad sense) is fighting ignorance and deviation. With the elimination of ignorance, knowledge, Revelation, and wisdom take root, and the extirpation of moral deviation and perversion opens the way for moral purification.

In the abovementioned verse and other similar verses that specify the functions and programs to which Islamic rulers must adhere, elimination of ignorance and spiritual purification are enumerated among the main objectives.

The verse cited above exhorts illiterate societies to pursue knowledge so as to rid themselves of illiteracy and to attain knowledge; the verse also invites corrupt and sinful societies to purify their souls so that they may purge themselves of their sins, to attain to virtue and salvation. Obviously, individuals possessed of knowledge and virtue can succeed in establishing and maintaining the ideal state.

2. Economic Development

Islamic leaders are entrusted with the duty to define the general lines according to which property must be handled in an Islamic state. Divine law encourages Muslims to "sow," "grow," and "harvest" in every field of the economy, proclaiming as lawful all the benefits they may reap in so doing.

In the context of divine law, the acknowledgement of the above economic rights is crucial to having a healthy economy. But in addition, divine law stipulates certain conditions that must be observed in conducting any economic activity.

Islam endorses private ownership but with some qualification. That is, every individual owns the fruit of his toil to the exclusion of other individuals. No one else has the right to exploit what one has gained without one's consent.

But, in relation to God, things are different. In respect to Him, no human being can claim to own anything. We are all as custodians entrusted with the care of what He has bestowed on us. Such Qur'anic phrases as,

﴿ وَأَتَوْهُم مِّنْ مَّالِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي آتَاكُمْ ﴾

And give them out of the wealth of God (24:33).

and,

﴿ وَأَنْفَقُوا مِمَّا جَعَلَكُمْ مُسْتَخْلَفِينَ فِيهِ ﴾

And spend out of that wherein He has made you successors (57:7).

attest to this truth. As such we are not to spend our wealth where it is against His wish.

Islam considers the collective wealth of all Muslims as a means for managing the affairs of society in its entirety. That is, while acknowledging private ownership, it does not allow that such ownership should lead to the impoverishment of any particular segment of society. Islamic law does not tolerate the division of society into a wealthy money-hording elite and an impoverished underclass.

Wealth in Islamic law is seen as the backbone of the society that keeps it erect. Impoverished individuals are deprived of their financial backbone. (*Faqir*, which is the Arabic for *impoverished*, derives from the root *faqr*, denoting the vertebra in the spinal column and as such presents the notion of a broken backbone.)

As wealth is the economic backbone of the society, it must not be put in the hands of those who are inept in handling financial matters. The following verse alludes to all the above three points¹³:

وَلَا تُؤْتُوا السُّفَهَاءَ أَمْوَالَكُمُ الَّتِي جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ قِيَامًا وَارْزُقُوهُمْ

Do not give the feeble-minded your property which God has assigned to you as a means for maintenance. (4:5).

In this verse wealth is attributed to the society as a whole¹⁴ while being described as a source for the maintenance of society. The verse also prohibits Muslims from putting the incompetent in charge of the economic sector of the Islamic society.

Excessive accumulation of money in the hands of a few is also forbidden by Islam, which sees it as a blood clot that paralyzes the other economic classes. It is necessary that wealth should reach every economic class as expressed by verses such as the following:

وَالَّذِينَ يَكْنِزُونَ الذَّهَبَ وَالْفِضَّةَ وَلَا يَنْفِقُونَهَا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

Those who treasure up gold and silver, and do not spend it in the way of God, inform them of a painful punishment. (9:34).

Islam condemns the incomplete circulation of wealth and deems it necessary that it should make a full circle. That is, Islamic law disallows the circulation of money in the hands of an elite, leaving the majority utterly deprived. It rather requires that the circulation of wealth be complete so that all classes could benefit therefrom. The following verse is one instance where this requirement is expressed:

مَا أَفَاءَ اللَّهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَى فَلِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ وَلِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ كَيْ لَا يَكُونَ دُولَةً بَيْنَ الْأَغْنِيَاءِ مِنْكُمْ

The spoils that God gave to His Prophet...are for God and the Apostle, the relatives and the orphans, the needy and the traveler, so that they do not circulate [exclusively] among your rich. (59:7).

The circulation of wealth among the rich to the exclusion of the majority is conceivable in two ways, both of which are wrong. One way is Western capitalism, and the other is government-centered economy based on the now defunct communism of the East.

Thus, wealth should not be the exclusive privilege of a few individuals or of a legal entity; rather, it must flow in the veins of every class. Such is the teaching of Islam, which forms the dignified foundations for a healthy economy, bridging the two extremes of capitalism and communism and giving birth to Islamic economics, which has as its core Islamic justice.

It is thus that Islam requires the complete circulation of wealth, encompassing the greater majority of the society. The method Islam sanctions for this circulation (besides such means as inheritance and giving money to whom one wishes) is transaction by consent.

To undertake a transaction without a party's consent or to acquire money with consent but without a transaction (as is the case in gambling)–in either case the acquisition of money is considered improper. The following verse articulates this point:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْكُمْ

O you who have faith! Do not consume your wealth among yourselves unrightfully, but it should be trade by mutual consent. (4:29).

3. Advancement In Art And Industry

1. Solomon¹⁵ who spread the domain of Islamic authority over a vast region and propagated the faith by writing letters to a number of the rulers of his time, inviting them to embrace the faith, was possessed of abundant resources. The Qur'an thus describes his employment of the industry of his day:

وَأَسْلَمْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقَطْرِ

We made a fount of [molten] copper flow for him (34: 12).

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِيبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانَ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ ۚ اَعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا ۚ وَقَلِيلٌ مِنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ

They built for him as many temples as he wished, and figures, basins as cisterns, and caldrons fixed [in the ground]. "O House of David, observe thanksgiving while few of My servants are grateful" (34: 13).

According to these verses, the officers in Solomon's government engaged in architecture and art, funding such projects as building great castles and sponsoring paintings that depicted angels, prophets, and saints so as to encourage art and satisfy in a healthy way the society's inherent need for art. In so doing, they demonstrated the correct way for engaging in art and industry and set before people, in the form of painting, exemplars so as to promulgate simultaneously art and felicity.

By engaging in metalwork, they fashioned dishes needed for individual and communal purposes by way of improving life, again cultivating art as well as satisfying the natural needs. Thus the Qur'an tells us that they made large containers and basins and caldrons.

The story of the Queen of Sheba's entrance into Solomon's court, witnessing his crystal castle, which she mistook for water and so raised her dress to avoid getting wet¹⁶, attests to the advanced state of art and industry in Solomon's empire.

But in addition to the obligation to employ the blessing of industry appropriately, Solomon and his officers were ordered to praise God for providing them with the raw material, the technique to benefit therefrom, and the capacity for art and industry that enabled them to make the necessary instruments.

2. Another manifestation of advancement in art and industry within the framework of Islamic government pertains to David, Solomon's father. It was David who initiated Islamic government with a revolutionary leadership that had as its purpose the eradication of injustice. He possessed ample resources and was gifted with the power to turn hard metal in his palms into whatever shape he wished. God ordered him to use his miraculous power to develop the craft of mail-making, taking care to install the chains and rings in an orderly fashion:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا يَا جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ وَأَلْنَا لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ

Certainly We gave David a grace from Us: "O mountains and birds, chime in with him." And We

made iron soft for him, (34: 10).

أَنْ أَعْمَلَ سَابِغَاتٍ وَقَدَّرَ فِي السَّرْدِ وَأَعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

[saying] 'Make easy coats of mail, and keep the measure in arranging [the links], and act righteously" (34: 11).

وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَكُمْ لِتُحْصِنَكُمْ مِنْ بَأْسِكُمْ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ شَاكِرُونَ

We taught him the making of coats of mail for you, to protect you from your own violence, Will you then be grateful? (21:80).

(A noteworthy observation regarding the above verses is that since the manufacture of mail is an art that people can learn, the Qur'an says God "taught" David. But regarding the power to turn hard metal into soft material, this word is not employed, for such a miracle is not an ordinary art but rather derives from the majesty and purity of spirit possessed by God's friends.

Thus God simply says, "We made iron soft for him," to demonstrate that such power is possible only by God's miraculous grace. Of course the softening of metal by heating is an art that can be traced back to ancient times, but this is an ordinary accomplishment that differs from David's miraculous power.)

3. Noah's feat in constructing the Ark is yet another demonstration of industrial advancement. Noah is distinguished not only for his longevity and precedence in prophet hood but also for his appropriate employment of technology. God taught him how to build a ship and, further, guaranteed his success. The Qur'an thus affirms this truth:

وَاصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا

Build the ark before Our eyes and by Our revelation. (11:37, 23:27).

4. The story of Dhu al-Qarnayn (the Two-Horned One) is also interesting in this relation. Though the Qur'an makes no mention of his prophethood, it nevertheless recounts his commendable employment of the resources available at his time to construct a number of impressive projects.

One such project was the construction of an impenetrable defensive wall, which was, due to its height and smoothness of surface, insurmountable and, due to its firmness, indestructible. It was built not of clay, stone, mortar, and the like but rather of molten iron and copper. The Qur'an describes the construction in the following verse:

أَتُونِي زُبَرَ الْحَدِيدِ حَتَّى إِذَا سَاوَى بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ قَالَ انْفُخُوا حَتَّى إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ آتُونِي أُفْرِغَ عَلَيْهِ قَطْرًا

[Dhu al-Qarnayn commanded,] "Bring me pieces of iron." When he had leveled up [them] between the flanks [of the mountains], he said, "Blow." When he had turned [the iron as if] into fire, he said, "Bring me molten copper to pour over it." (18:96).

5. From the above Qur'anic stories, one may draw the following conclusions. First: Employment of technology is commendable and must be endorsed by the Islamic government. Second: Technology must be employed for proper purposes. Third: The paramount purpose for technology is fulfilling the scientific and practical needs of every age.

It is necessary to point out that the examples provided by the Qur'an are not exclusive. That is, proper employment of technology is not restricted to these instances. Noah's ship-building is indicative of the need to construct various types of submarine, marine, ground, and air transportation for both passengers and cargo.

David's mail-making craft is the prototype for the production of all means of defense, whether it be against arrows, bullets, chemical weapons, etc. Solomon's architecture, handicraft, artistic work, and metalwork present a model for producing all the necessary instruments of life, for individual and social purposes, and, in addition, fulfilling the society's artistic needs.

From these observations one may derive the guidelines according to which technology should be employed. Generally speaking, it is appropriate to use technology for all constructive purposes. But to use technology for any destructive or aggressive purpose that harms the earth, the sea, the air, the plants, the animals, or humankind is unquestionably inappropriate.

It is this distinction in purpose that sets technology in the ideal state as pursued by Islamic government apart from that as espoused by the aggressive and destructive powers who feign civilization; it is this distinction that clarifies the difference between a wholesome and a sick and degenerate environment.

4. Legal Progress

Islamic law and the officials in the Islamic government are responsible for delimiting, formulating, executing, and developing international law in as well as national law. No matter how advanced a society is in economic and technological matters, as long as it lacks a perfect legal system that honors mutual rights, it will never achieve genuine felicity.

For, without legal and ethical systems, economic and technological advancement can lead to destruction. The First and Second World Wars and the subsequent military intrusions conducted by imperialist powers against the weaker nations, which have resulted in death and plunder, attest to this truth. Islamic law offers certain principles in this relation, a list of which follows.

1. Islam condemns both oppressing others and allowing others to oppress us:

لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ

Neither oppressing nor being oppressed. (2:279).

2. Islam requires that international agreements and contracts should be honored:

وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ ۖ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا

And fulfill the agreements; indeed [you are] accountable [for] all agreements. (17:34).

This verse encompasses, in addition to our agreements with God, all agreements with His creatures. In describing the elevated believers who achieve the status of virtue, the Qur'an says,

وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا

Those who fulfill their agreements when they make an agreement. (2: 177).

Disbelievers are antithetically characterized by the Qur'an as

الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتَ مِنْهُمْ ثُمَّ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَهُمْ فِي كُلِّ مَرَّةٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَتَّقُونَ

Those who when you obtained an agreement from them, they violated their agreement in every instance. (8:56).

Islam's insistence on honoring agreements is for the purpose of ensuring social security and freedom. Security and freedom, as requirements for the materialization of civil society and thus as two principles of the ideal state, can be realized only by a society that honors its agreements. Should a society fail to honor its agreements, it will be deprived of security, freedom, and the other functions of civil society.

The Noble Qur'an eloquently affirms that human beings are equal in nature and in the general principles of creation and renounces any false superiority based on history, language, race, color, or customs:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O humankind, indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes

that you may identify one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most God-wary among you. (49: 13).

In this way, it disallows that an individual or group should claim precedence over others and condemns the overbearing powers for upsetting the social balance. And the overbearing attitude is no more than the tendency to violate the agreements one has pledged. The following verse alludes to this truth:

وَإِنْ نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَهْدِهِمْ وَطَعَنُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ فَقَاتِلُوا أَتِمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَا أَيْمَانَ لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْتَهُونَ

But if they violate their pledges after having made an argument and revile your religion, then fight the leaders of unfaith (for, indeed with them no pledge [is honorable]) that they may relinquish. (9: 12).

The principal reason for fighting overbearing powers is their disregard for the pledges they make. In the above verse, the reason God offers for fighting the disbelievers is not their lack of faith but their violation of the pledges they make.

Peaceful life with nonbelievers is possible but not with overbearing nonbelievers who violate their pledges, for social life requires reciprocal commitment. When one of the parties involved feels free to violate his pledge when possessed of superior power, the possibility of social life fades.

The problem modern ignorance poses for contemporary society is the same as that posed by pre-modern ignorance: the lack of commitment on the part of the overbearing powers. This is sufficiently demonstrated by the current state of the United Nations and the other international organizations, which are indifferent to the atrocities perpetrated by aggressive powers, powers who feign concern for human rights. To expound on such grievances is, of course, beyond the scope of the present work.

3. To honor what has been committed to our trust—be it a financial or a legal commitment—is another principle that Islam sets forth:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا

Indeed God commands you to deliver the trusts to their [rightful] owners. (4:58).

When describing the qualities of true believers, the Qur'an says,

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ

Those who honor their trusts and agreements. (23:8).

Moreover, many of God's prophets mentioned in the Qur'an are described as "trustworthy" as a look at Surah Shu'ara makes evident¹⁷.

The effect of mutual trust in bringing about security and liberty and, consequently, establishing the ideal state is obvious. The Noble Qur'an in the following verse presents an analysis of the human constitution, thereby demonstrating that no individual or group may violate a trust (in this the Qur'an seems to be speaking to the racism inherent in such ideologies as Zionism that assume to be the superior race):

وَمِنَ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِن تَأْمَنهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ إِن تَأْمَنهُ بِدِينَارٍ لَا يُؤَدِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا ذَلِكَ
بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ

And among the People of the Book is he who if you entrust him with a great wealth will repay it to you, and among them is he who, if you entrust him with a dinar will not repay it to you unless you stand persistently over him. That is because they say, "We have no obligation to the Gentiles." (3:75).

That is, some among the Jews exhibit such treachery that if they are entrusted with something scarcely valuable, they will resist returning it unless coerced to do so. The reason for their treachery is that they deem themselves superior to Gentiles and as a result assume themselves free of any obligation to honor Gentile trusts.

It should go without saying that a people so unscrupulous in dealing with trusts can easily plunder; a people who bear no reservations in violating a meager trust of one dinar doubtless view the violation of a trust as great as the vast resources of an entire country as feasible.

Abraham's Prayer For The Human Being's Divine Viceroyalty And The Establishment Of The Ideal State

Numerous prophets arose from Abraham's progeny who ruled as custodians of Islamic governance. In this regard the Qur'an says,

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ أذكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَعَلَ فِيكُمْ أَنْبِيَاءَ وَجَعَلَكُمْ مُلُوكًا وَآتَاكُمْ مَا لَمْ يُؤْتِ أَحَدًا مِنَ
الْعَالَمِينَ

When Moses said to his people, "O my people, remember God's blessing upon you as He appointed prophets among you and made you kings." (5:20).

These prophets inherited the main principles of divine authority and leadership and of politics and governance from the architect of the Ka'ba, Abraham, their progenitor.

In addition to putting these principles into practice, Abraham eloquently articulated them in his supplications with God. The main lines introduced in these supplications as narrated by the Qur'an constitute the two principal objectives of Islamic governance: the ultimate fruition of the virtuous human being pursuing perfection in divine viceroyalty and the establishment of the ideal state. And the latter can be achieved solely by the former.

In Abraham's supplications narrated by the Qur'an, there are two sets of descriptions. One set lays down the qualities of the ideal state, such as development, liberty, security, and a sound economic basis. These qualities may be inferred from the following supplication:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ

And when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a secure town, and provide its people with fruits." (2: 126).

The other set concerns human perfections as conditions for procuring divine viceroyalty. These conditions are stated, among others, in the following verses:

رَبَّنَا وَأَبْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ ۗ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

[Abraham and Ishmael prayed,] Our Lord, raise amongst them an apostle from among them, who should recite to them Your signs, and teach them the Book and wisdom, and purify them. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise. (2: 129).

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ

When Abraham said, "My Lord, make this city a sanctuary, and save me my children from worshipping idols." (14:35).

(It is these supplications by the ancient prophets as recorded in the Qur'an and the other heavenly scriptures that are the source from which the supplications of the Imams in the Shia corpus of hadith derive.)

[1.](#) The Arabic phrase for "delegated to you its development" is ista'marakum. In Arabic morphology, the verb form istafala (which is the form of ista 'mara) is indicative of urgency. Thus ista 'marakum more accurately means, "He eagerly asks you to develop the earth."

[2.](#) Translated here as "subdued." [Tr.]

[3.](#) An allusion to 5:48.

[4.](#) Shaykh as-Saduq, Tawhid, p. 18.

[5.](#) See Surah Shu'ara', 26:141 and 26:160.

6. Shaykh Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, p. 40.

7. Isti'mar literally denotes "seeking to develop." But since in the Middle East and the surrounding region, where Western imperialist powers ruled despotically for over two centuries, the word has been commonly associated with oppressive exploitation, it carries a negative political connotation, implying such concepts as subjugation and bondage. [Tr.]

8. An allusion to Qur'an:

فَرُوحٌ وَرَيْحَانٌ وَجَنَّتٌ نَعِيمٍ

"Then happiness and bounty and a garden of bliss."(56:89).[Tr.]

9. Religion in the context of this verse signifies spiritual and divine virtues rather than canon. [Tr.]

10. Hadiqah al-Haqiqah, p. 550.

11. Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 692.

12. Nahj al-Balagha Epistles, no. 53.

13. That wealth in a society belongs to the entire society collectively, that wealth is the column that keeps standing, and that it must not be entrusted to the incompetent. [Tr.]

14. The pronoun in the Arabic is second person plural, addressing all Muslims as one community. [Tr.]

15. As opposed to Christian doctrine, which depicts Solomon as a secular king, Islam considers him a prophet entrusted with temporal authority. [Tr.]

16.

قِيلَ لَهَا ادْخُلِي الصَّرْحَ ﴿٤٤﴾ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً وَكَشَفَتْ عَنْ سَاقَيْهَا ﴿٤٥﴾ قَالَ إِنَّهُ صَرْحٌ مُّمَرَّدٌ مِنْ قَوَارِيرَ

It was said to her, "Enter the palace." So when she saw it, she supposed it to be a pool of water, and she bared her shanks. He said, "It is a translucent palace of crystal" (27:44).

17. See, for instance:

فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا كَأَنَّمَا يَصْعَدُ فِي السَّمَاءِ كَذَلِكَ يَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ الرِّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

Therefore (for) whomsoever Allah intends that He would guide him aright, He expands his breast for Islam, and (for) whomsoever He intends that He should cause him to err, He makes his breast straight and narrow as though he were ascending upwards; thus does Allah lay uncleanness on those who do not believe (26:125). [Tr.]

Chapter 2: The Religious And Humanistic Environmental Concerns

1. The Humanistic Nature Of Environmental Concerns

Environmental concerns, though related in some respects to natural and empirical sciences, are as far as their purposes are concerned—such purposes as the quality of human life, hygiene, and happiness—connected with humanistic disciplines.

Of primary importance in the humanistic disciplines is the topic of anthropology. Thus it is necessary that we should first dwell on some of the theories propounded by some intellectuals regarding the human being and then to compare them with the Qur'anic perspective.

The Human Being As Viewed By Western Intellectuals

One of the topics that have been a point of abundant discussion among Western intellectuals and that have more or less formed the focus of their philosophical speculations is the human being. In fact, a number of Western philosophies have been formulated in connection with this topic.

For analyzing the history of anthropology in the West, three stages should be distinguished: the pre-modern (or traditional) era, the modern era, and the post-modern era. Some contemporary Western intellectuals are convinced that the human being before the modern era lacked any sense of significance. With the inauguration of the modern era, however, the human being procured this significance, and in the course of postmodernity he will perfect it.

In the pre-modern era, philosophers defined the human being on the basis of his nature. They believed that human nature was immutable, that the earth was the center of the cosmos, and that the human being, on account of his noble status, occupied the cosmic center. The natural world had a specific order and the purpose in the creation of the human being was his harmony with the natural order.

The natural order followed a fixed course that humankind could not alter and, as such, were compelled to conform to it. Traditionalists saw the human being not as a drastically different entity but rather as a member of the natural order, which had conferred on him the pride of place that he enjoyed. As such, they likened the human being to a cryptic text that philosophy had to decipher. [1](#)

In the modern era, however, this outlook changed. Numerous attempts were made to define the human being, four of which will be considered here [2](#). One approach to defining the human being took a biological bent. According to this definition the human being is an animal and so is neither a vegetable nor a god; the former are inferior to humankind and the latter superior.

The second definition offered was psychological, according to which the human being was a conscious individual agent. The third definition was sociological and thus maintained that the individual human being was a member of the social order that included him. The fourth definition was based on a religious outlook, and according to this outlook the human being fit all of the above three definitions.

Philosophers in the post-modern era endeavored to elevate the status of the human being in nature, though they failed to achieve this through an ontological definition. In the last fifty years, starting from around the 1960s, Western philosophers have strived to perfect the definitions proffered by their predecessors.

These post-modern definitions tend to enlarge the individual aspect of the human being. According to these definitions, the human being determines his character through conflict with nature, the material world, and other people, while ethically he is characterized by greed, which is what compels him to enter into conflict with his environment.

Here is a summary of the description of the human being propounded by post-modern philosophy: The human being is a sacrilegious political animal and an opportunist characterized by greed, self-centeredness, disobedience, and rebelliousness.

In giving such a description, Western philosophers hoped it would provide a more dignified status for the human being. But on the contrary, and as confessed by a number of Western intellectuals, this description is ultimately leading the self-centered human being of the modern era to destruction in the post-modern era.

[The Qur'anic Definition Of The Human Being](#)

The noble human being may be interpreted correctly only by the Noble Qur'an. And just as the best method for interpreting the Qur'an (in addition to having recourse to sound reason and authenticated hadiths) is studying each verse in relation to other verses, so the best method for comprehending the human being is examining him within the context of his own being.

That is, to achieve a correct understanding of the human being, we must apply the products of sensory perception, imagination, and apprehension ([wahm](#))³ to the principles confirmed by the theoretic intellect, and, likewise, rein in the urge of the sexual instinct and anger in accordance with the dictates of the practical intellect and in this way set the divine human nature and reason as the judges for, respectively, human conduct and cognition.

It is only through this way that we may preserve the angelic aspect of environmental concerns. An interesting example for this relation between the angelic aspect of things and their mundane aspect is the Prophet's instruction,

*Verily your mouths are the ways through which the Qur'an passes, so clean them with the toothbrush.*⁴

In the Qur'anic definition of the human being, the predominant description of the human being as a rational animal—a definition that rests on such concepts as 'vegetable' and 'animal'—is deemed insufficient. The Qur'an puts forth a different description, which constitutes the human being's ultimate differentia, namely, the living and God-seeking creature.

The genus in this definition is living, which encompasses plants, animals, and the human being and as such is a broad equivalent for "rational animal." God-seeking is the differentia, which denotes the natural inclination to seek God – an inclination nourished by an innate knowledge of Him—and the subsequent immersion in His divinity.

In this light, rationality, though an indispensable characteristic of the human being, does not constitute his ultimate differentia. An individual possessing ingenuity, industry, and sagacity but who exploits his talents for egoistic purposes is, from the Qur'anic viewpoint, a brute, a demon. Thus, the Qur'anic definition takes "rational animal" as the genus for the human being, specifying God-seeking as his

differentia that sets him apart from other creatures.

But since the God-seeking inclination and the desire to embrace the true faith is embedded in human nature, the two qualities of God-seeking and living are so intertwined as to render them one, jointly manifest in the inherent love for divine beauty and magnificence a love which eschews defilement by attachment to anything else. Pure faith is irreconcilable with plurality and polytheism, and as a result, the slightest indication of and tendency toward other than God withers the soul and dampens the spirit.

Since true human life consists in seeking God, the rejection of His call to embrace His prophets impairs one's God-seeking nature and, consequently, one's quality of life. In light of this analysis, such verses as

قُلْ أَغْيَرَ اللَّهُ اتَّخَذُ وَلِيًّا فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

Say, 'Shall I take for guardian [anyone] other than God, the originator of the heavens and the earth" (6: 14).

وَالِيهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ كُلُّهَا فاعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ

And to Him all matters are returned. So worship Him and trust in Him (11: 123).

Which pertain to the God-seeking nature, apply by extension to life itself.

One may infer from the Noble Qur'an that the true human being is he who transcends the realms of the vegetable and animal life, transcends even rationality and actualizes his divine and eternal life by awakening his God seeking nature, ascending the levels of perfection till he reaches the status of divine viceroyalty, which is the ultimate manifestation of God's Names and the station wherein one assimilates the divine traits.

All human beings are potentially living and God-seeking. Spiritual life and the angelic spirit of seeking God is implanted in human nature. But not all succeed in bringing this nature to fruition by traversing the path of perfection.

Many bury their God-seeking nature under the darkness of ignorance and sin, transforming their Godly nature into a profane form that is enthralled with wicked desires and satanic powers. The Qur'an considers such people bereft of life and outside the pale of the living:

لِيُنذَرَ مَنْ كَانَ حَيًّا وَبِحَقِّ الْقَوْلِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

So that anyone who is alive may be warned, and that the word may come due against the

faithless. (36:70).

From the antithesis portrayed in this verse between "alive" and "faithless," one may draw the conclusion that the living are the believers, that disbelievers are not alive and do not enjoy true life and as such are dead. Of course, life in this relation designates the life immersed in seeking God, the life that all human beings share being beside the point. (The various stages of life are hierarchically related. Thus one may possess human life in the popular sense but lack it in the Qur'anic sense, without this precluding in any way the application of human to ordinary human beings.)

Based on the foregoing explanation, human beings may be classified into the living and the dead. Disbelievers bury their human nature under layers of ignorance and superstition and are as such dead. They may be divided into two groups.

One group consists of those who are as frozen bodies, mute, stagnant, and unprolific, who have surrendered to abjection and disgrace and are content with merely securing their dead souls from harm.

These are disbelievers who live in peace with the community of Muslims. The second group is composed of putrid corpses whose stench poisons the world. These are the belligerent disbelievers whose purpose in life is to fight Islam.

But those who liberate themselves from the fatal darkness of unfaith are alive. The living, however, may also be categorized into various groups. Some are overtaken by sleep and are in a state of negligence concerning their faith and humanity; some though are awake.

Those awake could in turn be sick, and their sickness could be either temporary or chronic. Those who are alive, awake, and healthy may be perfect or imperfect and the perfect are of various degrees.

All the above groups are tentative humans, excepting the perfect and the ultimately perfect. These two form the firm foundation of human society. The prophets and their successors are the ultimately perfect while the truly observant scholars constitute the perfect. The former are firm by nature and the latter are firm by recourse to the former.

The perfect must continually gauge themselves vis-a-vis the ultimately perfect, those who are naturally perfect, so as to be capable of leading the tentative humans, who must in their turn refer to and follow the perfect, thus traversing step by step the path of human perfection.

Harmony With Nature As A Fruit Of The Internal Harmony Of The Human Faculties

If one orders the cognitive faculties with the leadership of the theoretic intellect and the conative faculties with that of the practical intellect, such that all the cognitive and conative faculties yield to the firm direction of human nature, true harmony among the internal faculties would ensue. It is in allusion to this arrangement of the internal faculties that we employ the plural pronoun when we address God in our

individual prayers, saying,

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

You alone do we worship, and to You [alone] do we have recourse. (1:5).

This verse implies that our cognitive faculties surrender to the leadership of the theoretic intellect, our conative faculties to the leadership of the practical intellect, and they collectively surrender to the leadership of the lofty human soul, chiming in unison,

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

You alone do we worship, and to You [alone] do we have recourse. (1:5).

It is this key point that explains the occurrence of the plural noun in this verse.

Should the human being succeed in creating harmony among his internal faculties, he would utter in sincerity and in unison with all other creatures—which compliantly proclaimed,

قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ

[The earth and the heaven said,] "We come willingly" (41:11).

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

You alone do we worship, and to You [alone] do we have recourse. (1:5).

It is in this way that humankind can maintain an intimate and respectful relation to nature.

In reference to Mount Uhud, the Prophet once said,

This is one of the mountains that love us and that we love.[5](#)

What this means is that mountains are the Prophet's friends, and he in return is their friends. Mount Uhud was merely one example, and this phrase is not restricted to just that one mountain. It is in the light of this sort of understanding that environmental concerns may be resolved, for one with such an outlook would never pollute the sea, the desert, or the mountains.

The above phrase by the Prophet implies humankind can derive proper benefits from the mountains: we

can use their soil and mines; they are not reluctant to yield such benefits to humankind. And the trees likewise offer their fruit for humankind to use.

The fruit on a tree has its [figurative] head turned toward the farmer while its "tail" attaches it to the tree; it is as though the tree were offering its fruit to the human being. The same holds true of the desert and the sea.

Should this harmony be realized between humankind and nature, there would be no pollution to defile the sea or the land; science would not be utilized to create the nuclear bomb; there would be no third world suffering under extreme poverty; there would be no overbearing capitalistic order, nor a corrupt socialistic one. All these discrepancies and disharmonies are caused by the egoism of the rulers, who have fettered the intellect and have misunderstood human nature:

How many an enslaved intellect is subservient to the ego as its master[6](#).

If we identify ourselves correctly as God's viceroys, we will interact in kindness with society and will view the mountains as our friends and will refrain from polluting the environment. One possessing such an understanding would not be an instance of this verse:

إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِهَا أَذِلَّةً ۖ وَكَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ

Indeed when kings enter a town, they devastate it and reduce the mightiest of its people to servility. (27:34).

But to fail to attain this understanding would lead to consequences mentioned in the following passage from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib:

Take a look at whatever people you wish. Do you see but the poor grappling with impoverishment or the rich repaying God's blessing with ingratitude?[7](#)

The individual or society that succeeds in correctly understanding human nature benefits fully from the asset of life. One equipped with such an understanding progresses in life as a weathered tree whose efforts are not lost but are rather transformed into thick roots that keep it firm.

But one who lacks this understanding wastes life as a car worn down by overuse, which inevitably ends up useless. In other words, those who go astray in life move, but their motion is futile and gains them nothing, and they end their life futilely and burdened with regret. On the other hand, those who advance in life, following the instructions of the intellect and Islam (both of which are equally inspired by Revelation), profit from their lives.

Let me reiterate the above example. Imagine a tree and an automobile both twenty years of age. The tree has stored the product of its efforts underneath its trunk as its roots, which give it more strength and

help it remain erect, enabling it to continue growing its trunk, branches, and leaves.

That is, the tree's twenty years of toil have not gone to waste. But the automobile after twenty years is utterly dilapidated; it has spent its energy without gaining anything in return. The difference is, the automobile did not really move itself; it was rather moved by others, and since it has not itself moved, it has not gained. It is now only a worthless and cold mass of metal.

To advance like a tree is to store every effort in the form of roots, which enable us to remain firm and to grow further and to reach fruition. In this way, we preserve the fruit of our life's effort with us. There are individuals who fit this characterization.

At eighty, if they are asked what they have earned, they will promptly reply that they have left behind scholarly works or have raised good children or have accomplished economic projects that benefit the society, and so in this way they are proud before their Lord and feel no shame for the life they have spent.

They have not engaged in usury, or usurped what belonged to others, or broken someone's heart. They have secured for themselves enduring profits. But there are also those who really have nothing to say. Like the automobile, their only accomplishment in life is a frail body.

Thus, advancement in life and taking profitable advantage from the assets God has endowed us with depend on self-knowledge and self-improvement, which can be accomplished by shedding light on the tentative areas of life with an understanding of the firm principles embedded in human nature. Otherwise, one may spend eighty years only to end up feeling useless in this world and unprepared to enter the next.

One must die proud and with one's gains in hand, for otherwise the angels of death will wrest the soul in violence:

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّتْهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهُهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ

But how will it be when the angels take them away while striking their faces and their backs? (47:27).

(The angels will be thrashing him but those present at his deathbed will only see him lying down normally, gradually growing cold. This is like a dream. One may experience good or bad dreams, but when one sees nightmares, usually others do not notice the frightful state one experiences.

Similarly, one on the verge of death may be receiving painful blows from the angels while those present at one's deathbed will notice nothing. Of course, the difference is that the death pangs take place in real life and not in a dream.)

The Prophets' Mission To Interpret The Microcosm And The Macrocosm And To Change Them For The Better

The greatest achievement of all prophets, and, specifically, of Prophet Muhammad, is their interpretation and modification of the microcosm and the macrocosm. The interpretation and modification of the macrocosm is a result of the interpretation and modification of the microcosm.

If the human being is interpreted correctly and, consequently, finds his central role, the world will be transformed. For, the world was created for the human being and the human being in turn for union with God. It is incorrect to consider the human being and the world on a par or the human being as created for the world.

The purpose in the creation of the world is to nurture the growth of the human being and prepare him for union with God, for he alone is capable of attaining to that divine court-

ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى

Then [Muhammad] drew nearer and nearer [to God's throne] (53:8).

فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ

Until he was within two bows' length or even nearer. (53:9).

It is an exclusive honor of the human being to proclaim the first and the last words in the cosmos, for other creatures, which will all perish⁸ and turn to darkness⁹, are incapable of uttering the first and last words.

In the order of creation, the human being enjoys pride of place and the world exists to serve him. The human being and the world both derive from the effusion of the divine light. The world advances and through the human being attains union with God. The Straight Path is that of the primordial human being, and it is in this path that every creature realizes its fundamental purpose.

The final goal of the prophets was to shed light on the true meaning of humanity and to change humankind to set them on the correct path of humanity and in so doing change the entire cosmos. As such, their function was not merely to strive to establish the ideal state on the basis of justice; this was only their mediate goal. (This mediate goal is thus expressed in the Qur'an:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ

Certainly We sent Our prophets with manifest proofs, and We sent (57:25).

Their final goal was to illumine the society. The following verses ascertain this final goal:

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

[This is] a Book We have sent down to you that you may bring humankind out from darkness into light, by the command of their Lord, to the path of the All-mighty, the All-laudable. (14: 1).

What is intended by light in this relation is the light that enables one to perceive the truth even in the absence of all material light, to perceive the unseen truth even when one's eyes are shut. (In this reference one may recall the account of Harithah ibn Malik, who said, "It is as though I am staring at my Lord's throne."¹⁰)

The ultimate goal of the prophets is to enlighten the human being so that he could gain knowledge of the past and the future—near and distant. It is this path that the Qur'an offers and encourages humankind to pursue. It is a way that has been traversed before, and we also can traverse it by first procuring perception (nazar) and then insight (basar) so as to witness the truths of the world.

Once the truths of the world are unveiled, one can clearly feel the poison and fire in sin and witness the burning of the sinful in hellfire:

كَأَلَا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ

No indeed; were you to know with certain knowledge, (102:5).

لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ

You would surely see hell; (102:6).

تُمْ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ

You would surely see it with the eye of certainty. (102:7).

The vision intended in this verse occurs in this world, not the Hereafter, for there even disbelievers will see:

رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

Were you to see when the guilty hang their heads before their Lord [confessing], "Our Lord, we [now] see and hear." (32: 12).

Thus, the ultimate goal of God's prophets is to enlighten humankind so that they could see the truths of the world.

Should this goal be realized, our dark world will be transformed, our environment cleansed, and the blind human being enlightened; the macrocosm will then be seen in its truth and our environment will change for the better.

This light of which we talk is the light of truth; it is luminous thus illuminates. Material light enables one to perceive material objects, whereas spiritual light enables one to comprehend spiritual truths. Just as the body is possessed of five senses, so the soul has five senses.

The prophets were entrusted with the mission to awaken humankind to their spiritual senses. And just as the bodily senses must be cured when they fail to function, so the spiritual senses must be healed when they fail to comprehend the spiritual truths. Thus the Qur'an talks of diseased hearts–

فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا

There is a sickness in their hearts; then God increases their sickness (2: 10).

–which it invites to be cured so as to attain soundness:

إِذْ جَاءَ رَبَّهُ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

When he came to his Lord with a sound heart (37:84).

إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

Except him who comes to God with a sound heart. (26:89).

Humankind desire that the world should proceed on its course such that they could derive the most benefit from it. But we must heed that the world with its four seasons (which are abundant in spiritual as well as material blessings:

وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا وَبَارَكَ فِيهَا وَقَدَّرَ فِيهَا أَقْوَاتَهَا فِي أَرْبَعَةِ أَيَّامٍ

[He] blessed it and ordained therein its various means of sustenance in four days (41: 10).

maintains a direct connection with human conduct. If humankind conduct themselves appropriately, the cosmic order will work and change to their advantage:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

If the people of the towns had believed and been Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth. (7:96).

Should we believe in God and act accordingly, rain-laden clouds would accumulate and navigate to the areas in need of water, quenching the land, and thus God's blessings would be abundantly available. But if humankind instead disbelieve and rebel against God, the clouds would drop their rain on the seas or on land unfit for cultivation or would rain in a time that would do more harm than good. This is due to the fact that the reins of the clouds, as everything else, are in the hands of God:

وَأَرْسَلْنَا الرِّيحَ لَوَاقِحَ فَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمُوهُ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ لَهُ بِخَازِنِينَ

And We send the fertilizing winds and send down water from the sky providing it for you to drink and you are not maintainers of its resources (15:22).

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَامُهُمْ وَأَنْفُسُهُمْ ۗ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ

Do they not see that We carry water to the parched earth and with it We bring forth crops of which they eat, themselves and their cattle? Will they then not take heed? (32:27).

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَزْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكَّامًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ جِبَالٍ فِيهَا مِنْ بَرَدٍ فَيُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَصْرِفُهُ عَنِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ يَكَادُ سَنَا بَرْقِهِ يَذْهَبُ بِالْأَبْصَارِ

Have you not regarded that God drives the clouds, then He collects them together, then He piles them up, whereat you see the rain issuing from its midst? And He sends down hail from the sky, out of the mountains that are in it. (24:43).

The negative aspect {that is, God's holding back His blessings) is expressed in the following verse:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

God never changes a blessing that He has bestowed on a people unless they change what is in their own souls. (8:53).

The foregoing explanation points to, on the one hand, the interpretation of and change in the microcosm and, on the other hand, the consequent interpretation of and change in the macrocosm.

This means that the world was created to cultivate a harmonious life for the human being, and the human being, in turn, was created to become luminous. Thus if one wishes to understand the world correctly and to change it to establish an environment suitable for human habitation, one must first understand the human being and change him.

That materialist assumes that he is from the earth and to it he returns:

إِن هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا

There is nothing but the life of this world: we live and we die. (23:37).

The average monotheist believes that the human being is created from the earth but advances to divine proximity, a belief that finds expression in this verse:

مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَى

From it did We create you, into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you forth a second time. (20:55).

The mystic, however, proclaims that humankind are from God and to Him they return:

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return. (2: 156).

The latter realize, in addition to the earthly aspect of the human being, his angelic aspect, which derives from the Divine Breath; they bear in mind that

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي

[God] breathed into [the human being] of [His] spirit. (15:29).

One with such an outlook recognizes the end as familiar when he meets it. He will say that he was once there, when his Lord asked him to bear witness–

أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۗ شَهِدْنَا

Am I not your Lord ? – and indeed he did bear witness when he replied, yes (7: 172).

If we open the ear of our hearts, following the example of David, we will discover that all creatures—the inanimate, the plants, the animals, along with the human beings, the jinn, and the angels—all praise in unison their Lord:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا ۗ يَا جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ ۗ وَالنَّارُ لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ

Certainly We gave David a grace from Us: "O mountains and birds, chime in with him." (34: 10).

The Qur'an commends the men of God, those who cannot be distracted from God's remembrance by worldly affairs:

رَجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيمُهُمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَن ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

Men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of God. (24:37).

It is such human beings who by contemplating the world of creation acknowledge:

His unity is praised not by the children of Adam alone;
[but also by] every nightingale singing on a branch. [11](#)

The mission of God's prophets was to proffer a correct interpretation of the microcosm and the macrocosm. They strove to enable humankind to hear all creatures as they praise God. Curing the blind and the deaf were not the real miracles of the prophets; the real miracle was removing the veil from the ears and eyes of people's hearts. Many were nurtured in their school who could hear the praise of all creatures.

Thus humankind can, by adhering to the heavenly instructions of God's prophets, liberate themselves from the hell of egotism, greed, and oppression and instead live in a community of light and friendship, transforming their environment by replacing their brute traits with human virtues.

2. The Religious Nature Of Environmental Concerns

The Divine Religion's Concern For The Human Environment

In the teachings of the true divine religion (which in the course of history has been manifested in a variety of forms) knowing the principles of a wholesome environment, refraining from harming it, and

endeavoring to secure its wellbeing are viewed as among the primary human rights as well as the primary human obligations, which must be observed so as to guarantee society's happiness and soundness. For this reason, Islam forbids polluting nature and littering public places, and in the event that such pollution or littering occurs, it exhorts believers to try and remove it.

Imam Al-Sadiq once said,

Verily when God (exalted and elevated is He) bestows a blessing on His slave, He likes to see its results on him." He was then asked, "How is that?" to which he replied, "He should clean his dress, and use fragrance, and tidy his home, and sweep his doorway." [12](#)

The abovementioned points are indicative of the reciprocal rights of the citizenry in a society. The Prophet said,

He who removes from the road on which Muslims pass that which vexes them, God will record for him the reward of reading four hundred verses of the Qur'an, for each letter ten rewards. [13](#)

"Road" should not be understood to denote exclusively ground roads; it includes also waterways and airways. And the cause of vexation could be an obstacle or something detrimental to the health or wellbeing of the society, such as the stench of garbage, smoke from factories, sound pollution, or even heavy traffic; all these can be viewed as instances of the Prophet's wise saying. Another point that one can infer from this saying is that observing environmental principles is as sacred as reading the book of God.

This inference in turn suggests the offensiveness of neglecting environmental principles. Should a government or a people deliberately harm the environment and pollute nature or remain silent in the face of the pollution caused by negligent industries, they will have to face God's wrath. In this relation, the Prophet said,

Three persons are cursed owing to their misdeeds: one who defecates in the shade of houses [14](#), *one who bars [another from using his due] portion of water [and instead appropriates it for one's own use]* [15](#), *one who obstructs a road in use.* [16](#)

Religious authorities were not content with merely preaching environmental principles; they practiced them so as to establish a precedence that people and governments alike could follow. Thus when he came upon an obstacle on the road, Imam al-Sajjad would dismount and remove it so that it would not hinder others [17](#).

In this relation there is also an interesting story from Jesus. Once he came upon a grave and saw that the dead buried in it was being tormented. It so happened that a year later he again came across that grave, but this time, to his surprise, the dead buried there was no longer being punished.

He inquired from God regarding what had ceased the punishment. God replied that the dead person's

son came of age; he repaired a road and provided shelter for an orphan. For the sake of the son, the father was pardoned¹⁸.

Three Aspects Of Environmental Concerns In Islam

Within the context of Islam, we may distinguish three aspects for environmental concerns:

1. the material aspect,
2. the material–spiritual aspect,
3. and the purely spiritual aspect.

1. To secure a wholesome environment, a society must possess three qualities. Imam Al–Sadiq is quoted as saying,

Life is not pleasant without three things: clean air, abundant fresh water, and fertile land ¹⁹

To enjoy a pleasant life these three elements are necessary; otherwise, for mere survival, they are not necessary. A society afflicted with famine, impoverishment, and disease may survive, but the people would definitely not enjoy a pleasant life; they endure as though neither dead nor alive.

2. The environmental issues connected with a combination of the material and the spiritual are also contingent on three elements. In another hadith, Imam Al–Sadiq is quoted as having said,

*Three things are indispensable for the life of a people both in this world and in the Hereafter, without which they would be reduced to barbarity: a pious scholar of religion, a kind and authoritative ruler, a proficient and trustworthy physician.*²⁰

Every society is in need of these three elements. First and foremost is the need for a religious scholar who, in addition to being capable of teaching religious doctrine and law, is well aware of the times and has a pure heart.

The next crucial element for a society is a kind ruler, whom people could obey so as to ensure the integrity, independence, unity, and security of their nation. And last, but not least, is the need for a proficient physician whom people could trust. That is, he should be well acquainted with his craft and honest in preserving the secrets people confide in him.

3. Human life or, to put it differently, the human being's humanity consists in the soul, not the body. As such we must strive to establish an environment conducive to our spiritual growth, and this can be attained through the spiritual exercises ordained by Revelation.

To this end, one must cut back on the pleasures of the flesh and instead focus on spiritual improvement. The Master of the Faithful said, "Religion is but the exercise of the soul."²¹ On another account he said of himself, "Verily this soul of mine I strengthen it through God wariness."²²

Those embarking on spiritual improvement through God wariness must endeavor to weaken their corporeal pleasures (even those sanctioned by canon) to a minimum. For this reason, some observant Muslims fast many days and there are even a small number who fast all year around, except for the days prohibited by Islamic law, and keep vigil every night, except for a short nap. The Qur'an thus describes this group:

كَأَنُوا قَلِيلًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مَا يَهْجَعُونَ

[The Godwary] would sleep [in this world] but a little during the night; (51: 17).

وَبِالْأَسْحَارِ هُمْ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَ

For, at dawns they would be pleading for forgiveness. (51: 18).

Addressing the Prophet God says,

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَّكَ عَسَىٰ أَن يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا

And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a supererogatory devotion for you that your Lord may raise you to a praiseworthy station. (17:79).

One may object that there is no need to abstain from the pleasures sanctioned by religion. But this mentality can only bring about an environment that simultaneously satisfies body and spirit. Otherwise, to nurture the soul further, one must reduce even the pleasures sanctioned by religion—shortening one's sleep and decreasing one's food—and persevere in the remembrance of God:

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَىٰ صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ

Those who are persevering in their prayers. (70:23).

In an enlightening passage narrated from Imam 'Ali, he says,

Keep your eyes awake at night, keep your stomachs thin, employ your feet (by way of worship), give from your wealth, take from your bodies, and [instead] give to your souls.[23](#)

Though the body needs nourishment, sleep, and corporeal pleasures, nevertheless in order to nurture the soul, we must, without going to any extremes, reduce the body's share and increase instead that of the soul.

Through recitation of the Qur'an, contemplation of the words of God, nocturnal worship, and offering help to God's slaves, we may cultivate the soul. Such was the example of the Ahl al-Bayt, as testified by the following verse from Surah al-Insan:

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ

They give food [to the needy], for the love of Him. (76:8).

Qur'anic commentators report that the Master of the Faithful and Fatima, his wife, fasted three consecutive days as an offering for the cure of Hasan and Husayn. But every day when it was time for breaking the fast, a person in need would knock their door, asking for food—one day an indigent, one day an orphan, and one day a captive²⁴.

Obviously their bodies were in need of food, and fulfilling the body's primary needs is indeed a reasonable cause, and they did have food, food which was pure of any spiritual impurity. Yet they decided on giving their food to the needy, out of love for God.

They reduced their bodies' share and instead gave it to their souls. (It is interesting to note that one of the three to whom they offered their food, the captive, wasn't even Muslim, for we know that in Medina there could not have been any Muslim captives.)

In yet another hadith, the Master of the Faithful is thus quoted:

The noblest of dresses worn by the children of Adam is made of the saliva of a worm [silk], and the noblest of their drinks is of the excretions of the bee.

Though honey is pure and a source of healing

يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بُطُونِهَا شَرَابٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ فِيهِ شِفَاءٌ لِلنَّاسِ

There issues from [the bee's] belly a juice of diverse hues in which there is cure for the people (16:69).

And silk is used to produce valuable clothing and rugs (of course according to Islamic law, the use of silk fabrics by men is forbidden), but 'Ali warns us lest the products of these two insects should distract us from tending our souls.

The majority of people, of course, are reluctant to bear such restrictions. Rather they expend their utmost efforts to procure the maximum worldly delights possible. It is true that if the delights are lawful, such an effort is sanctioned by Islam, but such gratification is incapable of leading to the environment that is most productive for the growth of the soul (the third environment as elucidated above), the

environment so cherished by the elite among the devout.

Though the latter do benefit from an environment that cultivates physical health alongside material wellbeing, yet what really appeals to them is the wellbeing of the spiritual environment, resulting from, among others, nocturnal worship. One cannot hope to achieve such an environment while exploiting extravagantly such material delights as honey and silk.

Environmental Conservation In The Light Of The Instructions Of God's Prophets

Although today there is much talk in the West and the East on environmental conservation, yet it is important to note that whenever a positive point is mentioned, it invariably derives from the fountainhead of divine inspiration.

The philosophies of the West and the East fail to benefit from divine teachings and as such are akin to a disoriented person ignorant of his whereabouts. But a philosophy originating in Revelation and profiting from such heavenly books as the Qur'an, the Torah, or the Bible has a firm foundation.

And though before Abraham there were numerous prophets, but the surviving world religions trace back their roots, over 40 centuries, to him. Therefore, one can conclude that any positive statement regarding the environment rests on the teachings of the prophets from Abraham's progeny.

A concept that originates in Revelation issues ultimately from the Sacred Essence of God. Any other idea that is not derived directly from Revelation is either a flawed and indirect inference from the teachings of divine prophets or is a mundane creation of the human mind, in which case it is only a fleeting notion. One instance of the latter was the irreligious communism of the East, which, due to its conflict with the divinely implanted human nature, is now lost and forgotten.

Whether Religious Sanctity Is Reconcilable With Mundane Affairs

An objector may claim that [religion's commenting upon or] entering into the domain of mundane life diminishes religion's sanctity, gradually leading to its vulgarization. To articulate this objection more fully, there are two problems confronting religion's treatment of mundane concerns, which are as follows.

First, worldly affairs are essentially antithetical to the supernatural and the sacred. Generally speaking, any issue with an essential identity [of its own] is incapable of assuming an extraneous religious identity.

For, a single entity cannot have two essences. For instance, water has a certain molecular composition and as such cannot be labeled as religious or nonreligious. The same case holds true of such issues as justice, governance, science, and philosophy, in regard to which religion must assume a neutral stance.

Second. Not only are mundane affairs incapable of assuming a religious dimension, furthermore religion's encroachment on the realm of nature can only diminish the value of religion and lead to its vulgarization.

That is, anything that enters the realm of nature becomes physical, and, in the same vein, anything that enters the social realm becomes human. In this light, on the plain of the physical and the human, there is no room for the supra-physical or the supra-human. So much so, that even the supernatural soul, on entering the realm of nature, dons the garb of the physical.

Conclusion: sacred religion must confine itself to the private realm of the individual and refrain from interfering with social, political, or mundane affairs. In a word, religion should keep away from that which concerns the socio-political affairs of humankind and in so doing protect its sanctity.

For this reason, religious scholars must avoid bothering with the mundane human problems, for, in addition to wasting their resources, they would be harming religion's sanctity, which could in turn jeopardize religiosity in human society.

The Concept Of Sanctity

For a critique of the second reasoning, the following observations are in order. From a religious perspective, anything related to the divine is sacred. God proclaims the divine aspect as the most exquisite description for all things in the world:

صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً ۗ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ

The hue of God, and who possesses a more exquisite hue than God. (2: 138).

Anything, regard less of which category of creatures it belongs to, tinged with the divine hue is sacred.

The way God has opened for human beings to acquire sanctity is conforming to His law, complying one's conduct with the instructions of the Revelation. The greater this conformity is, the more manifest will the divine hue be. In this light, this conformity with God's instructions can be extended to all spheres of life, conferring sanctity on all individual and social aspects of the human being.

A better understanding of the concept of sanctity requires that we should acquire a deeper grasp of religion. Religion invariably encourages humankind to observe the following two points. First, it warns the faithful to refrain from wicked deeds and to act righteously.

For this reason, Islam views only the righteous among the faithful—to the exclusion of the sinful believers and the nonbelievers—as entitled to receive the happy tidings of God's blissful rewards:

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا

And [the Qur'an] gives the good news to the faithful who do righteous deeds that there is a great reward for them. (17:9).

Second, religion exhorts the faithful to purify their intentions. God stipulates personal virtue as a prerequisite for the approval of a believer's deeds, thus stressing the importance of heeding the spiritual aspect of a deed. This point is underscored, among others, in the following hadiths. Imam as-Sajjad said,

No deed [is acceptable] without [the appropriate] intention;[25](#)

The Prophet stated,

The believer's intention takes precedence over his action. [26](#)

We may draw two conclusions from this point. 1. A misdeed incurs God's punishment, even if the sinner is a believer. 2. A righteous deed in and of itself is insufficient to procure reward; rather, it is contingent on the personal virtue of the agent performing it. Thus, a disbeliever's righteous deed fails to earn him divine reward.

In this light, Islam's message for human kind is both to do good and to attain personal virtue. Human beings are duty-bound to strive exceedingly to realize both of these valuable objectives. The greater the extent to which one realizes these two objectives, the more profound will the manifestation of the divine hue in one's conduct be and, as a result, the more sacred one will be.

Thus sanctity is directly related to how manifest the divine hue is in one's beliefs, disposition, and actions—private and social alike. Divine hue in turn depends on one's personal virtue and righteous conduct. If we comprehend this truth appropriately, we will recognize that a thing's sanctification in no way requires that it should [somehow] transform in its essence [or quiddity].

Any aspect of life blessed with these two factors (personal virtue and righteous conduct) acquires sanctity. Sanctity is never an internal component of a thing's essence, and therefore sanctification does not necessitate essential transformation, which is impossible.

The Scope Of Sanctity

Since anything possessed of divine hue is sacred, and divine hue is unattainable except through observing the instructions of Religion, we can satisfactorily conclude that anything that falls under the jurisdiction of religion is sacred, including the actions we perform with the guidance of Revelation to fulfill our natural needs.

It may at first seem paradoxical to view our purely natural actions as sacred. This prima facie paradox, however, is resolved once we correctly understand the Revelation's point of view.

In a hadith, Imam Al-Sadiq is related as having said,

One who struggles for the sake of his family is like one struggling in the way of God[27](#).

A hadith from Imam Al-Ridha' reads,

He who pursues by the grace of God that with which he could maintain his family is greater in reward than he who struggles in the way of God, exalted and elevated is He. [28](#)

Imam al-Baqir says,

He who pursues [the bounties of] this world to avoid being in need of others and to fulfill the needs of his family and to help his neighbor will meet God on the Day of Judgment while his face shines like the full moon. [29](#)

These hadiths demonstrate that by identifying mundane activities (even such activities as are required by our nature, for instance, working for a living to maintain one's family) with such sacred and religious deeds as struggling in the way of God, Islam intends to bestow sanctity on the former to such a degree that their performance would elevate one to the heights of human perfection and union with God.

Therefore, Islam does not restrict the scope of sanctity to the conventional instances of obedience to God, such as prayer, but rather broadens the scope such that every aspect of human life has the potential of becoming sacred.

This potential includes those aspects that are specifically mentioned in the religious texts (e.g., prayer, fast, and hajj) as well as those implied by rational deduction from religious principles, and these include, among others, earning a living to maintain one's family.

In the latter category, ordinary and important affairs are similarly sacred. Such seemingly negligible activities as drinking water, eating, recreation, and going on a trip as well as such vital functions as governance and enacting laws for the maintenance of order in a society can all acquire sanctity, though the degree of sanctity obviously differs.

Another relevant observation that deserves mention here is that sanctity is not restricted to only the transmitted (naqli) components of religion but also encompasses the rational components. Rational demonstrations are viewed in Islam as equal to demonstrations premised on transmitted material [i.e. the sacred deposits and traditional texts].

Rational demonstration deriving from apodictic reasoning forms an important and indispensable part of religion. As such, one may employ rational reasoning along with transmitted reasoning (bearing in mind the two abovementioned factors—personal virtue and righteous conduct) to sanctify human life and affairs.

In summary we may reiterate that every aspect of human life is potentially sacred, for it is inevitably related to some aspect of religion whether rational or transmitted—and in this respect, the important and the mediocre, the natural and the discretionary activities are alike.

In this light, we must define sanctity to include not just those activities that are directly related to the Mosque or the Church but also the activities carried out in the mundane course of life.

Distribution of wealth, providing equal economic opportunity, offering medical services, maintaining domestic and international security, observing environmental principles, preventing the destruction of the social environment, etc.: all these are religious and sacred, should they be executed justly and reasonably—with precedence given to national interests over private interests—and in seeking God's satisfaction and nearness to Him.

The Basis Of Sanctity

Islam or, generally, any truth that is of a religious and sacred nature has its roots in existential reality. This basis is such that it subsumes every aspect of religion—doctrine, morality, and law.

What this means is that underlying the instructions and precepts of religion are existential truths. Religious instructions are in fact the existential truths conveyed in the form of canon (i'tibar) of a certain religion, such that if religious instruction were to shed the garb of canon to reveal their inward reality, they would appear as existential truths.

Hence, religion is the canonical representation of the world of existence. In this light, one may view religion as an interpretation of the cosmos in its myriad forms. In other words, religion is not a mere congeries of contractual laws devoid of any existential substance. Every particle of Revelation is grounded on a firm ontic basis. In this relation, it would be helpful to consider the case of the "embodiment of deeds".

The rewards that God promises to grant us in heaven—streams of honey and blissful wines—are not the products of plants and animals such as is the case in this world. It is rather our beliefs, disposition, and conduct that take the form of such rewards. In the Noble Qur'an, God says,

تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ..

You will be requited with what you used to do. (52: 16; 66:7; 37:39).

The verse doesn't read "You will be requited for what you used to do" but "...with what you used to do." As such, the requital is the deed itself; what we will encounter in the Hereafter is precisely what we do in this world. When a believer helps one in need, the spiritual reality of this deed—as specified by Revelation—takes a certain form in the Hereafter, and it is this form that constitutes one's reward.

When one lies, the spiritual manifestation of the lie is one's punishment in the Hereafter. This example serves to illustrate that religious instructions, though composed of a body of obligations and prohibitions in the form of canon, are nevertheless possessed of a reality that underlies their canonical expression.

An examination of the various stages of the existential order would help to clarify this concept. These stages in the order of the Arc of Ascent are (1) the world of matter, (2) the imaginary realm, (3) the realm of the detached intellects, and (4) ultimately union with God.

This order starts from the lowest stage and ends at the meta-perfect. The stages of the human being's ascent toward God consist of these existential stages. The human being must put these stages behind, one after the other, so as to attain to infinity, which is union with God.

This hierarchy is such that the stages are existentially connected without any possibility of intermittence. Each higher level is the transcending reality of the lower level, just as each lower level is the diluted reality of the higher level. As such, these levels constitute a continuous existential path that allows of no gap. God thus asserts this truth:

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا

Has there been for the human being a period of time when he was nothing worthy of mention?
(76: 1).

Of course, the answer is, yes. The human being was initially nothing (this refers to the starting point in the Arc of Ascent). Then God created him and made him a creature worthy of mention. Thereafter God taught the human being that he is on a rapid course toward his Lord:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

O human being, you are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him.
(84:6).

A close analysis of the meaning of *kadh* (translated above as "laboring") in this verse proves that union with God is attainable only by way of a continuous path free of any disruption. Were the boundary between the material realm and the imaginary realm closed?

Were the imaginary realm and the realm of detached intellectuality separated by a gap, were there no way to divine union from the realm of detached immateriality—if such were so, the word *kadh* would have been inappropriate. (I will not delve any further into this etymological discussion as it would cause us to digress needlessly.)

As explicated above, the cosmos contains a hierarchical order of existence, each level of which is existentially connected with the preceding and subsequent levels. To convey how these levels are connected, the Qur'an describes the higher levels as managing the affairs of the lower ones (*mudabbirat amr*), at the same time pointing out that all beings, regardless of their existential rank, humbly praise and

obey God, their Creator.

This description reinforces the conception that the creatures of the loftier realms preside causally over the creatures of the lower realms and that, naturally, the creatures of the lower realms are effects caused by those of the higher realms. Thus the Qur'an illustrates the connection present in the hierarchy of existence.

It is this angelic matrix—firm and interconnected as it is—that permeates the entire cosmos. In this light, even the most insignificant of phenomena, which most people may overlook as fortuitous, rests on firm existential bases.

As such, religion and any other truth related to the divine must not be taken at face value, for beyond their exoteric dimension lie existential truths. In other words, all the moral and legal articles of faith, on the one hand, presuppose existential criteria and, on the other hand, lead to existential rewards or punishments.

Based on the foregoing explanation, the entrance of Revelation or, generally, any divine truth, while supported with such firm existential foundations, into the social realm cannot in anyway diminish its sanctity.

Furthermore, Revelation sanctifies the believers who embrace it. For this reason, mundane phenomena when associated with the divine acquire sanctity. Dirt, for instance, is ubiquitous and worthless. Yet when it comes into contact with Imam Husayn's body, it is no longer mere dirt; it is now the *turbah* of Husayn and as such sacred and a source of healing. The same holds true of the blessed water of Zamzam.

This truth even applies to such seemingly brute activities as coitus. All marine and land animals mate in order to procreate. But when the act of mating is performed by a believing couple who have observed its ritual requirements, coitus is no longer a spasm of sensuality but a sacred tradition³⁰ and a cause for preserving one's faith. The Prophet said,

*He who marries has indeed secured half of his religion.*³¹

For the purpose of this intercourse is more than just satisfying carnal lust. It is thus that the coming together of the male and the female in this form acquires sanctity.

In these examples, the material components are mediocre, but through association with divine elements they transcend their material fate and thus acquire sanctity.

Another interesting example in this relation is the Ahl al-Bayt's treatment of the poor seeking help from them. In Islam, a poor soul seeking one's help is portrayed as God's agent:

Indeed a poor soul is an agent from God. He who rejects the poor soul is as though he has rejected

God, and he who gives to the poor soul is as though he has given to God. [32](#)

For this reason, on encountering a poor person who sought their help, they would take his hand into theirs and after giving something to him would kiss his hand and place it on their head as a token of respect. While doing so they would quote this verse:

أَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ يَقْبَلُ التَّوْبَةَ عَنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَأْخُذُ الصَّدَقَاتِ

Do they not know that it is God who accepts the repentance of His servants and receives the charities. (9: 104) [33](#).

Thus they would kiss the poor person's hands as though it were God's hands receiving charity from them. In this instance, it was the identification of the hands of the poor with God's hands that conferred sanctity. And for the same reason, after raising their hands in supplication to God, they would rub their faces with their hands as if their hands had touched God.

Popular Acknowledgement Of Sacred Truths

Without doubt, the acquaintance of laypeople with religious and divine truths is very valuable. It was in fact the purpose of God's prophets to help people understand the truth of Revelation and to thus be guided to the Straight Path.

Many a faithful, prophets among them, sacrificed their lives for the sake of God and in the effort to inform people of God's instructions and to help them discover the essence of Revelation. In the Qur'an, God counts people's interest in and acceptance of Islam as an instance of divine succor, for which He orders the Prophet to praise and glorify Him:

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ

When God's help comes along with victory, (110: 1).

وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا

And you see the people entering God's religion in throngs, (110:2).

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا

Then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and plead to Him for forgiveness. Indeed He is most

clement. (110:3).

In spite of the importance that Islam assigns to the guidance of humankind, it does not make the value of religious sanctities contingent on whether people endorse them or not. People's acceptance of a truth's sanctity does not reinforce it, just as their rejection does not diminish it.

This is because religious truths, as elucidated above, derive their sanctity from the inextinguishable source of existential reality. As such, they do not descend to the level of the mundane, should people cease to acknowledge their sanctity.

The false notion that sanctity is a quality bestowed by people is founded on the invalid premise that sanctity is a product of human imagination and superstition and as such religious sanctities are merely subjective.

But Islam refutes this notion, instead articulating the firm and ontic foundations of sanctity. Therefore, the value of sacred truths connected with Revelation is in no way influenced by whether people accept them or not.

Islam's Treatment Of Environmental Concerns

In the pure religion decreed by God (which has throughout history been revealed in a variety of forms to numerous prophets) observing environmental principles and preventing any harm to the environment have been invariably introduced as primary human rights as well as fundamental human obligations.

Now, considering the religious nature of environmental concerns, it remains to be seen how religious instructions relate to the products of human intellectual achievements in the humanistic and scientific disciplines.

One of the duties of the Noble Prophet, in addition to conveying the verses of the Qur'an, was to explicate and interpret them. This duty was taken up by the Infallible Imams, who would strongly encourage their followers to pursue the study of religion in depth. Imam Al-Ridha' said,

It is upon us to convey the general principles, and it is upon you to derive [conclusions therefrom]³⁴.

This assertion is not restricted to the science of jurisprudence, usul, or the other religious disciplines. It applies to every field of knowledge, whether religious, empirical, abstract, or a combination of the latter two. In other words, it includes the humanistic and the scientific disciplines.

Another subtle point one may derive from the above hadith is that gaining proficiency in a field of knowledge is an obligation. The expression used in the hadith is not "for you" but "upon you," which signifies obligation. (Of course, there are two possibilities in understanding obligation in this context.

It could refer to an obligation binding on every individual, or it could be an obligation on Muslims at large,

meaning that some Muslims, but not all, must pursue knowledge to the highest levels.) Thus Muslims are to learn every advantageous field of knowledge, which includes the disciplines related to securing a wholesome environment.

To pursue knowledge concerning environmental issues, we must learn the general principles to then derive the particulars therefrom. But how is this to be done? To this end, it is necessary to make the sciences religious, and to achieve this, first the philosophy of science must be converted. The conversion of the philosophy of science, in turn, requires the conversion of metaphysics.

Metaphysics, the foundation of the human being's worldview, is born free; at its genesis, it is free, neither Islamic nor non-Islamic; it is human prejudices occasioned by social life that fetter it. Thus, it is only after being systematically formulated that it is characterized as religious or secular. To stray from the Straight Path, to refute the Origin and the Resurrection, and to see the world as confined to the material:

وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلَّا الدَّهْرُ

They say, "There is nothing but the life of this world: we live and we die, and nothing but time destroys us" (45:24).

mark one's philosophy as secular. But even the secularist is not secular from the start. Initially, he seeks to fathom reality and as such is not a secularist, but being muddled in a secular frame of mind compels one to embrace a secular philosophy.

A religious frame of mind, however, leads one to a religious philosophy of science and, as a result, one's study of the environment also becomes religious, and this extends to include all the sciences. With such a perspective, one no longer views the world as merely nature but rather as God's creation. And in this way, one succeeds in apprehending the relationship between the human being and nature satisfactorily.

God created nature for the sake of the human being and obliged him to protect it, while affirming the presence of a true interaction between human conduct and natural phenomena:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

If the people of the towns had believed and been Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings. (7:96).

The human being is a part of the world of creation. Just as natural phenomena impact human conduct and thought, the opposite is also true: human conduct, belief, and thought influence the way natural phenomena unfold, for it is God who directs the entire cosmos. Imam Al-Sadiq said,

There is not a single drop of rain descending from the heaven but that an angel accompanies it, placing it where it had been predestined for. [35](#)

This is confirmed by the Qur'an:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ

Do they not see that We carry water to the parched earth. (32:27).

The General Guidelines Of Islam For Pursuing The Sciences

Islam, though honoring the epistemic contributions of reason and sensory experience and considering them necessary in securing equitable peace and civilized culture, deems them insufficient for fully satisfying the theoretic and practical needs of humankind. Thus, it is necessary that we should consider the role of religion in delimiting the boundaries of the various disciplines.

To this end, we must first answer this question: Were the contributions of the divine prophets limited to expressing ritual duties, moral precepts, and law? Or did they also offer principles for pursuing scientific, cosmologic, political, military, economic, sociologic, and environmental concerns? In other words, does Revelation encompass all theoretic and practical principles on which human knowledge and virtue may be constructed?

To the above questions, we must answer in the positive. Revelation not only encourages humankind to pursue knowledge and seek scientific advancement, it also propounds the general guidelines for many of the sciences, including such practical disciplines as pertain to technological and military issues.

Of course, there is one point here that must be pointed out. Different topics are treated by Revelation to different extents. The rituals, for instance, are treated at length, their code of practice and, occasionally even, their secrets being elaborated or implied. (In Islam such elaboration occurs in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, which, in the Shia school, consists of the example and instructions of the Infallibles.)

In other cases, however, Revelation only offers the general principle, which serves as the basis for a scientific or philosophic concept, without expounding the details concerning its conditions and qualifications. An instance of the latter is the legal discussion regarding financial and social transactions in Islamic law.

Those familiar with Islamic law acknowledge that there are very few precepts in Islam's religious texts dealing with legal issues as opposed to the rituals. Islamic law is distinguished for its difficulty, on the one hand, in having few religious precepts to draw on but, on the other hand, abundant rational principles, whose systematic composition and examination form a demanding task.

On the contrary, however, the difficulty in the study of Islamic rituals lies in the abundant transmitted material and the scarcity of rational principles relevant thereto, which renders the task of understanding the transmitted sources arduous and intellectually demanding. In spite of this major difference, however, both sets of discussions are religious in nature.

There are two elements, either of which may cause a topic to be characterized as religious. The first and the principal element is that the topic in question be originated by Revelation. This element forms the basis in large part of the rituals. The second element is the sanction that Revelation extends to an existing practice, which indicates its conformity with Islam's value system. It is in this sense that many of the topics in Islam's legal code can be described as religious.

It is important to point out that Islamic disciplines are not restricted to the very few studied in the Islamic seminaries. For, on the one hand, many of the Islamic disciplines are studied in other academic centers and, on the other, certain disciplines studied in the Islamic seminaries, such as Arabic literature, though serving as preliminaries for understanding religious texts, are not by nature Islamic.

Thus, if we are justified in classifying such disciplines as *usul al-fiqh* among the Islamic studies, the same status should be awarded to many scientific and humanistic disciplines.

Based on the above conclusion, we may make the following observation. A discipline's Islamicness is proportionate to its epistemic justification. That is, if a discipline is based on definite grounds, it is undoubtedly Islamic. But if it is partially hypothetical, then it's being Islamic is merely a possibility.

This is the same approach that we take in ranking the traditional Islamic disciplines. In the study of Islamic ritual, law, and ethics or of Qur'anic commentary and the Sunnah, the degree of a rule is dependent on its verifiability. For this reason, it would not harm Islam should a certain theory be proven wrong, for that would only demonstrate the error in attributing it to Islam.

The discipline of *usul al-fiqh*, with the vast proportions it has taken on, is deduced from a mere handful of Qur'anic verses and hadiths, while the religious texts contain numerous references to the various scientific and humanistic disciplines, from which we may obtain a great wealth of knowledge concerning the various subjects related to the world of creation.

Thus, in view of the success in formulating *usul al-fiqh*, Muslim scholarship can through examination of the Qur'anic verses and hadiths dealing with the heavens and the earth, water and air, and taking into account the efficient and teleological causal orders of the cosmos incorporate many of the so-called secular disciplines into the scope of the sacred sciences.

As an example, let us consider this verse:

وَاللَّهُ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ

God sends down water from the sky with which He revives the earth after its death. There is indeed a sign in that for people who hearken. (16:65).

The following are among the topics one may infer from this verse: the natural process of rainfall, the earth's revival, the fruition of trees, the preparation of nourishment for living creatures, and the blossoming beauty of nature. This verse goes beyond talk of the awakening of trees to mention the revival of the dead earth, a revival that is effected through the absorption of its nutrients by plants.

To carry out the same examination on the many verses and hadiths related to agriculture, aquaculture, meteorology, mineralogy, and the numerous related sub-disciplines would yield a great abundance of knowledge.

For carrying out such an examination on the verses of the Qur'an, one must observe the following guidelines.

- 1) Each related verse must be analyzed independently.
- 2) The meanings of the words of a given verse must be meticulously studied.
- 3) One must make sure that the meanings attributed to a verse conform to common sense and are not farfetched.
- 4) It is important that the whole meaning of the verse comply with the meanings of the constituent words.
- 5) The opinions of all Qur'anic commentators, old and recent alike, as far as they are accessible, should be studied.
- 6) Their views should be duly examined and, where possible, reconciled.
- 7) The other related verses should also be adduced.
- 8) The hadiths reported in the Shia corpus related to the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses should be consulted.
- 9) In this process, the definitive products of rational reasoning and empirical investigation must not be neglected, for they serve as external modifiers.

After carefully following these steps, one may then come to a certain conclusion as to the meaning of a verse. It is important that our endeavor, whether based on empirical investigation or rational reasoning, should yield such a conclusion as to assure our faith in God.

The Conclusiveness Of Systematic Rational Reasoning

Systematic rational reasoning is conclusive. When one comes to a conclusion, whether a believer or a

nonbeliever, by way of valid ratiocination on a subject—be it biology, botany, pharmacology, zoology, geology, oceanography, or cosmology—one is religiously justified in holding that conclusion.

If a believer reaches a conclusion concerning the religious rituals in this way, he would be rewarded for complying with the conclusion or punished for defying it. If, however, a nonbeliever arrives at a reasoned conclusion, his burden of guilt would be alleviated on the Day of Judgment should he comply with the verdict of reason, whereas his noncompliance would exacerbate his punishment. For, nonbelievers, like believers, are bound by religious obligation.

Thus if a scientist's studies lead him to the conclusion that he should design a certain dam, which would, in addition to preserving rainwater, improve social wellbeing, prevent natural disasters, better the environmental state, help in the development of agriculture and industry, and provide drinking water for people, he should do as his studies have directed him.

But should he fail to carry out his findings, he would incur divine punishment. He would not be justified in arguing that the Qur'an and the Sunnah do not specify the making of dams as obligatory, for he is guided by reason, and so his sin would be inexcusable.

This explanation makes clear that just as in the case of complying with the views of a religious expert, so to heed the professional view of an expert in any field involves two goods if the expert is correct (those are, one, abiding by what one assumes to be true and, two, doing what is right), but if the expert is incorrect, there would still be one good (abiding by what one assumes to be true).

On the other hand, to neglect an expert's view, even if he should be wrong, would characterize one as rebellious against God, though not constituting a canonic sin. In this respect, whether the expert is a believer or not makes no difference.

What is important is knowledge. To know is an instance of divine activity, and knowledge is divine evidence. Just as knowledge forms logical evidence, so it is [tantamount to] religious evidence as well that one holds before God.

From a canonic point of view, certain trips may be defined as sinful and thus forbidden. One cause that may lead to the sinfulness of a trip is to set out knowing that that the caravan one travels in may be threatened by bandits.

This is an example that was true in pre-modern times. A relevant example today would be if an expert, based on his professional view, declared a flight dangerous. To defy his professional view and take that flight would constitute an instance of sinful trip, regardless of whether the expert is Muslim or not.

In this light, any theory that by the direction of reason becomes knowledge is religiously binding. But the important observation to make here is that sensory experience is not the sole means of attaining knowledge.

Thus the materialist is not justified in rejecting supplication to God for rain as superstition. Many a truth is beyond the purview of empirical science. The empirical sciences are only entitled to make positive statements regarding phenomena. They cannot legitimately make negative statements.

Through empirical investigation one may conclude that a certain experiment proves a certain conclusion. One, however, would be wrong to claim that the way to bring about the conclusion in question is restricted to that employed in one's experiment, for empirical investigation is incapable of exhaustively studying the ways that lead to a result.

This explanation should suffice to demonstrate that all sciences are Islamic. There are no non-Islamic sciences. Thus such questions as "What distinguishes Islamic physics from non-Islamic physics?" are fundamentally flawed. When one studies any part of the cosmos—whether it is the depths of the earth or the highest reaches of the firmament, whether it is the sea or the land—one is ultimately studying the book of God's creation and His activity.

Moreover, all scientific ventures succeed by the aid of reason, which is God's proof, and as such we study God's activity through the medium of His proof. And taking into account the efficient and telic designs of the world, we are yet further guided as to the Islamic nature of all the sciences.

We take the sanctity of the Qur'an for granted, yet should we reject its Origin of Revelation, on the one hand, and its teleology (which points to the direction of Resurrection), on the other, we would reduce it to a mere Arabic text.

In such a scenario, one would be justified to claim, after studying its literary aspects that the Qur'an is neither Islamic nor non-Islamic, but such a claim would presuppose the rejection of the Origin and the End of the Qur'an and put it on a par with any other Arabic text.

In this respect, the book of existence (the cosmos) is akin to the book of Revelation (the Qur'an). The earth and the skies, the mountains and the plains, the plants and the animals—these are the pages of God's book of existence. Whether the human being ascends to the heights of the firmament or descends to the depths of the seas, God's decree is one and the same, for ultimately He is the One Origin:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي فِي السَّمَاءِ إِلَهٌ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَهٌ

It is He who is God in the sky, and God on the earth. (43:84).

Just as moving to the other planets would not alter the meaning of the Qur'an or canon, so regarding the Origin and the End of the cosmos, nothing is alterable.

Pure Reason As A Source For Canon

There is a reciprocal relationship between intellect and tradition³⁶. Once this relationship is brought to light, it is futile to attempt to set them at odds. The religious texts of Islam express the importance of intellect in both its practical and theoretic functions:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

It is God who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them, that you may know that God has power over all things, and that God comprehends all things in knowledge. (65: 12).

According to this verse, the purpose in the creation of the cosmos is so that the human being may acquire knowledge. As it is the theoretic intellect that enables thought and cognition, one may conclude that the fulfillment of the cosmic purpose rests on the intellect. Thus human beings can realize their purpose of creation only if they duly employ their capability of thought, thereby uncovering the truths of the world.

The Qur'an also underscores the function of the practical intellect. God says,

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me. (51:56).

This verse indicates that the purpose in the creation of the human being and the jinn is that they may worship God. Worship and obedience are consequent on a righteous and valid intention, which is a product of the practical intellect. Were the human being incapable of harboring righteous intentions within his soul by seeing beyond the material, worship and obedience would lack their proper meaning. As such, the cosmic purpose rests also on the practical intellect.

It should be pointed out that the duality of the theoretic and the practical intellects do not imply conflict. Each intellect has a positive entity functioning in its own jurisdiction, and two positive entities never come into conflict. That is, the affirmation of one does not lead to the negation of the other.

But religious texts go further than just commending the intellect. Islam also teaches the right direction that thought should take and the correct method by which it should detect valid intentions. As such Revelation does not leave the intellect to its own devices but rather shows it the right methods by which it can discover the truths of which it is ignorant.

Let us now direct our attention to another important aspect of the relation between intellect and tradition. The epistemic value of the intellect is so great that it is considered on a par with tradition as a source for canon. This assessment of the intellect is based on the following four factors:

- 1) The essence of canon is divine decree;
- 2) Divine decree in turn derives from God's will;
- 3) The only legitimate sources for revealing God's will are those recognized by canon;
- 4) The sources recognized by canon are two: intellect and tradition.

The conclusion that the above premises lead to is that intellect, like tradition, is a valid source for fathoming divine decree and, consequently, God's will. This analysis renders the intellect comparable to tradition.

This line of reasoning also clarifies the absence of any sort of discrepancy between the intellect and tradition. The content of a rational reasoning as well as that of a traditional reasoning constitutes an article of faith.

To consider this consistency between intellect and tradition would clarify the error in drawing a line between ideology and methodology. Some have wrongly contended that religious ideology is propounded by God, while methodology falls within the jurisdiction of the intellect.

The error in drawing this line lies in the fact that regardless of whether a proposition is derived from tradition or the intellect, it is in either case a religious proposition, for canon confirms the intellect alongside of tradition. In other words, just as tradition is a source for canon, pure reason is likewise a source.

Whatever the content of a rational reasoning may be, it is of the same value as that derived from tradition. Thus the social and political concepts produced by apodictic reasoning are part of Islam's social and political systems, just as is the case in regard to the social and political concepts deduced from tradition.

There are a few points here that need be stressed. First, the intellect contrasts with tradition rather than religion. To classify concepts as either rational or religious is incorrect; a correct division would be between reason and tradition. Second, the legitimacy of rational reasoning is contingent on certain conditions, just as the legitimacy of tradition is thus contingent.

Third, one should not equate the intellect with such invalid methods of inference as analogy (qiyas). Rational reasoning informs legitimate deduction, while inference based on analogy is invalid. Fourth, the invalidity of inference based on analogy is not merely a matter of religious belief, for it is a matter that logic too affirms.

Making The Curricula Of Higher Learning Religious By Incorporating The Teachings Of Islam

For rendering the curricula of higher learning religious, the texts must be Islamicized. That is, the Origin and End of things must be taken into account. "God's creation" should supersede "nature." Currently, God has been supplanted by nature. Instead of speaking of a phenomenon as part of God's creation with an origin, from which it comes forth, and an end, toward which it progresses, it is said that nature requires such and such. When creation is the theme, God as the Creator figures in, and this is in turn followed by a sense of responsibility, while talk of nature implies no such responsibility.

Can the human being be accountable to nature? How is nature relevant to the afterlife? How vast is nature's sphere? Who created nature in the first place? If one talks of nature as an omniscient and omnipotent being that manages the world, one is in effect talking of God with a different name. If, however, nature is employed in another sense, then it is merely a delusive concept.

Should nature be replaced by God in higher education, the university disciplines would be as sacred as those pursued in Islamic seminaries. In the seminaries, it is God's word that constitutes the subject matter, while in the university it is His actions that are studied. This change of perspective vis-a-vis the world elevates the human being and infuses him with an angelic character. Such a change of mind would enable one to see things as deriving from God.

When one sees things in this light, one may then grasp both the natural and the supernatural ways in which God works. The normal way corresponds to God's general command, which informs the universal system of causality and which is manifest in the ordinary phenomena of nature. The supernatural ways are the miraculous divine workings, such as the navigation of Noah's Ark and the event of water gushing out of the furnace³⁷.

The Islamic Nature Of Nuclear Technology

As mentioned above, all sciences are Islamic, for there is no nonIslamic knowledge. The question that this may raise concerns the use of such harmful sciences as wizardry, in the traditional context, and the knowledge of manufacturing nuclear and chemical weapons, which threaten society and the environment. To address this question, it need be reiterated that science consists in discovering the relationships among phenomena, which are God's actions.

Thus, it is by no means objectionable to uncover the secrets within the atom. What is forbidden is to make inappropriate use of weapons of mass destruction. Otherwise, to develop such weapons for deterrent purposes is in some cases even necessary.

In the traditional context, for instance, though the learning of wizardry was deemed forbidden, it was sanctioned to employ it in order to counter those who exploited it with the intention of making false

claims to prophethood.

The Inclusive Treatment Of The Human Being And The World In The Qur'an And The Sunnah

The inclusive scope of Islamic knowledge confirms that the phrase *“It is upon us to convey the general principles, and it is upon you to derive [therefrom]”* pertains not only to the traditional Islamic disciplines studied in the seminaries but rather includes all sciences. The religious texts' treatment of topics concerning the world and the human being is no less than their treatment of canon.

Thus, just as Islamic scholars employ rational methods to derive certain key principles to apply to the study of canon, so the same rational methods should be used in the way of understanding the verses and hadiths that address the issues of the human being and the world to derive solutions to questions concerning cosmology, ethics, history, technology, and ecology.

But when we say that sciences are Islamic, this should not give rise to the expectation that the detailed formulas of a given science should be furnished by religious texts. Should Revelation provide detailed formulas, there would be no room for scientific progress. Islam establishes the principles.

From these principles the experts can arrive at a variety of conclusions. It is the faithful experts that should guarantee the intellectual progress of human society. Scientists are in effect the empirical interpreters of the Qur'an, should they conform science to Islam's value system.

The Role Of Revelation In Complementing And Perfecting Reason

Reason and Revelation are complementary. Though apodictic reason is a sufficient means for grasping the general principles, divine Revelation as a more perfect form of knowledge is necessary to fathom the truths of the cosmos fully.

Thus, that which reason comprehends, Revelation confirms, and that which reason cannot reach, Revelation sheds light on. By unearthing the knowledge dormant in the human soul, Revelation actualizes our potential knowledge and brings to light those truths of which we only have a vague perception.

In this way, Revelation compensates for reason's deficiency. In a speech, the Master of the Faithful explains the role of God's prophet's vis-a-vis human understanding:

God raised prophets among them...that they [i.e., prophets] should unearth for them [i.e., humankind] the intellect's deposits and show them the proportioned signs.

Thus the intellect blossoms in the light of divine Revelation, and, drawing nourishment from its celestial teachings becomes luminous.

Revelation's Emphasis On The Relation Of Phenomena To The Origin

Revelation is the word of the Supreme Being who comprehends fully the entire world of existence. From Him issues an infinite and encompassing unity that is the cosmos. As such the cosmos is a single, genuine system. Thus when God speaks of a phenomenon, he does so in such a way as would aptly reflect His connection with the cosmos and emphasize its continuous attachment to the Origin.

The Qur'an, when describing a phenomenon, tends to illustrate clearly its relation to the Origin and so does not bother with such pedantic descriptions as concern the material and formal causes, or the genus and the differentia. It transcends such material confines, disregarding the mundane and material evolution of phenomena.

Neglecting The Efficient And Teleological Causal Orders In The Scientific And Humanistic Disciplines

Some of the scientific and humanistic disciplines take on the task of tracing the evolutionary trajectory of phenomena, starting from the past and going into the future. In so doing, they merely content themselves with the linear development of a phenomenon.

In other words, they consider only the internal causal system of phenomena, neglecting their efficient and teleological orders. For instance, when explaining the stages of a mineral's development in the earth's crust, they treat of the various stages of its development but fail to examine the question of its creator, the Ultimate Origin of things, which is necessary in its existence, free of any need and which fulfills the needs of all creatures.

Likewise, there is no treatment of the teleological system in phenomena. Scientists neglect the question of purpose in the development of phenomena: that a phenomenon's purpose is an external destination toward which it advances; that this is the case concerning all phenomena, but as regards the Necessary Existent, the purpose is one with its essence without any external objective; that the essence of the Necessary Existent is the ultimate purpose toward which all creatures strive.

Thus the sciences conduct their studies while evading the question of the Origin and the End. That is, they deprive phenomena of the status of creaturehood and as such disfigure their identity. And in thus depriving phenomena of their divine identity, the sciences commit sacrilege.

The Ramification Of Neglecting The Efficient And Teleological Causal Orders: A Defective Understanding Of The Secrets Of The World

To examine the internal causal order of things in isolation of the efficient and teleological causal orders produces a defective description of the world. This defective description lacks many of the valuable benefits of truly knowing the secrets of the world, resulting in innumerable sins, clear examples of which

abound in the modern world, which boasts of reason without Revelation and science without intellection.

Divine Revelation, however, describes phenomena as symbols that signify the Origin. While touching on the internal causal order in things, the Qur'an also takes into account the efficient and teleological causal orders. In so doing, it perfects the linear [horizontal) description by combining it with a vertical description.

Revelation presents the efficient and teleological causal orders as two strong wings that could attach to the internal causal order, thus enabling the sciences (and certain humanistic disciplines) to fly free of the confines of stagnancy to achieve vigor and progress. With this new perspective, the human being will find the illimitable vista of divine cosmology before him.

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it. (20:50).

This short verse concisely introduces all three orders. "Our Lord" is the origin of all things; "who gave everything its creation" is indicative of the internal equipment with which God has endowed every creature; and "then guided it" is a reference to the teleological order, the final end toward which God directs all creatures.

This treatment of all three systems is evident throughout the Noble Qur'an. By juxtaposing the internal order with the efficient and teleological orders, God elevates science to the status of intellection, knowledge to the status of insight, and thought to that of spiritual unveiling.

In this way, the findings of the theoretic intellect are put to action by the aid of the practical intellect, and thus subjective concepts are transformed to objective reality. Through this transformation, the expert is converted to the devout, the theorist to the practicing, and in this way pure reason [and true intellection] is invigorated and matured.

Let us now take a look at a few instances of how science may come to fruition by the light of Revelation.

The Internal, Efficient, And Teleological Orders In The Heavens

Regarding the creation of the heavens and their steadiness without any perceptible pillars, the creation of the stars and their arrangement, and the course of the sun and the moon, the Qur'an asserts:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي رَفَعَ السَّمَاوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّكُمْ تُوقِنُونَ

God is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that you see, and He is firm in power and He made the sun and the moon subservient (to you); each one pursues its course to an appointed time; He regulates the affair, making clear the signs that you may be certain of meeting your Lord. (13:2).

This verse, while mentioning the internal order of the heavens and the stars, treats also of their efficient and teleological orders by speaking of divine unity and the return of all things to Him.

The Three Orders In The Earth

Concerning the expansion of the earth, the raising of the mountains, which function like plugs in steadying the earth, and how the trees produce myriad fruit from the same material present in the soil and the same water, the Qur'an states,

وَهُوَ الَّذِي مَدَّ الْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنْهَارًا وَمِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ جَعَلَ فِيهَا زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ ۗ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

And He it is Who spread the earth and made in it firm mountains and rivers, and of all fruits He has made in it two kinds; He makes the night cover the day; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. (13:3).

وَفِي الْأَرْضِ قِطْعٌ مُتَجَاوِرَاتٌ وَجَنَّاتٌ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَزَرْعٌ وَنَخِيلٌ صِنْوَانٌ وَعَيْرٌ صِنْوَانٌ يُسْقَى بِمَاءٍ وَاحِدٍ وَنُفْضِلُ بَعْضَهَا عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الْأُكْلِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

And in the earth there are tracts side by side and gardens of grapes and corn and palm trees having one root and (others) having distinct roots-- they are watered with one water, and We make some of them excel others in fruit; most surely there are signs in this for a people who understand. (13:4).

أَإِذَا كُنَّا تُرَابًا أَأَنْتَا لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ الْأَغْلَالُ فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ ۗ وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

And if you would wonder, then wondrous is their saying: What! When we are dust, shall we then certainly be in a new creation? (13:5).

These two verses touch on the internal order in earthly blessings. But in addition, the verses allude to the efficient and teleological orders of things, that is, to their Origin and End. The two verses, however, treat the efficient order differently. In verse 3, unity leads to plurality: God creates the earth and expands

it and implants therein mountains and puts streams into motion. In verse 4, it is the opposite.

In the latter verse, unity results from plurality. That is, the diverse plants and fruits, which are nourished by the same soil and water, compel one to acknowledge the One God. This is followed by the mention of Resurrection and revival following death.

But the important point to be heeded in such verses is that creatureness is an integral part of the essence of the earth and all phenomena. It is impossible to understand something without taking into account an integral part of its essence, and thus to comprehend phenomena one must know God, whose activity is invariably purposeful.

The Three Orders In Livestock

In explaining the produce of cattle, husbandry, exploiting livestock, and the beauty in the journey of herds to and from the grazing land, the Qur'an says,

وَالْأَنْعَامَ خَلَقَهَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا دِفْءٌ وَمَنَافِعُ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ

And He created the cattle for you; you have in them warm clothing and (many) advantages, and of them do you eat. (16:5).

وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا جَمَالٌ حِينَ تُرِيحُونَ وَحِينَ تَسْرَحُونَ

And there is beauty in them for you when you drive them back (to home), and when you send them forth (to pasture). (16:6).

وَتَحْمِلُ أُنْفُسَكُمْ إِلَىٰ بَلَدٍ لَّمْ تَكُونُوا بِالْغَيْبِ إِلَّا بِشِقِّ الْأَنْفُسِ إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ لَرَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

And they carry your heavy loads to regions which you could not reach but with distress of the souls; most surely your Lord is Compassionate, Merciful. (16:7).

وَالْخَيْلَ وَالْبِغَالَ وَالْحَمِيرَ لِتَرْكَبُوهَا وَزِينَةً وَمَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

And (He made) horses and mules and asses that you might ride upon them and as an ornament; and He creates what you do not know. (16:8).

In these verses, in addition to the internal order at work in the breeding and raising of livestock, allusion is made to the efficient order–divine agency. A few verses later, the teleological order is also mentioned:

فَالَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ مُنْكَرَةٌ وَهُمْ مُسْتَكْبِرُونَ

Those who do not believe in the Hereafter, their hearts are amiss, and they are arrogant. (16:22).

Thus, when studying phenomena, we must take into account the efficient and teleological orders.

The Three Orders In The Formation Of Clouds And Rain

The formation of clouds; the falling of rain and hail, the distribution of water, the brilliance of lightening, the succession of day and night, the creation of animals—these are the themes expressed in the following verses:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُزْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكَّامًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خَالِهِ وَيُنزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ جِبَالٍ فِيهَا مِنْ بَرَدٍ فَيُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَصْرِفُهُ عَنِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ يَكَادُ سَنَا بَرْقِهِ يَذْهَبُ بِالْأَبْصَارِ

Do you not see that God drives along the clouds, then gathers them together, then piles them up, so that you see the rain coming forth from their midst? And He sends down of the clouds that are (like) mountains wherein is hail, afflicting therewith whom He pleases and turning it away from whom He pleases; the flash of His lightning almost takes away the sight. (24:43).

يُقَلِّبُ اللَّهُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لَأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ

God turns over the night and the day; most surely there is a lesson in this for those who have sight. (24:44).

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَ كُلَّ دَابَّةٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى بَطْنِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى رِجْلَيْنِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَمْشِي عَلَى أَرْبَعٍ يَخْلُقُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

And God has created from water every living creature: so of them is that which walks upon its belly, and of them is that which walks upon two feet, and of them is that which walks upon four; God creates what He pleases; surely God has power over all things. (24:45).

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا آيَاتٍ مُبِينَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

Certainly We have revealed clear communications, and God guides whom He pleases to the right way. (24:46).

These verses talk of God as the efficient cause of the clouds. By describing these natural phenomena as God's signs and referring to the Straight Path that leads to the End, it reminds us of the teleological order.

Thus, the verses go further than speaking of the internal order in atmospheric phenomena and point to the efficient cause of all things, which is the head of the hierarchy of causality, as well as to their teleological order, which consists of the sequence of purposes that are realized in the course of the Straight Path leading to the ultimate purpose of creation.

An Illustration Of The Flourishing Of Science Through The Guidance Of Revelation

At this point, it seems in order that we should illustrate how science can flourish when guided by Revelation.

1. Thought in the human being leads to power. But left to his own devices, the human being is incapable of distinguishing the legitimate purposes for which he may employ that power. This is where Revelation comes to the aid of reason. Revelation clarifies the legitimate purposes for power. As a general rule, the Qur'an asserts,

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ تَرَاهُمْ رُكَّعًا سُجَّدًا يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا

Muhammad is the prophet of God and those who are with him are firm against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves (48:29).

This is a general guideline for how Muslims should use their material and spiritual resources.

2. After conferring on David the miraculous power to forge hard metal in the palm of his hands, God taught him that he should use this power in the way of preparing weapons for defense rather than destruction:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا يَا جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ وَالنَّا لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ

And certainly We gave to David (Dawood) excellence from Us: O mountains! Sing praises with him, and the birds; and We made the iron pliant to him, (34: 10).

أَنْ اْعْمَلْ سَابِغَاتٍ وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ وَاَعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

Saying: Make ample (coats of mail), and assign a time to the making of coats of mail and do good; surely I am Seeing what you do. (34: 11).

The important point in these verses is that from the most destructive implements, the most productive defensive weapons should be built; the most aggressive resources should be utilized to produce the most effective defenses. The Qur'an describes iron as a source of both might and humanitarian benefits:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ

And We sent down iron, in which there is great might and benefits for humankind. (57:25).

As is evident, the verse underscores the humanitarian benefits that can be derived from iron, to the exclusion of the destructive and lethal uses.

3. When war breaks out, arms trade flourishes. Secular powers, who exploit technology for their fleeting worldly benefits, seize war as an opportunity to increase their arms exports, providing weaponry to both sides of a conflict.

The Qur'an, however, condemns such opportunism and asserts that when two non-Muslim forces engage in war, Muslims are forbidden from selling destructive weaponry to them, though the Islamic government is allowed to provide the conflicting forces with means of defense.

Muhammad, son of Qays, once asked Imam Al-Sadiq whether or not Muslims were allowed to sell weapons to two non-Muslim groups engaged in war. The Imam replied, "Sell them what protects them: armors, shoes, and the like."[38](#)

Thus Islam prohibits people from exploiting the opportunity of war to foment death and destruction through arms trade or to take the side of a certain race or group to cultivate oppression. In the event of war, the noble-spirited, who are unaffected by greed, strive to prevent bloodshed and destruction. As such, they feel obliged to sell only means of defense, and that to both sides of the conflict.

4. In his letter to Malik Al-Ashtar, the Master of the Faithful expounded the model for a just and Godly state. In it, he explains how the ruler should enforce his authority within the bounds of justice. He writes,

Be not unto them as the beast of prey, lying in ambush to feed on them, for indeed they are of two sorts—either your brothers in faith or your peers in creation.[39](#)

In this political manifesto, which reflects divine Revelation, we witness the perfection of political science, as one of the humanistic disciplines originating in the practical intellect. Imam 'All restricts the function of politics within the bounds of justice, as a sacred boundary whose transgression even in dealing with non-Muslims is unpardonable. It is in this way that Revelation elevates political science and the other humanistic disciplines.

It is important that we realize the capacity of the Islamic Cultural Revolution in elevating the humanistic disciplines as well as the sciences to the heights of perfection, bearing in mind the themes discussed

above. To this end, it is necessary that we should, along with formulating the internal order of a field of knowledge, articulate its efficient and teleological orders, which entrench faith in divine Revelation, so that science would mature into intellection and professional expertise would embrace faith.

[1.](#) Risalih Dar Bab Insan p. 97.

[2.](#) Shur Javdangi, p. 28.

[3.](#) The faculty that apprehends particular, concrete concepts. [Tr.]

[4.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 896.

[5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 21, p. 248.

[6.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Aphorisms, no. 211.

[7.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Speeches, no. 129.

[8.](#) Reference to:

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ

When the sun is wound up (81:1).

[9.](#) Reference to:

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ

When the stars turn dark (81:2).

[10.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 54.

[11.](#) The Complete Sa'di, the Qasidahs.

[12.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 76, pp. 175–176.

[13.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 50.

[14.](#) In modern times, this would include the littering of any public place—parks, roads, rest areas, etc.

[15.](#) This item can be understood in a broad sense to include any violation of another's rights.

[16.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 1, p. 325.

[17.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 50.

[18.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 49.

[19.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 232.

[20.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 23.

[21.](#) Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam vol. 1, p. 145.

[22.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Epistles, no. 45.

[23.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Speeches, no. 183.

[24.](#) Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 209.

[25.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 70.

[26.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 84.

[27.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, p. 67.

[28.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 88.

[29.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 12, p. 11.

[30.](#) See Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 103, p. 220.

[31.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 103, p. 219.

[32.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Aphorisms, no. 304.

[33.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 9, pp. 433–435.

[34.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 27, p. 62.

[35.](#) Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih, vol. 1, p. 525.

[36.](#) I have rendered naql here as tradition, which denotes, in the Shia definition, the Qur'an along with the practical example as well as the sayings narrated from the Infallibles – the Prophet, his daughter and son-in-law and the eleven Imams from their progeny. [Tr.]

[37.](#) See Surah Hud, verses 40 and 41:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُّورُ قُلْنَا احْمِلْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ وَمَنْ آمَنَ ﴿٤٠﴾ وَمَا آمَنَ مَعَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ

Until when Our command came and water came forth from the valley, We said: Carry in it two of all things, a pair, and your own family – except those against whom the word has already gone forth, and those who believe. And there believed not with him but a few. (11:40).

وَقَالَ ارْكَبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا ﴿٤١﴾ إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

And he said: Embark in it, in the name of Allah be its sailing and its anchoring; most surely my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful. (11:41).

When we speak of water and wind, it is important that we should take into account their existential mission as ordained by God. The Qur'an states,

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَّاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ﴿٥٧﴾ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَقْلَّتْ سَحَابًا نَقَالًا سُفْنَاهُ لِيَلْدَ مِمَّيْتٍ فَأُنزَلْنَا بِهِ الْمَاءَ فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ

It is He who sends forth the winds as harbingers of His mercy. When they bear rain-laden clouds, We lead them toward a dead land and send down water on it, and with it We bring forth all kinds of crops (7:57).

God "sends forth," for He is the First, and "leads," as He is the Last.

[38.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 17, p. 102.

[39.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Epistles, no. 53.

Chapter 3: The Impact Of Human Conduct On Natural Phenomena

God has ordered humankind to develop the earth, providing the necessary equipment for this task in nature itself. For this purpose He has assigned two guides for the human being: the internal guide, which is reason, and the external guide, which is Revelation as conveyed through divine prophets.

The question that may be raised is, considering that God is the Creator of all things and the original agent of all activities in the cosmos, why then does He allow for natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, to reduce cities in a fraction of time to rubble?

This question may be thus rephrased in a more general fashion: How is evil attributable to God, and what is the role of the human being in this relation? Let us first consider a few preliminary points before getting to the answer.

1. The Importance Of This Topic

The question of evil is important in that, when misunderstood, it may undermine one's belief in such religious doctrines as divine unity in activity, divine justice, divine wisdom, and the best of all possible

worlds. It is this misunderstanding that has given rise to dualistic conceptions of the world as evident in certain religions as Zoroastrianism, which articulates independent demiurges for good and evil.

The examination of this question in relation to each of the abovementioned doctrines requires an independent discussion, for each doctrine has its distinct requirements. The doctrine we shall specifically take up here is divine unity in activity. That is, as believers in God's unity in agency, from whom all phenomena in the universe originate, how can we account for existential evil (natural disasters) and human evil (sin)?

2. The Relation Between Good And Existence And Between Evil And Nonexistence

Good is one with existence: every good is an instance of existence, and every instance of existence is good. Evil, however, is not identical with nonexistence; it is narrower in scope than nonexistence; every evil is nonexistence, but not every instance of nonexistence is evil. Put differently, evil is a thing's deprivation of that which it is by nature capable of possessing. Thus, good and evil, unlike existence and nonexistence, are not contradictories.

A distinction also must be drawn between good and advantage, on the one hand, and between evil and disadvantage, on the other hand. Good and evil describe the end of things, whereas advantage and disadvantage apply to a thing's course of progress.

On close analysis, it is made clear that advantage and disadvantage, like good and evil, can be traced back to existence and nonexistence, but in relation to the course of progress, not the end. Advantage and disadvantage are analogous to guidance and deviation, which contrast with felicity and doom. The latter two describe the end, whereas guidance (which reflects existence) and deviation (which reflects nonexistence) are compared in reference to the way.

Existence is either subjective or objective; so is nonexistence. Good and evil are also of two types. What concerns us here is objective good and evil. Subjective good and evil (which pertain to human actions) are based on the verdict of the practical intellect and as such apply to human values.

Objective good and evil, on the contrary, are the jurisdiction of the theoretic intellect. This distinction between the two types of good and evil is occasionally neglected, which may entail certain negative ramifications.

3. Absolute Or Relative Good And Evil

Good and evil are either absolute or relative. The good and evil in certain things are absolute, without requiring comparison; such as knowledge and ignorance. Some things, however, may be characterized as good or evil only after being compared; that is, they may be defined as evil solely when they are

viewed in a particular context; otherwise, they are good.

Examples of the latter are such predatory animals as snakes and scorpions, which are evil when their harm to human beings or other creatures is in question; otherwise, they are good.

This distinction is, of course, true only of good, for evil is invariably relative. A close consideration of this topic reveals that no creature is by nature evil. They are seen as evil only when their relation to certain other creatures is perceived.

4. The Criterion For Good And Evil

When judging between what is good and what is evil, we should be careful to avoid assigning the human being as the criterion. Good is not simply that which is advantageous to the human being, just as evil is not that which is disadvantageous to him. The human being is merely one member of the world of existence and as such is in no way superior to other creatures.

The source of a great many problem on the question of evil stems from comparing phenomena in relation to human advantage and disadvantage. But should our focus revolve round the universal order governing the cosmos, then all the phenomena which we assume to be evil on an individual and particular plain prove to be good in connection to the universe at large.

5. Good And Evil In The Qur'an

The Qur'an employs good and evil in some cases to describe human conduct, such as in this verse:

إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ

Indeed good removes evil. (11:114).

But in numerous occasions, these two terms apply to existential phenomena, such as in this case:

وَلَوْلَا هُمْ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

We have tried them with both prosperity and adversity: In order that they might turn (to us). (7:168).

6. Understanding The Difference Between "With God" And "From

God"

The Noble Qur'an, while affirming God's unity in activity, ascribes evil and sin to the human being. A careful study of the Qur'an [1](#) demonstrates that despite the universality of divine unity in activity, God is unstained by evil.

In the following two pivotal verses, the Qur'an offers a comprehensive and eloquent analysis of the origin of existential evil and its attribution to God:

يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَإِنْ تُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ قُلْ مِنْ كُلِّ مَنْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ فَمَالِ هَؤُلَاءِ الْقَوْمِ لَا يَكَادُونَ
يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا

If a benefit comes to them, they say: This is from Allah; and if a misfortune befalls them, they say: This is from you. Say: All is from Allah, but what is the matter with these people that they do not make approach to understanding what is told (them)? (4:78).

مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ

Whatever benefit comes to you (O man!), it is from Allah, and whatever misfortune befalls you, it is from yourself. (4:79).

On understanding the important points hidden within these two verses, especially the difference between "with God" (*min 'ind Allah*) and "from God" (*min Allah*), we may realize how good is both "from God" and "with God," whereas evil is merely "with God"; evil is not from God but from ourselves.

Those who lack firm faith form four different opinions when they encounter favorable and unfavorable events. One: When a distressing event occurs to others, they delight in having escaped from it:

فَإِنْ أَصَابَكُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالِ قَدْ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ إِذْ لَمْ أَكُنْ مَعَهُمْ شَهِيدًا

If then a misfortune befalls you he says: Surely Allah conferred a benefit on me that I was not present with them. (4:72).

Two: When others make a gain, they wish that they had shared m with them:

وَلَئِنْ أَصَابَكُمْ فَضْلٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ لَيَقُولَنَّ كَأَنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَهُ مَوَدَّةٌ يَا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ مَعَهُمْ فَأَفُوزَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا

And if grace from Allah come to you, he would certainly cry out, as if there had not been any

friendship between you and him: Would that I had been with them, then I should have attained a mighty good fortune. (4:73).

Three: Should they experience a favorable event, they say that it is "with God":

وَإِنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ حَسَنَةٌ يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ

If a benefit comes to them, they say: This is from Allah. (4:78).

They may also claim that the good is due to themselves (as in the case of believers of the time of Moses):

فَإِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ

But when good befell them they said: This is due to us. (7:131).

Four: But should they be confronted with an affliction, they attribute it to the prophets and the believers. The Qur'an states that at the time of the Prophet, certain people, when a distressing incident happened to them, would ascribe it to the Prophet:

وَإِنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ سَاءَ مَا يَقُولُوا هَذِهِ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ

And if evil befalls them, they say: This is from you. (4:78).

This has its precedence in the time of Moses, when some of his people declared him a bad influence:

وَإِنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَىٰ وَمَنْ مَعَهُ

And if evil afflicted them, they attributed it to the ill-luck of Musa and those with him. (7:131).

In response to such wrong reactions, the Qur'an distinguishes between evil and good, the former being "with God" but not "from God," whereas the latter is both "with God" and "from God." It is interesting to note that these verses are addressed to the Prophet, as if implying that those whose faith is weak and those who are superstitious are incapable of grasping such truths. Thus verse 78 ends with this phrase:

فَمَا لَهُمْ هُوَ لَاءِ الْقَوْمِ لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا

What is the matter with these people that they do not make approach to understanding what is

told (them)? (4:78).

Canonical Good And Evil

For the topic of good and evil, there are two contexts: canon and existence. In the context of canon, God enjoins good and forbids evil:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ

Indeed God enjoins justice and kindness and generosity toward relatives, and He forbids indecency, wrong and aggression (16:90).

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ

'Indeed God does not enjoin indecencies.' (7:28).

In Surah Isra¹, after enumerating a number of sins, the Qur'an asserts,

كُلُّ ذَلِكَ كَانَ سَيِّئُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ مَكْرُوهًا

The evil in all these is detestable to your Lord. (17:38).

As such, the evil in canonic sins is not from God, for He despises and forbids such evil. God's displeasure with and forbiddance of evil pertains solely to canonic, not existential, evil.

For, if God's forbiddance extended to existential evil, it would imply that His existential decree could be violated, which would entail the triumph of the sinful will of the human being and the defeat of the omnipotent will of God. This, in addition to being rationally implausible, is refuted by numerous hadiths.

A Classification Of Existential Evil

Existential evil is of two sorts. It may be a negative concept, that is, lack of existence and divine effusion, such as is the case as regards destitution, ignorance, and weakness. Or it may be a positive concept, which is brought about by certain causes; examples of the latter are flood, earthquake, and war.

Concerning the first sort, comprising negative concepts, there is no positive thing in the first place so as to give rise to the question of its ascription to God. For, negation and deprivation are not things to require a cause.

The question, however, that is pertinent regarding such evil is, why does God withhold His effusion? And an answer to this may be that unrighteous conduct on the part of the human being may be the cause of his deprivation.

The second sort is composed of two aspects: the aspect of existence and that of evil. In its aspect of existence, it is attributable to God, but in its aspect of evil, it is a product of human conduct. For, as explained in the preliminary points, existence and goodness are equivalent.

The trials and tribulations that afflict humankind, despite their inconvenience, are contingent existents that originate, immediately or otherwise, from the Necessary and Self-Sufficient Existent. As such, the existence of this type of evil, like that of the pleasurable experiences, is from God:

قُلْ كُلُّ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ

Say, 'All is with God.' (4:78).

And that which originates with God is good. It is the human being who, by failing to use such good, converts it to evil. For instance, when people "fail to construct dams to contain and store water, rain, which is a blessing from God, may turn into a devastating flood.

Or a nutritious and healthy food, if eaten to excess, may cause disease. In other words, it is God's perennial norm to perpetuate His effusion endlessly, unless the human being alters this by an evil choice.

To expound this topic, it is appropriate that we should examine two groups of Qur'anic verses. One group affirms the divine norm in perpetuation of God's blessings, while the other treats of the human being's changing God's blessings to suffering by misusing his freewill.

The Human Role In Turning Blessing Into Suffering

One of the principles articulated by the Qur'an is that God turns blessing into suffering only when people degenerate in their morals:

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَى قَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

That is because God never changes a blessing that He has bestowed on people unless they change what is in their own souls. (8:53).

The content of this verse verifies that that which is from God is blessing:

وَمَا بِكُمْ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ

Whatever blessing you have is from God. (16:53).

The human being, however, possesses volition. Thus, should he decide to employ a blessing appropriately, in addition to prolonging that particular blessing, he would also be granted other blessings as a reward. But, should he misuse a blessing, he would turn the blessing into suffering and in addition would cause the cessation of divine effusion.

Just as the human being is capable of transforming blessing to suffering, he can also through his power of will turn evil and suffering to good. As good is equivalent to existence, all good is both "with God" and "from God." Evil and suffering, however, are attributable to God only with respect to their existential aspect, which is blessing, and it is in this respect that they are "with God."

But with respect to their aspect of evil, they are not "from God" but are rather the doing of humankind. That evil and suffering are not "from God" is in no way contradictory to the doctrine of divine unity in activity, for evil is but privation and nonexistence, and God, the Immaculate, is free of privation.

It is for this reason that the Qur'an ascribes evil, affliction, and corruption in a number of verses to humankind:

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ

Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned (42:30).

أَوْلَمَّا أَصَابَتْكُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَدْ أَصَبْتُمْ مِثْلَيْهَا قُلْتُمْ أَنَّى هَذَا قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ

What! When a misfortune befell you, and you had certainly afflicted (the unbelievers) with twice as much, you began to say: Whence is this? Say: It is from yourselves; (3: 165).

فَأَصَابَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا عَمِلُوا وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ

So the evil (consequences) of what they did shall afflict them (16:34).

ظَهَرَ الْفُسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ

Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of what people's hands have earned. (30:41).

An observation of such verses verifies what is asserted in Surah Nisa¹: that good and evil, in respect to their existential origin, are both from God.

قُلْ كُلُّ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ

Say, 'All is with God.'(4:78).

Good in being blessing also has its origin in God

مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ

The good which visits you is from God (4:79).

But evil in being nonexistence and privation is caused by the human being:

وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ

And the evil which visits you is from yourself (4:79).

When Muslims defeated the infidels in the Battle of Badr, which was a great victory for the fledgling Muslim community, God addressed the Prophet in the following words:

لَيْسَ لَكَ مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ

There is no share for you in the matter. (3: 128).

We must strive to acquire the insight to realize that whatever we have and to whatever we attain, we are indebted to God's grace. For, all means of perfection—volition, willpower, reason, human nature, and Revelation are all from God. It is reported that in expressing his gratitude to God, Imam al-Sajjad said,

Whenever I say to You "Thanks," I am obliged on account of that to say to You again "Thanks." [2](#)

The human being is capable solely of serving as the conduit for manifesting Gods attributes, actions, and words. Otherwise, he has nothing of himself. This insight prevents one from falling into the abyss of conceit and arrogance. It is this simultaneous realization of perfection and humility that renders the spiritual wayfarer as the manifestation of God, for He is "low in His loftiness and lofty in His lowness."[3](#)

In one of his supplications, Imam al-Sajjad beseeches God, saying,

And endow me with the lofty states of virtue and secure me against arrogance.[4](#)

The Source Of Good And Evil

My late teacher, 'Allamah Tabaaba'i, considers at length the attribution of good and evil to God.[5](#) A summary of his discussion follows.

Good and evil are derived from the existential order. In the existential order, if a being enjoys internal harmony and possesses all that which it needs to fulfill its purpose, it is said to be good. But should imperfection afflict it, be it internal or external imperfection, leading to the disintegration of its internal harmony such that it could not fulfill its ontic purpose, it is said to be evil.

It is in this sense that justice and injustice apply to the order of existence. A tree that pursues its natural course of growth without being hindered by disease and comes to a timely fruition is just, whereas if it fails in fruition due to the disintegration of its internal coherence, it would be unjust:

كَلَّمَا الْجَنَّتَيْنِ آتَتْ أُكُلَهَا

Both gardens yielded their fruit without any injustice. (18:33).

The full fruition of trees in their due time is referred to in this verse as their being free of injustice.

Thus, good and evil in canon and law derive from the order of existence. When an action complies with canon, it is good; when it fails to comply, it is evil. Such compliance or noncompliance in the language of Revelation are expressed in such terms as "sanctioned" and "forbidden" or "obedience" and "disobedience."

The same case holds for social law. When an action conforms to the legal system of a society, which has as its purpose the collective welfare of society at large, it is good; if not, it is evil.

In this light, the phenomena that take place in the universe may be conducive to the individual and social wellbeing of the human being and lead to his comfort and health and uplift his hope; we describe such phenomena as good.

On the other hand, phenomena may sometimes prove distasteful to the human being for conflicting with his individual or social needs; we characterize such phenomena as evil.

The Best Of All Possible Worlds

The conclusion we may draw from the above explanation is that good and evil are relative concepts, which we arrive at by considering phenomena in relation to human felicity. As such, a phenomenon may

be evil for some people but good for others.

An example of this is executing the death penalty on a murderer, in which case it is good for the relatives of the murdered and evil for those of the murderer. But the existence of existential phenomena, without regard for such relative benefits, is absolutely good. Absolute evil does not exist in the existential order, for all phenomena are of God's creation:

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

God is creator of all things (39:62).

He has proportioned all things and placed them in their appropriate cosmic order

وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا

And He created everything, and then determined it in a precise measure (25:2).

–an order that gives phenomena the excellence we perceive in them:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ

Who perfected everything He created. (32:7).

Thus, every reality partakes of good to the extent its existential capacity allows, and all phenomena are arranged in a purposive order, in which they journey collectively toward the ultimate end:

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى

He said, "Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it." {20:50}.

In the light of this conception of the world, which the Qur'an articulates in a number of instances, the cosmos is good, beautiful, and excellent. Every creature reflects, in its own capacity, the beauty and magnificence of its Lord.

As such, there is no futile, evil, or extraneous thing in the cosmos. Just as Paradise is a beautiful sign of God's excellence, so Hell is also beautiful in its own right. The Qur'an counts Hell as among God's blessings:

هَذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي يُكَذِّبُ بِهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ

This is the Hell that the guilty would deny. (55:43).

يَطُوفُونَ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَ حَمِيمٍ آتٍ

They shall circuit between it and boiling hot water. (55:44).

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ

So which of your Lord's bounties do you deny? (55:45).

Even Satan and his devilish designs are on the whole good; Satan is the element that goes hand in hand with freewill to promote human perfection, to enable the human being to attain to the heights of divine viceroyalty and as such is good and beautiful.

This is when we consider the entirety of the existential order; otherwise, when comparing Hell with Paradise or Satan with the angels, we would undoubtedly find one beautiful and the other wicked.

The Relative Nature Of Evil

The evil in such phenomena as Hell and Satan is only relative. That is, their evil is due to the unrighteous choice of wrongdoers who decide to yield to Satan and condemn themselves to Hell. For the faithful, however, who opt for the path of the divine prophets and resist the temptations of Satan thus attaining to lofty stations of perfection, Hell and Satan are good.

The creatures that we perceive as harmful, such as the scorpion and the venomous snake, are good in their own existence. It is when they harm the human being that they are perceived as evil, and as such their evil is relative.

Such devastating phenomena as earthquakes and floods, which are caused by natural factors, are evil only for those who have deprived themselves of the wise teachings of God's prophets. Otherwise, the community of the faithful is capable of turning the destructive force of such phenomena into productive and energy-producing uses. Through science, the faithful can move away from the faults and build houses resistant to earthquakes and in this way avert their destructive force.

This observation shows that all creatures, irrespective of their relation to individual cases, are in and of themselves good. Evil is relative, and there is no absolute evil in phenomena. The evil certain phenomena inflict on a human being is really his mistake; otherwise, even the venomous snake is good and beautiful.

The Negative Nature Of Evil

Another explanation that an account for evil is that evil is no more than the negation of existence and actualization. That is, if an entity is capable of coming into existence or, when existent, of receiving certain perfection, but this does not materialize, the mind abstracts the concept of evil from such privation.

This also extends to a case where an entity is existent or in possession of perfection but then loses it. An observation of the instances of evil confirms this explanation, for where a thing is existent and partakes of the perfection that it naturally needs, the concept of evil is inapplicable.

It is for this reason that philosophers state that evil is "relatively existent" but "essentially nonexistent." As such, evil requires neither an agent nor an end. And in this light, it would be irrelevant to ask whether or not God is the origin of evil or, if not, whether or not the origination of evil in other than God would contradict divine unity in activity.

A World Without Evil

This, however, may raise a question. Granted that evil is essentially nonexistent, why should the world be arranged in such a way that certain creatures should be deprived of existence or an existential perfection so that evil could be conceived?

Couldn't the world have been fashioned in a way that no creature would be deprived of existence or an existential perfection? The answer proffered to such questions in philosophy postulates five general categories, into which all phenomena fit. (This categorization is based on a rational division and as such is exhaustive, for no other category is conceivable.)

An existent is either absolutely good or not; if not, it is either absolutely evil or not; if not (i.e., it is neither absolute good nor absolute evil), it is either such that its good is predominant or not; if its good is not predominant, then its good and evil are either equal or not.

Of these five categories, only two can be actualized. A thing whose evil is absolute {i.e., whether perceived in itself or in relation to other things or even in relation to its cause and effect, it is evil) is essentially impossible (for, its existence would involve its negation).

The category whose evil is predominant is also impossible to be actualized, for that would require giving precedence to that which is inferior. As regards the category whose good and evil are even, to actualize an entity of such description would be giving arbitrary precedence to one of two equals. According to this analysis, only two possibilities may be actualized: that which is absolute good and that whose good prevails.

Now to demonstrate that, in spite of the existing evil, our world is the best of all possible worlds, we must

consider the following two questions. First, why can the world not be made in such a way as to engender absolute good without any evil?

Second, assuming that all possible existents could not be absolute good, is it not possible for God to keep those things that do involve evil, though relatively little, out of the cosmic scheme, like the other three categories?

The answer to the first question is that a purely immaterial being is absolute good, for it is unstained by materiality and not prone to change. As such, it neither incurs harm nor inflicts harm on others.

For, in material beings are free of internal imbalance as well as external conflict. A material being, however, has potentialities that it needs to actualize. In this process of actualization, conflict with other material beings is inevitable, and as such evil, though little is necessary.

But as to the second question: To deprive of existence a thing whose good is predominant would be giving precedence to that which is inferior (in this case, evil is inferior and good superior). This would amount to taking the side of predominant evil. In this regard, Shaykh Ishraq offers an additional explanation. He says, "Without conflict, the perpetual divine effusion, continually renewing, would not be."[6](#)

Conflict and tension ensure the renewal of divine effusion. Perfection in material beings is brought about by their donning successive forms, which is possible only with conflict and evolution. Thus without conflict, God's effusion would cease, and this is impossible for He "perpetuates His grace on the creatures."[7](#)

The unfavorable occurrences that we encounter in our private and social lives may be due to a number of causes. In some cases, they are the result of our wrong choices; in other cases, they could be the outcome of social corruption; in still other cases, they may be tribulations to test one's faith; and there are enumerable other reasons that are hidden to us. But what is clear is that God intends no injustice:

وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And God does not desire any wrong for the creatures. (3: 108).

The Relation Of The Human Being To Nature

The relation of the human being to nature is one of takhir (subjugation), not qahr (coercion). Let me first explain these two terms and the difference between them. Qahr denotes external, coercive pressure. A coerced agent is one whose action is due to the coercion of an external force.

In other words, a coerced agent is one which acts without knowledge, choice, and against its nature;

such as the upward motion of a stone thrust in the air, which takes place without the stone's knowledge, consent, and against its nature.

Subjugation, however, applies when the action in question corresponds to the agent's nature; that is, the agent is created to execute that action.

(You will notice that this is a philosophical sense for subjugation, otherwise in its literal meaning, it may not be much different from coercion.) In the case of a subjugated agent, the external force requires reasonably from the agent that which is in accord with the latter's nature.

The subjugating force directs the subjugated agent in such a way as to make the most benefit from it. An example for this is the farmer's manipulation of the water sources that he directs toward his crops so as to nourish them. In this example, the farmer subjugates water. But should water be spurt upward in a fountain, it would be performing an action against its natural inclination.

God describes the relation of the human being to nature as one of subjugation. That is, the human being must discern the characteristic properties of every creature, thus managing and guiding it according to its nature. Such is the subjugation of natural phenomena. Of course, the primal subjugator is God Himself, who made nature subservient to and pliant before human will:

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

Do you not see that God has subdued for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth. (31:20).

As such the cosmos succumbs to the will of God, exhibiting its servility in glorifying Him and prostrating before Him:

وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ

To Him submits whoever there is in the heavens and the earth (3:83).

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

Whatever there is in the heavens glorifies God and whatever there is in the earth (62: 1).

وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

To God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth (16:49).

فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ

And He said to [the heaven] and to the earth, "Come, willingly or reluctantly." They said, 'We come willingly. "(41:11).

God, as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, ordered them to yield to the leadership of the perfect human being, the human being who traverses the path of spiritual wayfaring and is virtuous and fulfills his trust knowingly.

It is to such a human being that the cosmos is subjugated. But should the human being betray God's trust, the cosmos would no longer obey him, as he would then be inferior to it. Thus, the cosmos despises the human being who strays from the Straight Path, engulfing him in its wrath.

Water is a source of blessing, yet it may submerge and destroy the unrighteous, as in the account of Pharaoh:

فَاتَّبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ بِجُنُودِهِ فَغَشِيَهُمْ مِنَ الْيَمِّ مَا غَشِيَهُمْ

[Pharaoh and his troops] were engulfed by what engulfed them of the sea (20:78).

فَأَخَذْنَاهُ وَجُنُودَهُ فَنَبَذْنَاهُمْ فِي الْيَمِّ

So We seized him and his hosts, and cast them into the sea. (51:40).

But when the wise and righteous human being exploits it, water is a source of life:

﴿ وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ

And out of water we made every living thing. (21:30).

Wind, which is also a source of blessing, may occasionally serve as means of God's punishment:

وَأَمَّا عَادُ فَاهْتَكَمُوا بِرِيحٍ صَرْصَرٍ عَاتِيَةٍ

And as for Ad, they were destroyed by a fierce icy gale (69:6).

سَخَّرَهَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَبْعَ لَيَالٍ وَثَمَانِيَةَ أَيَّامٍ حُسُومًا فَتَرَى الْقَوْمَ فِيهَا صَرْعَى كَأَنَّهُمْ أُعْجَازٌ تَخَلٍ خَاوِيَةٍ

Which He made to prevail against them for seven nights and eight days unremittingly, so that you might have seen the people therein prostrate as if they were the trunks of hollow palms. (69:7).

Thus, so long as the human being preserves his existential value and honors God's trust, the cosmos is subservient to him; he may exploit all phenomena to procure his wellbeing. But as soon as he betrays God's trust, every creature will react unfavorably to him, for they are all obedient to and humble before God; they serve the righteous and torment the unrighteous.

The Relation Of Humankind And Nature To God

Humankind, nature, and generally all contingent beings depend in their very existence on God and as such are His possession. There are many theological and philosophical demonstrations for this point. Based on irrefutable rational reasoning, the existence of contingent beings is relative to God.

This means that for continuing in existence, they need to be continually replenished by the interminable divine effusion. Contingent beings are absolutely dependent on God. This dependence is due to their causal connection with Him and implies His possession of them. For, as all creatures are in need of Him, it is only He who can govern the cosmos, which entails that the cosmos is His possession.

This rational stance is confirmed by doctrinal sources. God asserts,

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

To God belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and God has power over all things (3: 189).

بَلْ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلٌّ لَهُ قَانِتُونَ

Rather to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All are obedient to Him. (2: 116).

And concerning the human being in particular, the Qur'an states,

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ

Have We not made for him two eyes, (90:8).

وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ

A tongue, and two lips. (90:9).

God equipped the human being with limbs and his body organs so that he may utilize them to secure his wellbeing. He, however, cautions the human being lest he should assume that he is the real owner of his parts. The illusion of independent ownership of what we are in possession of is a superficial understanding. We have only been entrusted with these blessings:

أَمْ مَنْ يَمْلِكُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ

Who is the owner of [your] hearing and sight. (10:31).

Thus God is the true owner of all that we possess and of our very existence. On a number of occasions the Qur'an warns that sin is an injustice against oneself:

وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَكِنْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

God does not wrong them, but they wrong themselves (3:117).

فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا فِيهِنَّ أَنْفُسَكُمْ

So do not wrong yourselves during [the sacred months]. (9:36).

Obviously if we were true owners of ourselves, doing injustice to ourselves would be meaningless, for without doubt the agent of injustice is other than the victim of injustice. Injustice applies when one encroaches unrightfully on the possession of others.

This makes clear, then, that the existence that we have belongs to God and is His possession. He has entrusted it to us, and we must honor His trust. Thus, to exploit it for purposes that displease God would constitute injustice.

The Necessity Of God's Permission In Exploiting His Creatures

As the human being is only a trustee in relation to his existence and body and is not the true owner, his relation to other creatures and things is even more tentative. It would be wrong for him to assume that he wields independent control over the things he has. It is this wrong notion that has led humankind to pollute the environment and harm other creatures.

It is the verdict of reason that when one wishes to make use of that which belongs to another, the latter's consent is necessary; otherwise, such use would be wrong. Likewise, when we desire to make use of that which has been placed in our trust, it is necessary that we should have the owner's permission. Thus, when we prove that our existence belongs to God, this implies that for any activity related to ourselves and any use of our faculties, we need to have God's permission.

Again, this is truer of our relation vis-a-vis other creatures, for in respect to them, the illusion of ownership that we may harbor in relation to ourselves is lacking. Thus, before exploiting nature and other creatures, we must first acknowledge that we and all existence belong to Him, and so we must endeavor to obtain His satisfaction. This can be done if we submit to His decrees as related by His prophets in the form of religion.

Human Being's Obligation Vis-A-Vis God's Bounties

One of the principles of Islamic human rights is the human being's unique connection with the cosmos and his obligation in respect to God's bounties. The central point of this principle is that human conduct has direct impact on the increase or decrease of God's bounties. Whichever region of the world he inhabits, the human being is capable of shaping his own world and determining the bounties he may enjoy.

It is important to point out that abundance in bounties is not always a sign of divine satisfaction. God may, for such purposes as exacerbating the misery of the unrighteous or as a test of faith, prolong His bounties on a people; the following verse alludes to this truth:

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهُ

A town secure and peaceful: Its provision came abundantly from everyplace. But it was ungrateful toward God's blessings. (16: 112).

This example illustrates that God may in certain cases confer on a people the two fundamental blessings of a healthy economy and security to test them as to whether or not they would use them to secure eternal felicity:

اللَّهُ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ

So God made [the ungrateful town] taste hunger and fear because of what they used to do. (16: 112).

(Such is the state of the Western countries. If they continue in their slumber, failing to praise God for His

bounties, they would encounter the same disastrous end as mentioned in the above verse.)

The impact of human conduct on the environment is also mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an. For instance, concerning the Arabian Peninsula, which was really poor in land and prone to social conflict, God says that due to the presence of the sacred House of Ka'ba, the people were blessed with security and a thriving economy:

لِيَأْلَفَ قُرَيْشٍ

For [the purpose of] solidarity among Quraysh, (106:1).

إِيْلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ

Their solidarity during winter and summer journeys, (106:2).

فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ

Let them worship the Ford of this House, (106:3).

الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَأَمَّنَّهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ

Who has fed them [and saved them] from hunger, and secured them from fear. (106:4).

Bearing this truth in mind, we may infer that in order to determine the human being's environmental obligations, we must define his relation to the cosmos. There are two perspectives on how to conceive this relation. One perspective is that offered by the Qur'an. From this perspective, God subdued the cosmos for the human being so that he may attain felicity, a felicity that consists in spiritual purification:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى

Felicitous is he who purifies himself. (87: 14).

The other perspective is that which derives from the secular frame of mind, which interprets felicity as the will to dominate. This mentality is thus expressed in the words of the Pharaoh's advisers as related in the following verse:

وَقَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْيَوْمَ مَنْ اسْتَعْلَى

Indeed, today felicitous is he who prevails. (20:64).

Clearly these two perspectives yield two fundamentally distinct solutions as to the human being's relation to the world. The Qur'an, based on its definition of felicity, articulates the End along with the principles and method leading to that End. This method is the way of lordship. This method is expressed comprehensively albeit concisely in the following verse:

فَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَرَبِّ الْأَرْضِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

So all praise belongs to God, the Lord of the heavens and the Lord of the earth, the Lord of all the worlds. (45:36).

This Omnipotent Lord assigned the human being as His viceroy so that he may use the blessing of existence in the way of reforming himself. Thus, he made the macrocosm subordinate to the microcosm.

For this reason, it is appropriate that the human being, in taking advantage of God's bounties, should bear this truth in mind and praise God while acknowledging his inability to praise Him as He deserves.

Let us consider an example in this regard. The Qur'an teaches us to utter the following phrase when using a vehicle for transportation:

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ لَنَا هَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لَهُ مُقْرِنِينَ

Immaculate is He Who has disposed this [vehicle] for us, for we [by ourselves] were incapable of doing this. (43:13).

وإِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا لَمُنْقَلِبُونَ

Indeed we shall return to our Lord. (43:14).

This verse avers the human being's weakness and reminds us of the time when we will be transported to the afterlife. This verse points out that our ability in employing the means of transportation is due to God's will and power.

Of course, this truth extends to any instance of making use of God's bounties. A farmer should know that cultivating the earth is possible as God has subdued water, earth, and sunlight for the human being. And humankind must acknowledge this, for our interaction with the phenomena of the world is so that we may remember our return to God and the provisions we must prepare to make this journey:

وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ

And take provision, for indeed the best provision is God wariness. (2:197).

The secular mindset, however, rejects the universal lordship of God. Viewing the cosmos from this perspective, the human being notices that phenomena are subservient to him without knowing how this is so.

Thus, he fails to glorify God, to acknowledge his weakness, and to remember his return to Him, as a result of which he forgets that he must search for the Straight Path and the provision he needs to traverse it.

One of the implications of the Qur'anic perspective is that the human being's exploitation of natural resources should be confined to uses not detrimental to peace and a healthy coexistence. Industrial development should not lead to global destruction.

To show that this is possible, the Qur'an offers examples of such historic figures as David, Solomon, and Dhu al-Qarnayn who, while being powerful men, never misused their power for aggression or destruction. David, for instance, despite his power to shape hard metal in his palms and despite his status as the leader of the nation of Israel, put his strength to use for constructive purposes, such as making armor. He fought victoriously such heads of evil as Goliath but refrained from aggression and destruction.

Dhu al-Qarnayn also possessed, as the Qur'an tells us, all the resources of his time by divine grace:

وَأَتَيْنَاهُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ سَبَبًا

Indeed [We] had given him the means of all things. (18:84).

He used his power in defending the oppressed against Gog and Magog by constructing impenetrable fortifications. And he praised God and acknowledged Him as the source of his blessings:

قَالَ هَذَا رَحْمَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّي

He said, 'This is a mercy from my Lord. '(18:98).

Thus the Qur'an teaches humankind to choose the correct way in exploiting God's bounties. In their research and experiments, humankind should seek reform and salvation, just as in their use of weaponry they should intend defense and security.

Heeding this Qur'anic teaching can produce valuable effects in the education of humankind. Based on the secular mentality, industrial progress leads to improvement in means of entertainment.

It is for this reason that the corporate world today creates games for every age group: children, adolescents, youth, middle aged, and old. Life in the modern world is but entertainment and frivolity.

But the Qur'anic perspective on the relation of the human being to the cosmos is that, after adolescence, he should enter into a new stage of research and truth seeking, putting games behind him.

*Imam Al-Sadiq was once asked, "To whom will Imamate pass after you?" He replied, "He who engages not in diversion and play." Immediately after this reply, his son, Imam Al-Kazim, entered along with a lamb. Addressing the lamb, Imam Al-Kazim said, "Prostrate before your Lord." Taking his son into his embrace, Imam Al-Sadiq affectionately said, "May the father and mother of he who takes not to game be sacrificed for him."*⁸

This account demonstrates, how different outlooks on the human being's relation to the cosmos lead to divergent conceptions of his rights and obligations. And in this regard, the unbridgeable chasm between the Qur'anic and the secular perspectives must be reckoned.

The Connection Between Thought And Action

Every action is existentially and necessarily connected with the person who performs it. Thus, it is impossible to escape the consequences of one's actions, just as it is impossible to receive the consequences of that which one has not done.

Rational reasoning proves that every action is preceded by a motivation, and as motivation is a reality in one's soul and action a reality related to one's body, action is connected solely with the agent that performs it, not with anyone else, and this is an inextricable connection.

Islam confirms this rational principle, declaring that doing good benefits oneself, just as doing evil harms oneself:

إِنْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا

If you do good, you will do good to your own selves, and if you do evil, it will be [evil] to your own selves. (17:7).

Virtue benefits the virtuous, and vice harms the unrighteous. This truth may be analyzed into two principles. The first principle is that an evil deed afflicts only its perpetrator; evil does not weigh on anyone other than he who is responsible for it:

أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبِّأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَىٰ

Has he not been informed of what is in the scriptures of Moses (53:36)

وَأِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّىٰ ۖ أَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

And of Abraham, who fulfilled [his summons]: that no bearer shall bear another's burden. (53:37-38).

The second principle specifies that one profits only from that which one does:

وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ

Nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, (53:39).

وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ

and that he will soon be shown his endeavor. (53:40).

We are not justified in asking for more than what we are entitled to based on our conduct, though God, out of His grace, rewards us with more than what our conduct merits. Whereas for our misdeeds, He limits our punishment to the exact amount incurred by them and no more–

جَزَاءً وَفَاءً

A fitting requital (78:26).

–for our good deeds, our reward is greater than what our deeds merit:

ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءَ الْأَوْفَىٰ

Then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward (53:41).

أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْتَوْنَ أَجْرَهُمْ مَرَّتَيْنِ

Those will be given their reward two times over (28:54).

يُؤْتِكُمْ كَفْلَيْنِ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ

He will grant you a double share of His mercy. (57:28).

Thus, the good and evil consequences of our actions are existentially connected with the actions [themselves]. The Prophet said,

He who initiates a righteous custom, for him is the reward of that (i.e., initiating the custom] and the reward of anyone who acts by it till the Day of Judgment, without this detracting from their reward (i.e., the reward of those who follow the initiator of the custom)].[9](#)

Before performing an action, it is [entirely] within our discretion: we may or may not do it. But once performed, one of two results may ensue. If good, the deed remains in our discretion without limiting our freedom. But if evil, the deed fetters the doer, for a misdeed is a transgression either against God or against fellow human beings.

In either case, a misdeed renders one indebted, and one so indebted is obliged to make a pledge. In conventional cases, this pledge can be any valuable property, but in a case involving an existential infraction, the pledge is one's soul. The way to release this pledge is repentance. The Prophet said,

O people, verily your souls are in pawn on account of your deeds, so release them by your repentance. [10](#)

The following two verses speak to this concern:

كُلُّ امْرِيٍّ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ

Every man is hostage to what he has earned (52:21).

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ

Every soul is hostage to what it has earned, (74:38).

إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ

except the People of the Right Hand (74:39).

At first glance, the verses appear to apply to both good and bad deeds, but on taking into account the verbal and nonverbal qualifiers, one may infer that it is only misdeeds that enfeeble.

The nonverbal qualifier is inferred from the predicate, which indicates that the subject is qualified. The proposition "He who makes a move is to be apprehended" appears unqualified, but we know that only one responsible for a crime is liable to being apprehended. The verbal qualifier is "except the people of the right hand."

The Impact Of One's Deeds On Others

Deeds entail good or bad consequences, which may affect one's ancestors and offspring and human society at large. God's grace allows that one's good deeds may benefit others, just as one's misdeeds may have an adverse effect on them. (That good deeds benefit others is certain, for God's mercy is irreversible, but as for the adverse effects of one's misdeeds on others, this may or may not take place, for God may withhold His wrath.)

The following example is one instance where the Qur'an talks of the adverse effects of one's misdeeds on others:

وَلِيَخْشَ الَّذِينَ لَوْ تَرَكُوا مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّةً ضِعَافًا خَافُوا عَلَيْهِمْ فَلْيَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْيَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا

Let them who, should they leave bereaved children would be concerned on their account fear [the result of mistreating orphans]. So let them be wary of God, and let them speak righteous words. (4:9).

An example of the favorable effects of one's deeds on others is portrayed in the account of Moses' journey with Khidr. In one of the stages of the edifying journey, Khidr repairs an indistinctive wall, an act which Moses perceives as vain and arbitrary. Later when the two are about to part, Khidr explains to Moses the purpose of his seemingly vain action. He says,

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا كَنْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ

As for the wall, it belonged to two boy orphans in the city. Under it there was a treasure belonging to them. Their father was a righteous man. So your Lord desired that they should come of age and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. (18:82).

According to a hadith, the "father" intended in this verse was their great grandfather seventy generations back. ¹¹ Thus God does not neglect the reward of a righteous deed, though He may postpone its fulfillment to later generations.

Another instance where this is mentioned in the Qur'an is the following verse:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ﴿٥١﴾ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ

The faithful and their descendants who followed them [but did not equal them] in faith We will make their descendants join them, and We will not stint anything from [the reward of] their deeds. Every man is a hostage to what he has earned. (52:21).

If the descendent had attained to the same status as their fathers, there would be no need to "join them." That God reunites them with their forefathers shows that though they failed to merit their fathers' degree of faith, God will favor them on account of their fathers. This favor God offers out of grace, and as such it in no way contravenes the principle that

وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

Nothing belongs to man except what he strives for. (53:39).

What the above verse denotes is that one merits what one earns; divine grace is another issue.

In the Hereafter, blood relations are nonexistent:

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ

And when the Trumpet is blown, there will be no ties of kinship between them; on that day. (23: 101).

Problems in that world cannot be resolved on the terms that obtain in this world. But should the believers' children follow in the footsteps of their parents, God, on account of their virtuous upbringing, would grant them rewards better than those they deserve on their own account and would offer them the opportunity of intercession. It is only the believers who may enjoy the pleasure of being reunited with their children in Paradise.

One question that may come to mind in this relation concerns what is expressed in some hadiths to the effect that in the case of certain sins, such as murder and backbiting, a portion of the victim's sins is transferred to the sinner. [12](#)

At first glance, this may seem to contradict the principle that one cannot suffer for the sin of others, but in fact this is a direct result of the sinner's own misdeed. The murderer or the backbiter encounters the consequence of his own sin.

What is mentioned in such hadiths as "transfer" is only a figurative presentation of the harm the wrongdoer inflicts on the victim, and God in this way compensates the victim's loss.

The Relation Of Human Action To The World

The good and evil intentions and deeds of humankind play a role in the good and evil phenomena of the world, for human conduct is inseparably connected with natural phenomena. This truth is confirmed by rational as well as doctrinal reasoning.

Rational reasoning: The human being is one link in the cosmic chain of existence. As such he is interconnected with the other links, for he is causally related to innumerable phenomena. He is affected by creatures of sea, land, and air, on which he has a reciprocal impact.

As such human conduct affects and is affected by good and evil phenomena in the world. This reciprocal relation is not restricted to the corporeal aspect of the human being, but rather extends to his beliefs, dispositions, and conduct.

The concrete instances of this reciprocal relation may not be rationally demonstrable but the general relationship is. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that a certain good deed could secure the blessing of rain or that a misdeed could be responsible for earthquake or an inopportune death.

Doctrinal reasoning: The Noble Qur'an testifies to the direct relation between human conduct and natural phenomena. But again, this only holds for the general truth without stipulating, for example, that such-and-such deed may bring about such-and-such phenomenon. The Quranic verses pertaining to this topic fall into the following classifications:

1. The verses that address the general issue of the relation between human conduct and natural phenomena;
2. The verses that indicate the role of good conduct in effecting favorable phenomena;
3. The verses that talk of the influence of evil conduct in engendering unfavorable phenomena.

(Each of the latter two classes may be further divided into the effects of individual actions and those of social actions.)

The Qur'anic Verses Addressing The General Issue Of The Relation Between Human Conduct And Natural Phenomena

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ

1. *He has guardian angels, to his front and his rear, who guard him by God's command. Indeed*

God does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls. And when God wishes to visit ill on a people, there is nothing that can avert it, and they have no protector besides Him. (13:11).

This verse denotes the connection of human conduct with natural phenomena, good and evil.

There are certain political, social, economic, and cultural matters in relation to which humankind wield discretion; through consultation and long-term planning they may determine the course of such matters. The course that the human being decides on is either in conformity with canon or not.

Based on whether or not it conforms to canon, God ordains the occurrence of certain phenomena consequent on the human beings decisions; these phenomena, however, defy human anticipation and forethought. (Of course, it should be noted that in citing the verses of the Qur'an, we do not intend to claim that all natural phenomena are related to and consequent on human conduct.)

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكُ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

2. That is because God never changes a blessing that He has bestowed on a people unless they change what is in their own souls, and God is all-hearing, all-knowing. (8:53).

This verse concerns God's bounties. Every bounty is a blessing that God bestows without the requirement of any merit on the part of the human being:

Everyone of Your bounties is initiated [gratuitously]. [13](#)

According to the above verse, God changes a bounty only when a people change their ways for the worse, thus depriving themselves of the bounty.

Noteworthy to say that in both the abovementioned verses there is talk, not of removing a bounty, but of changing a bounty. Knowledge, for instance, which is a perfection, may, as the result of one's failure to act as one knows, lead others to misinterpret one's motives, and this may ultimately doom one to disrepute of an order that an ignorant person would never experience.

Wealth is another divine bounty, but if we fail to make correct use of it and instead spend it in wicked ways, we would incur divine wrath in this world as well as in the next. The underlying cause of this change of fate is the change in one's mental state, which manifests itself in external phenomena.

[The Qur'anic Verses That Speak To The Relation Between Good](#)

Conduct And Favourable Natural Phenomena

وَأَنْ لَوْ اسْتَقَامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقَيْنَاهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا

1. *If they are steadfast on the path [of God], We shall provide them with abundant water. (72: 16)*

This verse asserts that persisting on the Straight Path is a cause for which the faithful will be provided with abundant water that replenishes their farms, plateaus, forests, animals, and themselves. This verse is a living testimony to the plausibility of the prayer for rain.

Prayer is the pillar on which religion is founded, and the prayer for rain is a particular ordinance that is a clear instance of being steadfast on the Straight Path. (Of course, "abundant water" encompasses more than merely rainwater; streams and wells are other sources of water with which God blesses the faithful.)

As such, God blesses the faithful with material bounties on account of their good conduct. But on the other hand, sin may cause the waters of the earth to recede to low subterranean levels as even lie beyond the reach of modern technology:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِمَاءٍ مَعِينٍ

Say, "Tell me, should your water sink down [into the ground], who will bring you running water?" (67:30)

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ أَقَامُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ مِنَ رَبِّهِمْ لَأَكَلُوا مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أُمَّةٌ مُقْتَصِدَةٌ

2. *Had they observed the Torah and the Evangel, and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would surely have drawn nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet. (5:66)*

Just as faith, piety, and repentance earn the faithful entrance into Paradise, so too faith and observance of the instructions of the Bible and the Qur'an influence our benefitting from the bounties of the heavens and the earth. In the above verse, "from above them" is indicative of heavenly bounties such as snow, rain, and sunlight, and "from beneath their feet" is a reference to the bounties in the earth—e.g. fertility of soil and underground waters.

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْفُرُجِ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ بَرَكَاتٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

3. If the people of the towns had been faithful and God wary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth. (7:96)

Faith and piety open the doors to heavenly and earthly bounties. This verse clearly demonstrates the connection between human conduct and natural phenomena.

"Blessings from the heaven and the earth" allows of multiple interpretations:

- 1) Heavenly blessings may comprise snow, rain, and sunlight, while earthly blessings may be understood as underground water reservoirs and the plants from which we benefit.
- 2) An alternate interpretation is that heavenly blessings are spiritual bounties and earthly blessings material ones.
- 3) A third interpretation holds that heavenly blessings are the esoteric inspirations and unveilings, whereas earthly blessings comprise acquired knowledge. [14](#)

The possible meanings of this verse are not limited to the above three. In any case, however, the fact remains that righteous conduct is effectively connected with the favorable phenomena of nature.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا وَيُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

4. O you who have faith, if you are wary of God, He shall appoint a criterion for you and absolve you of your misdeeds and forgive you, for God is dispenser of a great grace. (8:29)

This verse articulates how piety is effective in finding the esoteric and exoteric ways. Another relevant verse is the following:

إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Indeed if one is God wary and patient, God does not spoil the reward of the virtuous. (12:90)

The verse expresses the effect of piety and patience in reaping reward and attaining to the ultimate end. These two verses provide a general principle: that righteous conduct begets favorable results in this world as well.

The former verse explains how God wariness equips one with the criterion to distinguish good from bad and the Straight Path from false paths. When one is overcome by desire, one is blinded to the exoteric and esoteric truths.

God wariness, however, enables one to receive the divine blessing of insight. This insight is beyond the

reach of the human being; it is God who grants it to him. Such insight is an objective reality that, though a blessing from God, is directly related to human action. It is in this way that human action is connected with the world.

The Reason Why Disbelievers Enjoy God's Bounties

An objection that has been raised against the above line of reasoning is that many disbelieving nations also enjoy—in some cases even to a greater extent God's heavenly and earthly bounties. We may reply to this objection by explaining that when the Qur'an talks of enjoying God's bounties, it intends a blessed enjoyment that is, first, canonically pure and, second, conducive to human felicity.

It must be pointed out that a holistic examination of the Qur'an proves that what is intended in verse 66 of Surah Ma'idah¹⁵ is blessedness, not mere enjoyment of the benefits of nature. It is for this reason that verse 96 of Surah A'raf¹⁶ talks of "blessings" rather than benefits. (The renowned lexicographer, Raghib, defines barakah—here translated as blessing—as "the divine good in a thing."¹⁷

Another answer to the objection in question is that God in certain cases prolongs the fortunes of a people for the purpose of punishment:

وَلَكِنْ فَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

But their hearts had hardened and Satan had made to seem decorous to them what they had been doing. (6:43).

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا مَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَبْوَابَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَتَّى إِذَا فَرِحُوا بِمَا أُوتُوا أَخَذْنَاهُمْ بَغْتَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْلِسُونَ

So when they forgot what they had been admonished of We opened for them the gates of all [good] things. When they rejoiced in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, whereat, behold, they were despondent. (6:44).

In addition, what we intend is merely to demonstrate that there is a connection between the good and evil in human action and natural phenomena, without in any way denying the multiplicity of other factors that may affect natural phenomena.

A further explanation of what was said above as to the difference between blessing and benefit is that wealth or power may occasionally serve as God's snare. Thus God, in addition to proclaiming that the way to benefit from heavenly and earthly blessings is through faith and God wariness, warns disbelievers that wealth and comfort are not necessarily signs of divine favor, for God's norm in punishment is to give time and avenge gradually.

He allows time to the disbelievers so that they may increase their sin and thereby incur a much harsher punishment, though they may be negligent of this:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ نِعْمَتَنَا لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا ۚ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

Let not the faithless suppose that the respite that We grant them is good for their souls: We give them respite only that they may increase in sin, and there is a humiliating punishment for them. (3: 178).

أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ مَّالٍ وَبَنِينَ

Do they suppose that what We provide them of wealth and children is because. (23:55).

نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ ۗ بَلْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

We are eager to bring them good? Indeed they are heedless. (23:56).

The divine principle of postponed and gradual chastisement finds expression in several instances in the Quran. Those who reject God's signs are given time and gradually, without their being aware, lured toward the snare that God has prepared for them:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

As for those who deny Our signs, We will draw them imperceptibly [into ruin], whence they do not know. (7: 182).

وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِي

And I will grant them respite, for My cunning is indeed sure. (7: 183).

Just as God's "firm cord" is inviolable¹⁸ so is His "sure cunning." Furthermore, the Qur'an in a number of verses addresses the Prophet as the head of the Muslim community and warns him against being deceived by the technological and industrial development of disbelievers, for these are transient pleasures of the material world; to be blinded by them would entail the eternal punishment of Hell:

لَا يَغُرَّنَّكَ تَقَلُّبُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ

Never be misled by the bustle of the faithless in the towns. (3: 196).

مَتَاعٌ قَلِيلٌ ثُمَّ مَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ

It is a trivial enjoyment; then their refuge is hell, and it is an evil resting place. (3: 197) .

God admonishes us lest we be captivated by the wealth of the faithless:

فَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ ۗ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَتَزْهَقَ أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ

So let not their wealth and children impress you: God only desires to punish them with these in the life of this world, and that their souls may depart while they are faithless. (9:55).

Noteworthy to mention that it is a divine principle that having a prosperous life in this world is not gratuitous; hard labor is needed to earn it. (This is, of course, not to deny God's miraculous interventions.) God, after swearing several times, proclaims that though possessed of the most perfect constitution, the human being is created in the midst of pain and suffering:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

Certainly We created the human being in travail. (90:4).

The human being must, like the rider who mounts a wild horse, master the earth, thus exploiting its resources. God subdued the earth for the human being, but to master it is no easy task.

Thus, the disbelievers' superiority in economic advancement and in luxuries is due to their hard work, while the Muslim world sluggishly lags behind. However, those who enjoy such worldly benefits should not assume them to constitute felicity or to be a sign of divine favor, for wealth is often a burden rather than a blessing.

Furthermore, this worldly superiority should not deceive and captivate the Muslim world, for the pleasures of the world are transient. The human being's true value lies in faith and God wariness, not in superficial beauty and the pleasurable luxuries, which constitute the highest goal of the animals.

The Effect Of Prayer In Generating Rain

The cosmos is undergirded by the principle of causality. Every phenomenon comes into existence only when its cause is present. Rain, for example, falls only when the natural process is completed: when the impregnated clouds are moved by wind and then made cold enough to turn into droplets of water.

It must, however, be heeded that the reins of the causal system are in God's hands, and the only way for precipitation is not the normal route recognized by humankind. It is in this vein that religious texts speak of the effect of prayer in causing rainfall.

Avicenna, one of the greatest Muslim philosophers, writes in his magnum opus, *Shifa*, reckons that the greatest part of what the populace acknowledge and have recourse to and maintain [as to the effectuality of prayer in inducing favorable natural phenomena] is true. Indeed these quasi-philosophers reject them out of ignorance to their causes, and I have authored on this topic the *Boole of Virtue and Viet*, so seek the elucidation of these matters therefrom, and you will agree. [19](#)

One who fails to acknowledge the effectuality of prayer in generating rain is a false rather than a genuine philosopher, for the effect of prayer reaches every aspect of the order of existence.

One of the general principles propounded by the Qur'an is that just as nature affects humankind, they may in turn influence it. The human being is not an isolated creature aloof of the order of existence.

People are influenced by the circumstances of the regions wherein they dwell: they think in accordance with their circumstances; they fulfill their needs as determined by their surroundings; this is beyond doubt. But what the rain brings to light is that the human being may also affect external phenomena.

When a society tends toward reform and felicity, nature also changes for the better, and when it tends toward corruption, rebellion, and transgression, nature reacts proportionately. Thus the Qur'an vows that should we be good, rain would fall in abundance:

وَأَنْ لَّوِ اسْتَقَامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقِينَاهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا

If they are steadfast on the path [of God], We shall provide them with abundant water. (72: 16).

It is in this light that Islam exhorts the faithful to perform the prayer of rain. Of course, the advantages of social reform and seeking felicity are not limited to rain; rain is merely an example. Such positive change affects all phenomena. That is, we will be better able to make use of plants and mines. Rain is mentioned specifically as it is the principle of life:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ

We made every living thing out of water. (21:30).

The Role Of Purity M The Perpetuation Of The Means Of

Livelihood

When one of his companions complained of poverty, the Prophet replied, "Persist in canonic [or ritual] purity and sustenance will come to you continually." The man did as he was told, and his life improved.[20](#)

God is the Provider of Sustenance. Due to certain circumstances, which may be hidden to us, God grants to some better means of life and to some lesser means. Nevertheless, God will never let one who strives in purity and modesty to suffer from poverty. We must, however, realize that purity is of various degrees, and as such the sustenance granted by God is proportionately varied.

The abovementioned hadith encapsulates an abundance of wisdom. At a higher level, the hadith may be understood to imply, not merely canonic purity as obtained by ablution, but purity in a broader sense.

One, for instance, who escapes work out of laziness is impure, for he is under obligation to provide for his family. Having canonic purity can never make up for this failure to stand up to one's obligation: canonic purity is supererogatory, and the failure to acquire sustenance is unlawful; an unlawful act cannot be redeemed by a supererogatory deed.

One who constantly maintains purity observes the canonic duties: purchasing through lawful means, making a living through lawful means, and abstaining from profiteering and seeking inappropriate gain in business:

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ

Woe to the defrauders. (83:1).

الَّذِينَ إِذَا اكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ

Who use short measures, who, when they measure a commodity bought from the people, take the full measure, (83:2).

وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوَّزْنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ

But diminish when they measure or weigh for them. (83:3).

The intention in maintaining purity, however, should not be to obtain wealth, for in such a case one is exploiting spiritual purity for corporeal pleasure. In other words, to strive to refrain from sin and to purge the soul for the purpose of gaining greater material wealth is to sacrifice a greater purpose to a lower one. It would be analogous to requesting a wise sage to sweep a room instead of benefitting from his

wisdom. Thus, one should try to achieve purity for objectives other than material gain.

This also holds true of the prayer for rain. A community afflicted with drought should perform the prayer for rain, and their supplication will be effective, but their intention should not be rain itself. Though such an intention is correct and the prayer will be answered, nevertheless such a prayer is spiritually inferior.

The Infallibles too would perform the prayer for rain, but there is a difference between praying for rain and performing the prayer for rain but with the higher intention of attaining nearness to God. One could pray as a beggar seeking charity, but such was not the prayer of the Infallibles.

Thus, if their prayers were answered, they would praise God gratefully, and if not, they would still be grateful, a gratefulness enriched with patience. This, however, is a most difficult state for the common faithful to conceive.

But for the wayfarers of the Path of Truth, those who have traversed a great extent of the path, it is no ordeal. A yet higher level is to perform the prayer for rain, to maintain purity while utterly unmindful of the material purpose and simply in order to worship God and to attain proximity to Him.

The Effect Of A Wholesome Environment On Eternal Felicity

The value system of Islam proclaims all righteous deeds eternal. There are, however, particular deeds that are specified as such. Transcribing the Noble Qur'an and authoring books whose content is based on the Qur'an are among the deeds specifically mentioned in the hadiths as works whose rewards benefit one eternally.

One major category of deeds with such eternal reward comprises those conducive to the development of a wholesome environment e.g., planting trees, excavating wells, constructing dams. In Islam's religious sources, it is asserted that to plant a tree or to perform a philanthropic activity benefits one for as long as the public profits from the fruit of that work. Such a portrayal of activities beneficial to the society at large undoubtedly stimulates people to undertake them so as to improve the environment.

The materialist toils for short-term interests, whereas if he expands his purview and sees righteous deeds as eternal, he will then strive for the infinite life. Islam teaches us that watering a tree is as rewarding as quenching the thirst of a believer. The Prophet said,

He who waters a talh²¹ (acacia or banana) lotus tree is as if he had quenched the thirst of a believer. [22](#)

As watering a tree has such great reward, then obviously planting trees is also a great spiritually rewarding deed conducive to one's eternal felicity.

The Verses Addressing The Connection Of Unrighteous Conduct With Unfavourable Natural Phenomena

قُلْ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ يَنْتَهُوا يُغْفَرْ لَهُمْ مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ وَإِنْ يَعُودُوا فَقَدْ مَضَتْ سُنَّتُ الْأَوَّلِينَ

1. **Say to the faithless, if they relinquish [faithlessness], what is already past shall be forgiven them. But if they revert [to faithlessness], then the precedent of the ancients has already passed. (8:38).**

This verse warns disbelievers that they will face the consequences of their unfaith. In a similar tone, God proclaims in another verse,

عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يَرْحَمَكُم ۚ وَإِنْ عُدتُمُ عُدْنَا ۚ وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَصِيرًا

Maybe your Lord will have mercy on you, but if you revert, We [too] will revert, and We have made hell a prison for the faithless (17:8).

وَإِنْ تَعُودُوا نَعُدْ وَلَنْ تُغْنِيَّ عَنْكُمْ فِتْنَتُنَا شَيْئًا

And again: but if you revert, We [too] shall revert. (8: 19).

These two verses express the relation between evil conduct and the unfavorable phenomena of the world. Should we turn to unfaith, it is God's norm that He would turn to vengeance. Thus God's wrath, which is effected in a variety of natural catastrophes, is incurred by the disbelievers' desecrating religious sanctities.

Such is the connection between human beliefs and actions and the phenomena of the cosmos, a connection established by divine agency. (It would be wrong to believe that since this connection is necessary, it is not in need of divine creativity.)

وَإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَّرْنَاهَا تَدْمِيرًا

2. **And when We desire to destroy a town We command its affluent [to obey God]. But thy commit transgression in it, and so the word becomes due against it, and We destroy it utterly. (17: 16).**

The elite commit iniquities while the common masses, instead of standing up against their evil, remain acquiescently silent; thus they incur God's wrath.

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

3. Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of the people's hands, that He may make them taste something of what they have done, so that they may come back. (30:41).

Putting this verse beside verse 30 of Surah Shura:

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned, though He excuses many an offense (42:30).

One may deduce the natural connection of human misconduct with the rise of corruption in land and sea. These two verses clearly confirm the content of the other similar verses that aver an existential relation between social injustice and unfavorable natural phenomenal, which like any other existential principle is governed by the Divine Will.

The former verse (30:41) conveys two points. The first point is that which has already been elucidated regarding the relation between human misconduct and unfavorable natural phenomena. The second point is that God's punishment is lighter than what human misdeeds truly deserve. The latter point is corroborated by other verses, which, for instance, say that God pardons many sins and refrains from opening the gates of Hell for every sin²³ or that He, instead of avenging every sin with a commensurable chastisement, afflicts humankind with natural disasters so as to make their burden of sins lighter.²⁴

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوا هُمْ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَنَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَآخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَاقٍ

4. Have they not traveled over the land so that they may observe the fate of those who were before them? They were greater than them in might and with respect to the effects [thy left] in the land. But then God seized them for their sins, and they had no defender against God's punishment. (40:21).

Looking through the pages of history, we encounter powerful figures, such as Pharaoh, whom God destroyed on account of their sins and from whom only a name remains in the annals of history; they had no one to save them from God's wrath. There are abundant verses in the Qur'an concerning the tragic fates of Korah²⁵ and the Tribe of Sheba²⁶ who, along with other evil people, were afflicted with natural disasters and deprivations as a consequence of their individual and social sins.

According to the above-quoted verses, human misconduct and the unfavorable phenomena of nature

are connected. Of course, God in some cases pardons humankind's sins²⁷ and in other cases postpones their punishment (imhal), giving His disobedient servants time to repent.

Thus, the phenomena of the world are partly consequent on human conduct. When humankind obey God and submit in humility to His Lordship, the doors of His mercy and grace will open to them, whereas if they deviate from the path of obedience and transgress, entertaining false notions and evil intentions, corruption will overrun human society, such that its consequences would affect the entire earth; nations would verge toward destruction as a result of injustice, war, insecurity, and the others forms of wickedness.

Misconduct may bring such natural disasters as floods, earthquakes, and thunderous storms on human society; the following are instances of such disasters recounted in the Qur'an: the violent storm that struck the Tribe of Sheba,²⁸ the Deluge that inundated the towns contemptuous of Noah,²⁹ the humiliating affliction that destroyed the People of Thamud,³⁰ and the icy squalls that befell the People of 'Ad.³¹

What we have said thus far concerned in the main the fate of the righteous and unrighteous societies. The Qur'an, however, views the individual in the same light; that is, one will undoubtedly receive the consequences of one's good and bad deeds.

One, however, may on occasion enjoy blessings on account of the good done by one's ancestors or, on the other hand, be troubled by the evil perpetrated by them. It is no doubt more difficult to explicate the relation between natural phenomena and the actions of the individual.

The bounties that God bestows on the righteous society are simultaneously blessings and tests. This is expressed in God's words quoting the man of God in the service of Solomon:

فَلَمَّا رَأَاهُ مُسْتَقِرًّا عِنْدَهُ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي أَأَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ

This is by the grace of my Lord, to test me if I will give thanks or be ungrateful. And whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful [should know that] my Lord is indeed all-sufficient, all-generous. (27:40).

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned, though He excuses many an offense (42:30).

Expressing Gratitude Is A Virtue That Increases God's Bounties:

لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ

If you be grateful, I will surely multiply for you [My bounties]. (14:7).

Thus the bounties that the unrighteous enjoy are a slow and hidden means of punishment, which appear nice but are in reality instances of divine wrath.

In the same vein, affliction and tribulations visited upon a righteous society or individual are means of purification so as to distinguish them from the unrighteous, even as gold is smelted to purge it of its impurities:

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ

Certainly We tested those who were before them. So God shall surely ascertain those who are truthful, and He shall surely ascertain the liars. (29:3).

Afflictions and tribulations that the corrupt experience are the punishment for their misdeeds, in addition to preparing the way for their repentance and return to God, for He desires that the evildoer should be immediately awakened and saved from the evil path he goes.

What has been said in the above concerns the consequences of human conduct that appear in this world. In emphasizing the unworthiness of this material world, the Qur'an proclaims that had God not ordained that life in this world should pursue an orderly course or that it would not encourage people to disown faith in God, He would have given disbelievers such wealth as would empower them to build even their rooftops of silver:

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ يَكُونَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً لَجَعَلْنَا لِمَنْ يَكْفُرُ بِالرَّحْمَنِ لِبُيُوتِهِمْ سُقُفًا مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَمَعَارِجَ عَلَيْهَا يَظْهَرُونَ

Were it not [for the danger] that humankind would be one community [in unfaith], We would have surely made for those who defy the All-beneficent, silver roofs for their houses and [silver] stairways by which they ascend; (43:33).

وَلِبُيُوتِهِمْ أَبْوَابًا وَسُرُورًا عَلَيْهَا يُتَكَبُونَ

And [silver] doors for their houses and [silver] couches on which they recline; (43:44).

وَزُخْرَفًا ۚ وَإِنْ كُلُّ ذَلِكَ لَمَّا مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۚ وَالْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

And ornaments of gold; yet all that would be nothing but the wares of the life of this world, and the Hereafter near your Lord is for the God wary. (43:35).

(Thus understood, this verse in no way contradicts the verses dealing with the adverse consequences of evil deeds in this world.)[32](#)

There are also hadiths that talk of the adverse effect of unrighteous conduct in bringing about unfavorable natural phenomena. It is reported that Imam al-Baqir said,

There is no year that can be described as having received more rain, but God distributes rain as He wishes. When a people engage in sinful conduct, He withholds from them the rain that was decreed for them in that year and makes it fall elsewhere, whether it be the dry deserts, the seas, or the mountains.

Indeed God inflicts His punishment even on the dung beetle in its nest by withholding rainfall from the land on account of the sin perpetrated by the people that inhabit it, for verily He has provided for the dung beetle the means to move to a land inhabited by those obedient to Him. This, O you people of insight and reason, should heed.

The Imam continued: We [i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt read in the Book of the Master of the Faithful that the Prophet said, *"When fornication becomes ubiquitous, unexpected death increases; when a people engage in fraudulent transactions, God punishes them with drought and privation; when they refrain from paying the religious tax of zakat, the earth refuses its bounty in the crops, the fruit, and the mines. And when they transgress God's precepts, conspire in iniquity and aggression, and violate their oaths to God, God will make their enemy prevail over them.*

And when they fail to honor ties of kinship, their wealth will fall into the hands of the evil among them; and when they refrain from enjoining good and forbidding evil and from following my Household (Ahl al-Bayt), God will make the wicked among them prevalent, such that they would beseech the righteous for help, but they will not hear them."[33](#)

In addition to unrighteous conduct, unrighteous intentions are also effective in producing unfavorable phenomena; sinful intention too entails evil consequences. Imam Al-Sadiq said,

Verily a believer may intend to sin and, as a result, his livelihood will be curtailed.[34](#)

The Agreement Of The Consequences Of Human Conduct With The Causal Order Of The Cosmos

One may object that as nature is founded on the causal order, all natural phenomena, whether good or

bad, are caused by certain natural causes. The believer or disbeliever experiences the enjoyable fruits of nature as well as its unfavorable phenomena depending on what natural causes are at work. Thus to attribute natural phenomena, whether favorable or otherwise, to human conduct [on the moral level] is a false notion.

This is a fundamental objection, which not only threatens to disprove the connection of human conduct with cosmic phenomena, but also refutes any supernatural means through which the human being may influence natural phenomena, whether it be good or bad conduct, giving alms, honoring ties of kinship, or a miraculous power. What gives rise to this objection, however, is a misunderstanding of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt.

To claim that human conduct influences natural phenomena does not amount to a rejection of the effectuality of natural causes just as it does not mean that human conduct functions on the level of natural causes.

This question rises also when we speak of God as the original cause, in which case it is obvious that He is not intended as one of the elements that go hand and hand with natural causes to affect natural phenomena.

What we intend in such cases is to maintain the presence of certain higher causes that are of a spiritual nature and that transcend material and natural causes. That is, in the existential hierarchy of causality, phenomena are at one level attributable to natural and material causes and at a higher level to spiritual causes.

To explain this through an analogy, consider the example of a person writing a letter with a pen. The words written on paper can be attributed to a succession of causes. At one level, the words are caused by the pen.

The pen, however, was in the palm of the writer, and so the writer's palm is responsible for the words. But the palm, in turn, could not have written without the aid of the arm, and so one could claim that the arm is the author of the words. Yet again, beyond and above the arm is the human mind which directed all these elements so as to set certain words on paper.[35](#)

These higher spiritual causes, which go in large part neglected, are in some cases part of the effective elements that produce a phenomenon, and in other cases, they constitute the factors that prepare the conditions necessary for a phenomenon.

As the natural order of causality derives from the Truth, it rightfully hands the reins of causality to the higher world of the Hidden Truths, thus connecting the world of nature with the supernatural.

Any creature whose existence is other than its essence must of necessity derive its existence from a higher being whose essence and existence are identical. It cannot rely in its existence on itself or a

being like itself.

The principle of causality (which the objector cites in the abovementioned objection) suggests that there should be a "cause of causes," a "primal cause" to which all creatures are mysteriously related. Should we approach God in good faith and with good conduct, we will enjoy His Mercy and Effusion.

Thus, the one God, in whose hands are the reins of all the worlds, will bestow on the righteous, via the apparatus of the natural causes, His blessings and bounties or will withhold them from the unrighteous.

The growth of plants and trees, for instance, though impossible without water and rain, is nevertheless in God's hands, for rain falls as a result of numerous causes, many of which are unknown to us, but all of which operate under the Lordship of God. It is in this light that we believe that the prayer for rain is effective: it invokes the spiritual and mysterious causes beyond the human ken. In reference to this truth God says,

وَأَنْ لَوْ اسْتَقَامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقَيْنَاهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا

If they are steadfast on the path [of God], We shall provide them with abundant water. (72: 16).

The righteous believer is connected with the Lord in whose hands are the reins of all causes, and as such He gives to His servants, rain and fertility of earth:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ

Do they not see that We carry water to the parched earth and with it We bring forth crops (32:27).

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُزْجِي سَحَابًا ثُمَّ يُؤَلِّفُ بَيْنَهُ ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ رُكَامًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ يَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ

Have you not regarded that God drives the clouds, then He composes them, then He piles them up, where at you see the rain issuing from its midst? (24:43).

Thus, the answer to the objection is that the belief in the participation of human conduct in the formation of natural causes in no way contradicts the principle of causality. We recognize God as the Ultimate Cause, and it is in this capacity that He so manages the natural order of causality that it would function in favor of the righteous, producing phenomena conducive to their wellbeing. This, of course, still allows for certain instances where God provides material comfort to disbelievers as a test and as a reward for their worldly endeavors.

One important point remains to be reiterated in this regard. Empirical observation is productive of

knowledge inasmuch as it ascertains the cases under observation. It is not, however, in any way exhaustive.

That is, science is not entitled to make negative statements concerning such spiritual truths as prayer, giving alms, and honoring ties of kinship, for they are beyond its scope. Fundamentally speaking, science can proffer solely positive, not negative, statements.

The Relation Of Natural Catastrophes With Divine Tribulation

One of the elements that give rise to such natural disasters as earthquakes, floods, storms, tsunami, etc. that result in loss of life and property is divine tribulation. The Qur'an expresses this truth and advises humankind to be patient in the face of such tribulations:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ ۗ وَبَشِيرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient, (2: 155).

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Those who when an affliction visits them, say, 'Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return.' (2: 156).

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

It is they who receive the blessings of their Lord and [His] mercy, and it is they who are the [rightly] guided (2: 157).

The reason for these multifarious tribulations is that human beings are born with various potentialities. It is through these tribulations that these different potentialities may be actualized.

Patience and gratefulness are among the virtues conducive to human perfection. These two virtues can be actualized only through undergoing God's trials and tribulations. As such, God tests the human being, one day with blessing, possession, and power, one day with deprivation and degradation, that his patience and gratitude may be measured.

When experiencing tribulations and hardships, human beings must be patient, and when enjoying comfort, they must be grateful. This may be likened to war, in the course of which the soldiers' endurance is tested, and after which, when it is time for the collection of booty, it is their gratitude that

goes to trial.

The above–quoted verses aver that God will indeed test all people. Every human being will be tested. Thus to pray to God that He may absolve us of His trials is vain. Instead, we should pray, "God, make my faith firm and aid me, that I may undergo Your tests with success."³⁶

Economic Insecurity And Depression As God's Trials

The meaning of "a measure of fear and hunger" in the above–quoted verse is a society's being plagued with economic instability and depression. "Hunger" in this context denotes all types of bodily hardship, not merely lack of food as contrasted with thirst and fatigue. Thus, thirst and fatigue are explicitly expressed in other verses, such as the following:

مَا كَانَ لِأَهْلِ الْمَدِينَةِ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُمْ مِنَ الْأَعْرَابِ أَنْ يَتَخَلَّفُوا عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَرْغَبُوا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ
لَا يُصِيبُهُمْ ظَمَأٌ وَلَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا مَخْمَصَةٌ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَطْئُونَ مَوْطِئًا يَغِيظُ الْكُفَّارَ وَلَا يَنَالُونَ مِنْ عَدُوِّ نِيْلًا إِلَّا كُنْتُمْ
لَهُمْ بِهِ عَمَلٌ صَالِحٌ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

It is not fitting for the people of Madinah and the Bedouins around them to stay behind the Apostle of God and prefer their own lives to his. That is because they experience not any thirst nor fatigue, nor hunger, in the way of God, nor do they tread any ground enraging the faithless, nor do they gain any ground against an enemy but that a righteous deed is written for them on its account. Indeed God does not waste the reward of the virtuous. (9: 120).

The Magnificent Reward Of The Patient

Those who pass God's tests successfully rank among the patient, those to whom God has promised a worthy reward:

وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

And give good news to the patient. (2: 155).

That the verse does not state what the good news is, emphasizes its importance and magnitude. If it were a particular reward, the verse would have read, "give them the good news of such–and–such reward." Thus, that the verse refrains from specifying any particular reward implies its illimitable greatness:

إِنَّمَا يُوفَى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

Indeed the patient will be paid in full their reward without any reckoning. (39: 10).

This lack of specification, in addition to alluding to the greatness of the reward, is also indicative of its generality, for it encompasses the rewards of this world as well as those of the Hereafter. God endows the patient in this world with a great many rewards, including numerous personal virtues (which may in a respect be regarded as otherworldly rewards). Patience earns the believer such rewards as are deserved by the "grave matters:

وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا أَصَابَكَ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ

And be patient through whatever may visit you; that is indeed the gravest of matters. (31: 17).

No action obtains without will and resolution; any voluntary action, no matter how simple, is preceded by a willful decision. Certain tasks, however, are worthy of being intended and acted upon; they require firm resolution and cannot be achieved by the mediocre will.

In order to execute these tasks, it is necessary that one should have foresight and thought and benefit from the counsel of others, lest one's motivation should be impaired by sluggishness, reluctance, or hesitance.

The decision that crumbles on encountering the lightest obstacle lacks a firm ground. (The Arabic word that describes a firm resolution is samim, which is the opposite of being hollow; it means to be full within.

Thus, a solid rock in Arabic is described as samma¹—an adjective from the same root—and a genuine and loyal friend is referred to as al-samim. Moreover, deaf in Arabic is asamm, as though the ears of the deaf are clogged and have no room to receive sound.)

Patience is an extraordinary ordeal and as such requires a resolute decision. For, to practice patience, one must hold with a steadfast grip the reins of his desires so as to avoid indecision and weakness.

Thus, the patient human being exercises one of the "grave matters." Of course, an individual may be characterized as patient only when he is able to practice this virtue unremittingly and in all aspects of life.

The Material World: The Arena Of Trial

The material world is the realm of trials, trials which God operates to test humankind. Whatever the human being receives in this realm, be it pain or comfort, pleasure or anguish, is a test designed by God. To succeed in one test is only the beginning of the next. This world is the arena of trials and tribulations, whereas the Hereafter is the realm in which the tests cease, for it is where the human being receives his due reward and retribution.

Concerning the state of this world as the realm of trials and tribulations God says,

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

Indeed We have made whatever is on the earth an adornment for it that We may test them as to who is best in conduct. (18:7).

What exists in this world is an embellishment for the world, not for humankind, and a means by which they are tested. The bounties and abundance are means to test people's gratitude, while adversities and hardships are tests of patience. What embellishes the human being, on the other hand, is within him:

وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ

But God has endeared faith to you and made it appealing in your hearts. (49:7).

That which lies outside the human being and is thus separate from his essence cannot serve as an adornment for him. Jewelry, elegant clothing, and the like adorn merely the body, not the spirit. But one who acquires knowledge and attains to piety has adorned the soul.

That which pertains to the corporeal and material aspects is incapable of benefitting the soul, for the human being is immortal, whereas those aspects are transient; all the beauties of this world will one day wither:

وَإِنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا

And indeed We will turn whatever is on [the earth] into barren soil. (18:8).

As such to preoccupy oneself with the external is wasting the resources of one's soul, for one day the external will perish, leaving one with a hollow soul.

To journey to outer space, to other planets, to conquer the solar system will change nothing. Just as houses and gardens are adornments of the earth, not of man, so the stars are adornments of the firmament, and not of the human being:

إِنَّا زَيْنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ

Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the adornment of the stars. (37:6).

The human being, whether inhabiting the earth or the stars, must perfect his soul. Wealth and children,

which the Qur'an speaks of as adornments:

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of the world (18:46).

–are again but means to test the human being:

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ

Know that your possessions and children are only a test. (8:28).

Thus, just as lack of wealth is a test, so is its plenitude.

The Test Of Hardships

Every event, whether advantageous or otherwise, that takes place in our life is a test. Ordinary human beings, however, fail to recognize the advantageous and favorable events as tests; their acts of worship are in large part out of habit rather than a feeling of gratitude toward God.

Moreover, human beings engrossed in the material world and its sensual pleasures are incapable of realizing their gratitude to God. In order to make such people heedful of the spiritual and immaterial aspect of life, God entangles them in hardships.

God is reluctant to condemn His servants—even the most evil, like the Pharaohs—hastily to Hell. It is for this reason, that when Moses' admonitions failed in respect to Pharaoh,³⁷ God afflicted him and his people with years of hardship and drought that they may come to their senses:

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَكَّرُونَ

Certainly We afflicted Pharaoh's clan with droughts and loss of produce, that they may take admonition. (7: 130).

(God knew for sure whether they would take admonition or not. What appears to be an attribution of a lack of knowledge in such verses to God is in reality an expression of the possible occurrence of the issue in question.

That is, in objective reality, a particular cause may or may not produce the desired effect, depending on the various conditions. It is in relation to this multiplicity of possibilities in the realm of divine activity that some Qur'anic verses, such as the above–quoted, speak in a hesitant tone; otherwise, the Omniscient

God is ever-aware of the future of all things.)

Individual and social adversities are trials arranged by God. These trials are of various degrees. The lightest degree consists of experiencing some fear and hunger, but the gravest degree may be so harsh as would make the believers tremble:

إِذْ جَاءُوكُم مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنكُمْ وَإِذْ زَاغَتِ الْأَبْصَارُ وَبَلَغَتِ الْقُلُوبُ الْحَنَاجِرَ وَتَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ الظُّنُونَا

When they came at you from above and below you, and when the eyes rolled [with fear] and the hearts leapt to the throats and you entertained misgivings about God, (33: 10).

هُنَالِكَ ابْتُلِيَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَزُلْزِلُوا زِلْزَالًا شَدِيدًا

It was there that the faithful were tested and jolted with a severe agitation. (33: 11).

In such severe trials as make men tremble, the hypocrites take flight saying,

وَإِذْ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ مَا وَعَدَنَا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا

And when the hypocrites were saying, as well as those in whose hearts is a sickness, “God and His Apostle did not promise us [anything] except delusion” (33: 12).

But the steadfast believers remain patient and unfaltering: Among the faithful are men who fulfill what they have pledged to God.

مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَنْتَظِرُ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا تَبْدِيلًا

Of them are some who have fulfilled their pledge, and of them are some who still wait, and they have not changed in the least. (33:23).

Such trials are not restricted to a certain people; all people must in the course of their life undergo such trials. Concerning this issue, God thus addresses the believers residing in Medina:

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ ۚ مَسَّتْهُمُ الْبَأْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَّاءُ وَزُلْزِلُوا حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَىٰ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ ۚ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ

Do you suppose that you shall enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of

[what befell] those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, 'When will God's help come?' Lo! God's help is indeed near. (2:214).

It is important to reflect on such verses more than on other verses. The warning in this verse—"Do you suppose you shall enter paradise" is addressed at people who performed their prayers in the holiest of sanctuaries and with the holiest man, the Prophet of God; they would hear his words and associate with him personally. It is such people who are so threateningly warned.

The trials imposed by God may come in the form of the plights of war, such as is demonstrated in the following verse:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ حَتَّىٰ نَعْلَمَ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ مِنكُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَنَبْلُوَ أَخْبَارَكُمْ

We will surely test you until We ascertain those of you who are diligent and those who are patient, and We shall appraise your record. (47:31).

We must distinguish between the verses that talk of fear and hunger as trials and those that mention such hardships as punishments. In verse 112, Surah Nahl, we read:

فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ

So God enveloped [the wicked people] in hunger and fear. (16: 112).

This verse indicates the infliction of divine punishment. In contrast, verse 155, Surah Baqarah, which concerns God's trial does not contain this vindictive tone:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealthy lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient. (2: 155). [38](#)

The Test Of Comfort

Even as God tests human beings by a lack of bounties, so too He tests them by providing them with bounties, with public and spiritual positions, with success, with abundance in children and fruits.

The tree of the material world produces solely buds that never come to fruition. It is as though this unprolific tree were struck with a frost destructive of its buds. These buds, however, may also serve as

tests; God says,

مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ وَرَزَقُ رِبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ

Covet not what We have provided certain groups of them withy for it is but the glitter of the life of this world, so that We may test them thereby. (20: 131).

Moreover, for disbelievers and hypocrites, wealth and power are means of punishment:

فَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ ۗ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَتَزْهَقَ أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ

So let not their wealth and children impress you: God only desires to punish them with these in the life of this world, and that their souls may depart while they are faithless. (9:55).

And for the believers such worldly bounties are tests, though they may mistakenly take them as good in and of themselves:

أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ مَّالٍ وَبَنِينَ

Do they suppose that whatever aid We provide them in regard to wealth and children, (23:55).

نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ بَلْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

[Is because] We are eager to bring them good? Father they are not aware. (23:56).

In the Islamic value system, by contrast, it is fear of God, faith, and exclusive obedience to God that are intrinsically good:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ

Indeed those who are apprehensive for the fear of their Lord, (23:57).

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ

And who believe in the signs of their Lord, (23:58).

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ لَا يُشْرِكُونَ

And who do not ascribe partners to their Lord; (23:59).

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ مَا آتَوْا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ وَجَلَةٌ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ رَاجِعُونَ

And who give whatever they give while their hearts tremble with awe that they are going to return to their Lord, (23:60).

أُولَٰئِكَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَهُمْ لَهَا سَابِقُونَ

It is they who hasten in [performing] good works, and take the lead in them. (23:61).

What all this means is that in this world human rights are counterbalanced with human responsibilities. Whatever occurs, whether good or bad, is in essence a test from God. As such, when we pray to God for a favor, and He hears our prayer and fulfills it, we incur a new burden, for this favor begets responsibility and is, in this respect, a test.

It is in this light that when God speaks of bestowing copious bounties on the persevering, He adds that these bounties serve a dual purpose as tests:

وَأَن لَّوِ اسْتَقَامُوا عَلَى الطَّرِيقَةِ لَأَسْقِينَاهُمْ مَاءً غَدَقًا

If they are steadfast on the path [of God], We shall provide them with abundant water, (72: 16).

لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ

So that We may test them therein. (72: 17).

Thus even the most spiritually elevated of believers are, in this realm of obligation, put to test. In exchange for every bounty an obligation is incurred, which attests to the nature of the bounty as God's test. For this reason, the bounties that the righteous enjoy are accompanied by responsibility.

Though heavenly bounties are earned by virtue (keeping in mind, of course, that the bounties that disbelievers enjoy serve as a prelude to their eternal punishment in the Hereafter), they come at the price of obligation and this is what distinguishes worldly reward from that of the Paradise which is free of the onus of obligation.

Heavenly rewards include such material bounties as rain and sunlight as well as God's spiritual gifts in the form of divine knowledge, which God reveals to the hearts of the faithful:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

It is He who blesses you, and so do His angels, that He way bring you out from darkness into light. (33:43).

And in the same vein, terrestrial bounties may consist of the strictly material, such as fertile land, as well as the sciences that require instruction by a teacher.

The Trials Of Good And Evil

All events, whether good or bad, are tests from God. God tests some by comfort and some by discomfort:

وَبَلَوْنَاهُمْ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ

And We tested them with good and bad (7: 168).

وَتَبْلُوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً

And We will test you with ill and good. (21:35).

The reason why in the latter verse "ill" precedes "good" is that most people consider the test by ill as more grievous than the test by good and comfort. This, however, is a wrong notion, for the test by good is just as cumbersome, if not more so, than that by ill. For, one in comfort is more inclined to rebel against God and to refrain from paying the religious tax.

There are numerous hadiths to the effect that a person in trouble is aware of being tested, whereas one in comfort tends to be oblivious of God's test. In this relation, the Master of the Faithful says,

Indeed he whose wealth increases while he fails to notice this [increase] as a gradual (test) feels [falsely] immune to a frightful matter. [39](#)

God grants nothing without charge. The common individual, however, when possessed of youth, health, and vigor proudly assumes that God has favored him, and when he loses these bounties, he feels as though God had slighted him. This discrepancy is wrong as both states are tests from God as expressed in the following verse:

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ

As for man, whenever his Lord tests him and grants him honor and blesses him, he says, “My Lord has honored me” (89: 15).

وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ

But when He tests him and tightens for him his provision, he says, My Lord has humiliated me. ” (89: 16).

From the viewpoint of the Qur'an, there is no difference between a healthy person and a sick one. The former must be grateful, and the latter patient. To feel genuine gratitude is no less of a burden than being patient in the face of difficulties, for genuine gratitude is to spend a bounty for the appropriate purpose. Another verse that proves this point (that states of comfort and discomfort are in like manner tests from God) is this:

وَأِنَّا إِذَا أَذَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنَّا رَحْمَةً فَرِحَ بِهَا وَإِنْ تُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ فَإِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ كَفُورٌ

Indeed when We let man taste Our mercy, he exults in it; but should an ill visit them because of what their hands have sent ahead, then man is indeed very ungrateful. (42:48).

That is, God wishes that we should retain our humility before God when in comfort and refrain from being ungrateful when in discomfort. This shows that both states are tests. As such, when we are blessed with a bounty, we should not consider ourselves as deserving it, for even our righteous conduct and sincere supplications that we may supposed to have earned us the bounty in question are also bounties from God. As a general rule the Qur'an proclaims,

وَمَا بِكُمْ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ

Whatever blessing you have is from God. (16:53).

Imam al-Sajjad phrases this same truth differently in the following words:

All Your bounties are gratuitous. [40](#)

The Noble Qur'an explains that whatever takes place in this world is preordained in God's Book of Truth, and for this reason it would be futile to mourn over our losses or rejoice in our triumphs:

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ

No affliction visits the earth or yourselves but it is in a Book before We bring it about that is indeed easy for God, (57:22).

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ

So that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what comes your way. (57:23).

This spiritual insight gives us comfort, for we know that each new day brings with it a fresh turn in life, such that one day things may be for us and one day against us, but in either case life is a test.

With this realization, we will refrain from rejoicing with self-satisfaction when in comfort for we know that it is not earned. And when in distress, this realization relieves us from the pain and dejection that we may otherwise experience.

The Danger In Being Oblivious Of God's Tests

It has already been said that when in hardship we are better aware of God's tests, which makes them easier to endure. But the tests that come with ease and comfort are more difficult to detect, for in such a state we are more inclined to be neglectful. For this reason, men of God rarely ask for worldly comfort. What they desire is felicity in this world and the next:

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

And among them there are those who say, "Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter." (2:201).

In elucidating one of the divine norms, the Noble Qur'an states that when God wishes to awaken an affluent society, He afflicts them with hardship. When this measure fails, God then gives them liberally of His worldly bounties, which removes them even further from realizing the truth.

They live in this state of luxury until they are overwhelmed with gaiety and pleasure such as would make them feel invulnerable to all worldly woes. And then they are suddenly seized by God's wrath, while they are dumbstruck with anguish:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْضَرَعُونَ

We have certainly sent [apostles] to nations before you, then We seized them with stress and

distress so that they might entreat [Us]. (6:42).

فَلَوْلَا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا وَلَكِنْ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Why did thy not entreat when Our might overtook them. But their hearts had hardened, and Satan had made to seem decorous to them what they had been doing. (6:43).

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا مَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَبْوَابَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَتَّى إِذَا فَرِحُوا بِمَا أُوتُوا أَخَذْنَاهُمْ بَغْتَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْلِسُونَ

So when they forgot what they had been admonished of, We opened for them the gates of all [good] things. When thy rejoiced in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, whereat, behold, thy despondent. (6:44).

A Final Point

The reason we included such topics in the discussion on the environment is that to have a wholesome environment, we must first secure a wholesome society. A wholesome society can be achieved only when its culture, mores, and law are healthy, which in turn depend on honoring human dignity.

Human dignity consists in the human being's divine vicerealty. To be the viceroy of a noble king gives one nobility. But this is spiritual nobility that may be secured by safeguarding the angelic, immaterial spirit breathed in us by God Himself.

We can safeguard our soul by holding fast to the true doctrines taught by Revelation, by leading a virtuous life based on the value system expounded by Revelation, and by observing the precepts that Revelation sets forth. If we thus safeguard our soul, we will then undoubtedly enjoy a wholesome and invulnerable environment.

- [1.](#) Such studious study is described by the Qur'an as tafaqquh or comprehension, a capacity of which many are deprived.
- [2.](#) Mafatih Al-Jinan, "Munajah al-Shakirin."
- [3.](#) Al-Sahifah Al-Sajjadiyyah, no. 47.
- [4.](#) Al-Sahifah Al-Sajjadiyyah, no. 20.
- [5.](#) See Al-Mizan, vol. 5, pp. 9-16.
- [6.](#) Mutarahat, pp. 466-67.
- [7.](#) Mafatih al-Jinan, "A'mal Shab Jum'ah."
- [8.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 311.
- [9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 97, p. 23.
- [10.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar Al-Ridha', vol. 1, p. 296; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 93, p. 357.
- [11.](#) Ilal al-Shara'i, vol.2, p. 180 Al-Burhan, vol. 5, p. 48.
- [12.](#) See Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 259; Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 29, p. 15.
- [13.](#) Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah, Supplication no. 12.
- [14.](#) See Majma 'al Bayan, vol., pp. 697-98 and Ruff al-Ma 'ani, vol. 9, PP. 16-i7.

[15.](#)

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ أَقَامُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَأَكَلُوا مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِمْ

"Had they observed the Torah and the Evangel, and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would surely have drawn nourishment from above them and from beneath their feet." (5:66).

[16.](#)

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

"If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth." (7:96).

[17.](#) Mufradat, p. 119.

[18.](#) An allusion to the following Verse:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever disbelieves in the Shaitan and believes in Allah he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle, which shall not break off, and Allah is Hearing, Knowing. (2:256). [Tr.]

[19.](#) Ilahiyyat Shifa, p. 439.

[20.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 105, p. 16; Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 1, p. 300.

[21.](#) Talk: Arabic dictionaries provide both definitions, but considering that the arid and desert climate of Arabia doesn't allow for the cultivation of banana, we may conclude that it is the acacia plant that the Prophet intended. [Tr.]

[22.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 9, p. 212.

[23.](#) Refer to the following Verse:

يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ مِنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ

He may forgive you some of your sins (71:4).

[24.](#) Refer to the following Verses:

أَتَمَّا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُصِيبَهُمْ بِبَعْضِ ذُنُوبِهِمْ

God desires to punish them for some of their sins (5:49).

لِيذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

That He may make them taste something of what they have done, so that they may come back (30:41).

[25.](#) Refer to: 28:76–82.

[26.](#) See 34: 15–19.

[27.](#) Refer to the following Verse:

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned, though He excuses many an offense (42:30).

[28.](#) Refer to: 34: 16.

[29.](#) Refer to: 29: 14.

[30.](#) Refer to: 41: 17.

[31.](#) Refer to: 69:6.

[32.](#) See Al-Mizan, vol. 2, pp. 181–83.

[33.](#) Thawab al-Amal wa 'Iqabal-A'mal, p. 252.

[34.](#) Thawab al-Amal wa 'Iqabal-A'mal, p. 241.

[35.](#) For more on this topic, see Al-Mizan, vol. 2, pp. 183.

[36.](#) See Wasa'il al-Shiah, vol. 7, p. 137.

[37.](#) Concerning how Moses should address the infidels, God says:

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَى

Speak to him in a soft manner, that he may take heed or fear (20:44).

[38.](#) For more on this, see Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir, vol. 2, p. 53.

[39.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Aphorisms, no. 358.

[40.](#) Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah, no. 12.

Chapter 4: Exploiting Nature And Its Influence On The Environment

The Role Of Human Endeavour In Attaining A Wholesome Environment

One of the elements conducive to a wholesome environment is the vitality of those inhabiting it. Sluggishness and inactivity are diseases that may affect the individual and society alike. In order to achieve spiritual as well as material wellbeing and perfection, the human being must struggle ceaselessly.

The value of human endeavor is not limited to the financial gain it may produce. It involves numerous other personal benefits such as self-confidence, tranquility, and feeling useful to society. But above all, the highest benefit is fulfilling one's religious duty.

To be idle makes one a burden on one's family and society, and this state entails psychological depression, which may in turn cause sickness in the body as well. There is, however, a more serious consequence for being idle, and that is incurring God's wrath:

Verily God loathes His idle servant. [1](#)

The Value Of Work In Islam

Work is portrayed in the Islamic value system as the *raison d'être* of creation. The human being exhibits his worth through work, and it is through work that he acquires his true value. God breathed of His spirit into man² and equipped him with all that which was necessary for his spiritual and corporeal growth:

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَهُ ظَاهِرَةً وَبَاطِنَةً

Do you not see that God has disposed for you whatever there is in the heavens and whatever

there is in the earth and He has showered upon you His blessings, the outward and the inward? (31:20).

And in this way God honored the human being above all other creatures:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

Certainly We have honored the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference. (17:70).

God fashioned the human being out of clay, that he may, through persistent work, develop the earth³ and through righteous deeds actualize his essential value, attaining to the spiritual distinction that God intended for him. It is by developing the earth and cultivating self-knowledge that the human being can secure a wholesome environment and achieve perfection.

A society's integrity, honor, independence, wellbeing, and security are determined by the work of its people. Should they choose sloth and inactivity, their society would certainly suffer baseness, depression, and insecurity. The importance of work may be inferred from the Qur'an's attributing it to God. In many verses, the Qur'an attributes work to God, while in certain instances it ascribes generally all activity to God:

كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ

Every day He is engaged in some work. (55:29).

Every manifestation and effusion of divinity is a fresh activity. God's activities are not repetitive, for He is continually creating, and every creation possesses distinctive traits. As such God's activity cannot be repetitive. All phenomena seek the fulfillment of their essential needs in Him:

يَسْأَلُهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

Everyone in the heavens and the earth asks Him. (55:29).

God is the sole recourse who has the solution to all needs:

﴿ وَأَتَاكُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ مَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُ ﴾

He gave you all that you had asked Him. (14:34).

How Work Relates To Ontology

One's perception of the world determines how one perceives work. To view the world as confined to the material and thus to assume the means of knowledge as limited to sense perception and experience would narrow one's view of work to mere material productivity.

In the ontological system propounded by the Qur'an, however, existence is divided into the sensible and the supersensible. In this light, cognition is also divided to subsume both spheres of existence. Consequently, work must also apply to both spheres.

As such, one who sees the world as transcending the material realm views work in a broader sense. This broader sense sanctifies work from a spiritual perspective, thus extending its function.

The Broad Sphere Of Work

Productivity and work as achieved through exploiting nature and its resources constitute the human being's routine activity. God says,

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا

[Did We not] make the day for livelihood (78: 11).

إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا

And indeed during the day you have an extended opportunity [to seek out your means of livelihood] (73:7).

There are no boundaries for work; the depths of the oceans as well as the heights of the firmament and all the expanse of land provide opportunities for the human being to work:

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ ذَلُولًا فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِهِ

It is He who made the earth tractable for you; so walk on its flanks and eat of His provision (67: 15).

وَهُوَ الَّذِي سَخَّرَ الْبَحْرَ لِتَأْكُلُوا مِنْهُ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُوا مِنْهُ حَبْلَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ مَوَاجِرَ فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ

فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

It is He who disposed the sea [for your benefit] that you may eat from it fresh meat, and obtain from it ornaments, which you wear and you see the ships plowing through it and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks (16:14).

It need be pointed out that in this context work is not restricted to physical exertion. Work includes such activities as are conducted by the scholar in the way of research and study, by the physician in his endeavor to promote the health of other human beings, by the technician, and by the student who bears numerous difficulties to enhance his knowledge. All these scientific, academic, and technical endeavors are true instances of work in this broad sense.

Serious And Persistent Work

Islam instructs the human being that he should never stop work. He must strive in every aspect of life one of which is the need to fulfill the financial and material needs of life with a firm resolution and persistence, so that through such work the believer may procure his personal felicity and the religious society may accomplish its lofty goals.

The following saying by the Prophet clearly demonstrates the extent to which a Muslim should strive in life:

Should the Day of Judgment be imminent while you have in your hand a sprout, if you are able to plant it before the hour comes due, then do so.[4](#)

According to this saying, the human being must strive as long as he still has breath to work. In an Islamic society, every individual is expected to work to the extent of his talents and capabilities: the farmer in producing agricultural products, the industrialist in furthering industry, the teacher in instructing his students, the scholar in his studies, etc. Every individual must offer his sincere effort to fulfill his share in the qualitative and quantitative advancement of the society.

The Ahl al-Bayt speaks of sluggishness as one of the most abominable vices, which may undermine life both in this world and in the Hereafter. In this relation, Imam Musa says,

Avoid indolence and discontentment, for verily these two will deprive you of your profit in this world as well as in the next.[5](#)

So long as we live, we must endeavor to remain beneficial to our society. The tasks that we are capable of doing, we must do to the best of our capabilities, whether it be farming, industry, or cultural and scientific pursuits.

Idleness is detrimental to society and loathsome to God. He shuns the supplication of the idle individual.

Although the elderly are not expected to work as hard as the youth, nevertheless they must do the best that their mental and physical conditions allow.

Despite the numerous hadiths in Islam emphasizing the value of work, there are some who turn a blind eye to the positive approach Islam holds toward work for worldly purposes. They mistakenly cite the instances where Islam discourages believers from "worldliness" and being obsessed with the material.

The following hadith, however, clarifies the confusion between "worldliness"—which is truly evil—and work for satisfying one's material needs—which is undoubtedly praiseworthy.

*Muammad ibn al-Munkadir relates that one day he was on the outskirts of Medina when he came across Imam al-Baqir. The Imam had been working on his land, tending the crops, in the fierce heat of the Arabian desert and as such was exceedingly exhausted and could move only with the aid of his servants. Believing that the Imam was toiling more than the transient benefits of this world called for Muhammad ibn al-Munkadir decided to admonish him. Addressing the Imam, he said, "May God reform you! It is not becoming of a noble man such as you—being among the noble of the Tribe of Quraysh to be toiling in this time of day for your worldly profit. If death should seize you in this moment, how will you answer to God?" The Imam retorted, "By God, should death seize me while I am in this condition, I will die engaged in the worship of God."*⁶

It is a misconception to assume that working to fulfill one's material needs is in contradiction to God's wish and detrimental to one's spiritual wellbeing. Islamic wisdom assigns such work as a form of worship of God and thus strongly encourages humankind to strive in this way. This is especially true of those worldly duties that, if neglected, may involve irreparable consequences even for one's eternal felicity.

[The Worldliness Shunned By Islam](#)

Worldliness consists of the activities that involve sin or that distract one from the remembrance of God. In this light, the "evil world" that is so loathsome in the Islamic value system is not the sky and the earth or the sea and the land. These are in fact God's creatures and His signs, and as such the Qur'an speaks of them favorably:

إِنَّ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Indeed in the heavens and the earth there are signs for the faithful. (45:3).

وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُتُّ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ آيَاتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ

And in your creation [too], and whatever animals that He scatters abroad, there are signs for a

people who have certainty (45:4).

وَفِي أَنفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ

And in your souls too [there are signs of God] (51:21).

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for those who possess intellect (3: 190).

The Qur'an speaks of the beauty of the heaven and the earth on numerous occasions. Sea and land, mountains, trees, fish, and stars—the Qur'an portrays all these as constituting God's signs, not the world. Although, "this world," as contrasted with the Hereafter, applies to these natural phenomena, the Qur'an never speaks lightly of them. In truth, the material world is the delusive egotism that compels the human being to sin. The "evil world" is made of sensual diversions, sinful entertainments, and vainglory:

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُمْ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُمْصِرًا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا

Know that the life of this world is just play and diversion, and glitter, and mutual vainglory among you and a competition for wealth and children (57:20).

The material world is exemplified in the five elements counted in this verse. It is this world that deceives people of all ages. Every human being has a unique way of being deceived. This deception is the soul's poison, and a soul so poisoned is in eternal anguish. In order to cure our poisoned souls, the Most Merciful Lord has appointed the purest of souls as our spiritual doctors.

The above-quoted verse enumerates the five successive stages of the material world that the human being lives through: play, diversion, glitter (or luxury), vainglory, and competition for acquiring the fleeting profits of this world.

The first stage of life consists of the juvenile years, when children spend their time playing. In the second stage of life, adolescence, diversion takes the place of play. The adolescent tends to seek entertainment, thus neglecting the real tasks of life. The third stage of life, youth, is characterized by passion, love, and the tendency to worship style.

The youth view adornment, physical appeal, and fashionable dress as of prime importance. In the fourth stage of life, when degeneration sets in, one no longer cares for fashion so much and instead engages

in vainglory, boasting of one's position, status, title, and the like.

The final stage of life is that of frailty. At this stage, the desire to seek fame is replaced by a desire to accumulate worldly gains, whether it be in the form of a large family or of wealth. Some people never go beyond the first or second stage of life, being preoccupied even in their old age with play, diversion, and extravagance and thus leading a childish life.

The world that the Master of the Faithful irrevocably divorced in the famous account was, again, not God's material bounties, but rather the illusions, the vainglory, and the bickering characteristic of people engrossed in the material world. The reality of this world is a dead carcass, and the oppressors are as dogs fighting over this putrid carcass. The Master of the Faithful says,

They quarrel over this base world in the manner of dogs bickering over a putrid carcass. [7](#)

One who thus apprehends the reality of the world cannot be fond of it but rather disowns it.

In order to be able to perceive the world as such and witness its being a carcass, we must first protect ourselves from turning into corpses. One infatuated with the corporeal world and given to gluttony and sluggishness should not hope to discover the secrets of the world and its reality.

For, in the end, one will die, leaving only a dead corpse behind, a corpse so foul in smell that even one's closest family members would hurry to bury it to escape its stench. It would be unfortunate for the human being to turn into a dead corpse before realizing that the reality of the world is a dead corpse. We are capable of elevating ourselves so that we would gain eternal life, as Imam 'Ali put it when describing the Ahl al-Bayt:

Indeed when one of us dies, he dies while still alive, and when one of us perishes, he does not decompose. [8](#)

By eschewing the corporeal world, we can escape being a corpse and can attain an eternal and luminous life. God describes the corporeal world as follows:

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّهَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاؤُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُمْصَفًا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا

[This world is] like the rain whose vegetation impresses the farmer; then it withers and you see it turn yellow, then it becomes chaff (57:20).

Since in an analogy, the subject is other than that with which the analogy is drawn, we may infer that the world is not identical with the four seasons. The four seasons are in fact God's signs that exhibit the orderliness in His creation. Autumn in its own place is as beautiful and good as spring is, for without autumn and winter there would be no spring. It is actually our egotism that constitutes the material world

with its delusive attraction.

Wellbeing In This World As Well As The Next

Some have falsely assumed that the purpose in religious precepts is exclusively to secure human wellbeing in the Hereafter. They suppose that the devout must pray, fast, and perform such religious rites as the Hajj, preoccupied solely with spiritual concerns and should neglect their worldly wellbeing, for otherwise they would jeopardize their eternal felicity.

The proponents of this view argue that the faithful should relinquish their worldly affairs to others while holding fast to their spiritual matters. According to this view, worldly affairs are beyond the jurisdiction of religious law. To entrench this view, they contend that the faithful must occupy themselves solely with spiritual issues and leave the affairs of this world for the secular-minded experts to deal with.

This false conception, however, is a product of the idea of the separation of temporal and spiritual affairs. One of Islam's main objectives is to refute this idea. Rational reasoning (which is wrongly believed to be the exclusive turf of the secular expert) is among the main sources of religious doctrine. It is one of the sources from which religious precepts may be deduced. Reason and tradition go hand in hand to form the essence of religious scholarship. As such, the devout are the most rational experts.

It is wrong to argue that reforming the world should take place at the hands of secular experts, whereas the devout should worry solely about their spiritual felicity and hope to reap the gains of their religious endeavors in the hereafter.

It is also a misconception to claim that religious obligation entails dogmatism and stagnancy while worldly reform requires vitality and revolution. Such a misjudgment can be the result of an intentional misrepresentation of the religious message or, at best, an innocent misapprehension.

A profound understanding of religious doctrine proves that religious obligation is intended to foster both worldly and spiritual wellbeing. To take up a religious life and to conform to religious law can secure human welfare both in this world and in the next.

But we should bear in mind that it would be incorrect to define worldly welfare as merely limited to shallow and superficial pleasures. The disagreement in this area may be attributable to a difference in determining what constitutes worldly wellbeing.

The Sacred Purpose In Striving To Develop The Natural Environment

Islam condones the human being's opportunist inclination while at the same time warns that it should be curtailed. In order to clearly explain Islam's viewpoint on the opportunist inclination in the human being, it

is necessary that we should first consider another factor in this relation.

The divine religion of Islam discourages the human being from indulging his inclination to the detriment of higher tendencies. This is especially true in regard to those who wish to further their human and spiritual potentials.

Islam demands that human beings see beyond their material and selfish interests and endeavor for divine motives. In this Islamic value system, the way to achieve proximity to God is not restricted to such religious activities as prayer, fasting, and performing the Hajj; rather, the mundane and ordinary activities can also serve as means to ascend to the height of divine proximity and to nurture spiritual growth.

There are numerous hadiths that link the mundane with the spiritual, such as those that equate the struggle for acquiring a healthy livelihood with fighting in the way of God or those that define such struggle as identical with striving to secure spiritual salvation.⁹

These hadiths in effect illustrate the possibility of attaining to divine proximity even as one enjoys the benefits of the corporeal world. Thus we learn that we are obliged to work so as to fulfill our material and financial needs but without failing to heed our spiritual interests. Commending those who succeed in satisfying both these aspects, God says,

رَجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيمُ تِجَارَةً وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

Men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of God (24:37).

Financial occupation does not distract them from remembering God, for they have reconciled the dichotomy between worldly and spiritual affairs; they employ both the worldly and the spiritual in the way of reaching their ultimate purpose.

There are two possible misgivings that need be addressed at this point. First, there is the notion that Islam's insistence on pursuing spiritual wellbeing and viewing the world as only a path leading to divine proximity may induce a feeling of indifference to worldly and financial affairs in the faithful.

Considering what has been said in the above disproves such a notion. The divine teachings of Islam only ask that we should change our motives in engaging in financial activities, that we should replace the base and illusory motives with lofty ones.

Without doubt, material and worldly incentives can never motivate as strongly as the motives that arise from faith. Those who are motivated by faith can struggle for ends which are much more difficult than the ends that material incentives can muster up.

As such, should our financial activities be strengthened with the support of faith, the product would be much more valuable. For, as the faithful view their profits in a broader sense that transcends material

gain, they struggle more diligently.

The second misgiving is that since Islam encourages the faithful to free themselves of the confines of material motives and to take into account loftier purposes, the material world is in their eyes of only meager value and as such worldly affairs do not fit into the religious sphere.

This misconception may in turn lead to the conclusion that Islam fails to consider the development of the material world, focusing exclusively on promoting the spiritual aspects. As such, one who wishes to enjoy an advanced world should abandon religion and instead seek a better worldly life through science and the empirical disciplines. One is justified in opting for religion only when one's purpose is to pursue spiritual growth.

To counter this false conclusion, the explanation offered above regarding the difference in motivation should suffice. But, in short, if the advocates of this idea mean that Islam discourages limiting one's purview to the material world as being an unsuitable resting place for human beings seeking perfection, they are correct. Islam portrays this world as a path to human perfection, and so to see the world as the ultimate goal is against the human being's truth-seeking nature.

But this in no way implies that Islam neglects the development of the world. Although, the material world is not the end, nevertheless it is the path leading to the end, and so it cannot be maintained that the way does not deserve to be tended. It is very obvious that to say of something that it is not the be-all and the end all is not tantamount to rejecting its value altogether.

This world and the bounties that exist in it play a crucial role in encouraging faithfulness and promoting the lofty states of human perfection, which will be overtly manifest in the Hereafter. In the reported hadiths in the Shia corpus, worldly bounties are described as the best aids in seeking spiritual perfection. Imam Al-Sadiq says,

This world is a good aid for the Hereafter. [10](#)

On the other hand, harsh living conditions and poverty are considered as serious obstacles in the way of the religiosity of the general public. In the following excerpt from a well-known supplication related from the Prophet, he points to bread (as a symbol of the material bounties) and confirms that its lack weakens religiosity in society:

O God, bless us in our bread and withhold it not from us, for without it we: would not pray or fast or observe: the commandments of our Lord. [11](#)

Considering the great emphasis that Islamic tradition lays on worldly bounties and their crucial role in attaining the lofty states of human perfection, there are no legitimate grounds for claiming that Islam neglects this world and its development. Islam in fact encourages people to obtain the worldly means of wellbeing—while cautioning that they are not ends in themselves—because of their special place in

securing spiritual felicity.

Now that we have demonstrated that Islam does recognize the need to secure worldly wellbeing, another question looms: Should humankind be free in acquiring material wellbeing by any means possible? Are we justified in taking advantage of the material world in any way we desire?

Reason and Revelation concurrently affirm that from a religious perspective, we are allowed in utilizing the material world only in a certain framework, and as such there are definite restrictions to human beings' exploitation of worldly bounties.

Keeping within the framework established by Revelation ensures that our exploitation of the material world is consistent with human values, but in addition it also facilitates the development of the material world in a more appropriate manner.

Thus, true believers approach the world and the material bounties in view of the perspective offered by Revelation, for, in their view, achieving a more developed and orderly world requires that we should see the world from this perspective.

In this light, Revelation exhorts believers to seek the latest scientific and technological advancements and apply them to their life. But the religious perspective introduces another dimension to worldly development. Based on this viewpoint, to achieve a developed world, we must employ science and technology in harmony with reason and Revelation.

The Relation Of A Thorough Comprehension Of Religion To Promoting Worldly Wellbeing

It is reported that the Prophet said,

A thorough comprehension of religion requires, among others, that a man should endeavor to improve his life, and to seek such an improvement does not constitute infatuation with the material world. [12](#)

The "improvement in life" intended in this context is broader than moral improvement; it involves all the factors conducive to a better and healthier life. Of course, this should not be understood to imply extravagance; extravagance can only corrupt and defile life, for it is an indispensable aspect of the "evil world," whose attachment is the cause of all sins.

To seek lawful means of living, sanitation, education, and military prowess is in no way an instance of extravagance, for these are elements that we are duty bound, on account of reason and Revelation, to obtain. Thus, an accurate understanding of religion can help us draw the line between infatuation with the world, which is detestable, and improvement of life, which is right and commendable.

The Consistency Of Improving Worldly Life With The Observance Of Religious Duties

The following two hadiths are narrated from the Prophet:

Improve your worldly life and endeavor for your afterlife as though you will die tomorrow. [13](#)

Endeavor [for your worldly life] as a man hoping to live for eternity, but take caution (as to your spiritual wellbeing) as a man who fears lest he should die on the morrow. [14](#)

These two hadiths convey the following points.

1. Improving one's worldly life does not conflict with observing one's religious duties.
2. Improvement in one's life should be conducted with a view to a prolonged life. That is, it is impermissible to plan our worldly affairs negligently and with a short-term approach. To commit such folly would entail long-term misery, perpetual poverty, and unremitting deprivation and oppression. In order to escape long-term misery, long-term planning and well-balanced development are indispensable.
3. We should be careful to avoid confusing the commendable improvement of life with harboring far-fetched dreams, which is blameworthy. In order to dispel such misunderstanding, it is necessary that we should acquire a comprehensive grasp of religion, which is no easy task. In this relation, the Prophet offers a general and profound guideline:

The Straight Path is narrower than a thread of hair and sharper sword. [15](#)

This saying implies that the Straight Path, which we ask God to be guided to in every prayer, has a theoretic and epistemic aspect as well as a practical and ontic aspect. In its theoretic aspect, it is very difficult to apprehend as it is "narrower than a thread of hair."

And in its practical aspect, it is very difficult to conform to, for it is like treading on the sharp blade of a sword. The important point in studying Islam is that in the religious sources, rights are juxtaposed with obligations. Thus, to benefit from fertile land, clean air, abundant water, sanitation, etc., are, in addition to being rights, duties; human society is under an obligation to secure these benefits for itself.

For, God created these bounties for the human being and made them subservient to him. As such, we have no excuse should we fail to make appropriate use of sea, land, outer space, the solar system, the Milky Way, and, generally, the entire expanse of the celestial order.

God obliged humankind to exploit the bounties of the world, commanding the individuals in a society to give precedence to public interests over private interests and rebuking the corrupt and warning them of a

bitter chastisement. The Qur'anic verses that confirm the world's subjugation to the human being are so numerous that those well versed in the Qur'an could not legitimately dispute it.

As has been alluded to above, verse 61 of Surah Hud (He brought you forth from the earth and asked you to develop it. So plead with Him for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently. My Lord is indeed near most [and] responsive), speaks of the blessed principle of developing the earth. God created the earth, the mines, the mountains, the seas, the deserts, the forests, etc., in a virgin state and inspired the human being to develop these resources and to exploit them justly. God says,

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَتَبْتُمْ وَإِلَى النِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَتَبْتُمْ

To men belongs a share of what they have earned, and to women a share of what they have earned (4:32).

This means that the human being is obliged to develop the world, from the depths of the earth to the zenith of the firmament and that the fruit of his labor belongs to him alone, not to intruding oppressors. And in this regard, there is no distinction between man and woman.

The concept of the economic independence of human society is again reaffirmed in this verse:

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ

Certainly We have established you on the earth, and made in it [various] means of livelihood for you (7: 10).

This verse once again indicates that making appropriate use of the natural resources is a human right as well as a human obligation. Thus, people must strive to achieve economic independence, and if they fail, they will have to answer on the Day of Judgment.

In this way, Islam expounds a balanced approach to economic independence, asserting it as simultaneously a right and an obligation. As such Islam intertwines the material world and the Hereafter as the, respectively, exoteric and esoteric aspects of man's [terrestrial] identity. It is in virtue of this combination that Islam elevates the human being to the dignified station of divine viceroyalty. Thus, it is wrong to assume that Islam neglects human rights or the human being's interests.

Work As The Principle Of Dignity

Any human being merits dignity to the extent of his faith. The believer is dignified on account of his faith, and he must endeavor to preserve and elevate this dignity. Work is a means to achieving dignity through financial independence. It is in this light that religious authorities identify work with dignity. Thus, Imam

Al-Sadiq said to one of his companions who was late for work,

Rise to your dignity in the early morning. [16](#)

'Abd al-A'la, one of Imam Al-Sadiq's companions, relates that on one hot day he encountered Imam adiq walking through the streets of Medina. He asked the Imam, "With your status before God and your relation to the Prophet, why do you trouble yourself in such a hot day?" Imam Al-Sadiq replied,

I have embarked on earning my living so that would be [financially] independent before the likes of you. [17](#)

Islam combats baseness as an adverse consequence of sluggishness. There are numerous hadiths narrated from the Infallibles that condemn inactivity; below are a few examples:

Avoid sluggishness; [18](#)

The blight of victory is sluggishness; [19](#)

Avoid sluggishness and discontent, for they are the keys to every evil. [20](#)

He who is possessed of water and land and yet is impoverished, God disowns him. [21](#)

On one occasion a man asked Imam Al-Sadiq, "My hands are not fit for work, and I am not acquainted with commerce; I'm poor and unfortunate; what must I do?" The Imam answered, "Work. Carry loads on your head and thus retain your independence from other people." [22](#)

Though the man is truly needy, Imam Al-Sadiq encourages him to work so that he may earn his living without recourse to other people, for being in need of others undermines one's dignity. On another occasion, Imam Al-Sadiq says,

Asking others to meet one's needs deprives one of dignity and takes away one's self-esteem. [23](#)

The Principles Of Work

Satisfying the need for entertainment and other emotional needs in a society requires the artistic talent of the artists. Likewise, economic independence and improvement of a society rests on the society's view of work. Islam sets forth certain principles for work in order to guarantee economic order and advancement in society. By complying with these principles, the people in a society can ensure the fulfillment of their physical and spiritual needs. A number of these principles are as follows.

1. Professionalism and faithfulness. Without doubt, the two elements of professionalism and faithfulness are very influential in the qualitative and quantitative improvement of work. A faithful professional undertakes his duties in his sphere of work scrupulously and systematically. This pleases God:

Verily God likes the faithful professional. [24](#)

On the other hand, He despises the individual who pretends to be qualified for a task while lacking the necessary knowledge and scruples. The Prophet says,

He who invites people to himself knowing that there are others more knowledgeable than himself—on the Day of Judgment, God will deprive him of His mercy. [25](#)

A society that fails to entrust work to the professional will inevitably face deterioration. Concerning this truth, the Prophet says,

Should a society entrust its affairs to a man when there are others more qualified than him, their affairs would decline until they take up what they had failed to do (i.e., to entrust their affairs to those most qualified). [26](#)

Faithfulness in work is important as it guarantees that the individual considers the interests of the society as prior to his own, thus refraining from engaging in superficial jobs that tend to enhance one's personal gain at the expense of the society's economic stability.

2. Soundness and aesthetic beauty. Islam emphasizes two important factors in every aspect of human life, holding the authorities of a society responsible for them; these are soundness and aesthetic beauty. Work should be executed based on scientific principles, otherwise it would lack soundness and thus be unacceptable. But, even when sound, should it lack artistic beauty, it would fail to appeal to and gratify people.

Concerning the first factor, soundness, the Prophet says,

Verily God desires that when you perform an action, you should make it sound. [27](#)

And in relation to the second factor, he states,

God likes one who, when performing an action, makes it exquisite. [28](#)

In creating the world, God observed these two factors, and He wishes that His viceroy should also observe them in his architectural, technical, and artistic endeavors. As a result of observing these two factors, environmental concerns will also be addressed. For, soundness and beauty cleanse the environment and purify the air, and a society thus cleansed and purified enjoys stability, even as a defiled society is vulnerable to destruction.

Performing an action without taking into account its necessary requirements and consequences will ultimately result in failure. As such, if the purpose in an undertaking is fulfilling a social need and strengthening the economic foundations of society rather than merely increasing one's personal gain, our conscience requires that we should perform it soundly and with utmost care. After building a structure

with diligent care, the Prophet said,

This structure will one day fall to ruin. Nevertheless, God likes that His servant should perform an action soundly. [29](#)

Islam vehemently denounces undutifulness, disloyalty, deception, and collusion. The following verse makes Islam's position on these issues clear, though in a general fashion:

وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ

And do not cheat people of their goods (26: 183).

The message of this verse is inclusive of all the factors pertaining to work, whether material or spiritual work.

3. In His Book, God exhorts the Prophet and the believers to remain steadfast:

فَاسْتَقِمُّ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَمَنْ تَابَ مَعَكَ وَلَا تَطْغَوْا

So be steadfast, just as you have been commanded [you] and whoever has turned [to God] with you (11:112).

Perseverance and steadfastness help one to continue work in the face of hardship and difficulty and to persist in striving for one's lofty goals. The verses of the Qur'an express that steadfastness leads to tranquility³⁰ and material wellbeing ³¹

In our endeavors we should never feel as facing an impasse; there is always a solution. To persevere in searching for a solution will invariably lead to a solution. The Master of the Faithful says,

He who seeks a thing will achieve it [either entirely] or partially ³²

4. Sincerity. Although work involves [the practical benefit of strengthening the economic foundation of the Islamic society and procuring its independence, thereby cutting off the hands of intruding oppressors, nevertheless Islam instructs us to engage in work with the sincere intention of obeying God. Sincerity reinforces the ritual nature of work and renders it sacred, and as such it is as the perfection that beautifies work. Imam 'Ali says,

*When you embark on work, purify [your intentions]*³³

5. Suitability. Our vocations exert a direct influence on our character and conduct. To choose a vocation exclusively on financial grounds and without concern for our distinct personalities primarily harms

ourselves. It would be impossible to retain a noble spirit and hope to solve the problems of our fellow human beings if we undertake an unlawful vocation. An appropriate and honorable job helps society in solving its problems while also promoting the spiritual and moral elevation of the subject. In this regard, Imam Al-Sadiq says,

God likes noble and loathes ignoble vocations. [34](#)

Islam defines some vocations necessary, some forbidden, some desirable, and some undesirable. One of the duties of parents as expressed by Islam is helping children in finding the appropriate vocation. [35](#)

6. Innovation. Excellent work is that which brings tradition and technology together, that which establishes a harmonious relation between art and nature. God, the Immaculate, has provided in the matrix of divine tradition the material necessary for any type of innovation.

He has endowed human nature with the potential of innovation in every field of technology and science. In utilizing this potential, the human being must endeavor to transmute the base material of work into an invaluable product, to refrain from repetition, and to pursue innovation.

The principle that should govern work is to adorn the raw material of nature with the appealing apparel of technology so as to fulfill every human need with an appropriate solution. It is such work that constitutes true alchemy. Imam Al-Sadiq refers to agriculture as the "great alchemy." [36](#)

For, through the science of agriculture, the inorganic material in nature is vivified with vegetative life. Thus, the essence of work is infusing the apparently lifeless corpse of nature with the spirit of art. And in this way, human technology is an artistic manifestation that exemplifies liveliness.

7. Purposefulness. Work is elevated to the status of advanced art only when it is purged of negligence, undutifulness and indifference and nurtured with innovation and purposefulness. As the continuation of our work depends on its being innovative and orderly and as we aspire to be known and liberated from obscurity, we need heed the following points.

One, we should perform work, not for its own sake, but for the sake of a higher purpose. Two, that the higher purpose should be reasonable and acceptable to the community of believers. Three, the multifarious jobs done in a society should complement one another as the parts and organs of the body complement each other.

Four, the culture of work should be such as to promote the religious and civil appeal of a form of work by defining its relationship with other forms of work performed in society. It is only in this way that various forms of work can complement each other and thus minister to the genuine needs of human society.

Determination In Production, Economy, Consumption

One of the influential elements in securing psychological stability in a society is the firm determination of the individual. A people's dignity and pride rests on their determination. The Master of the Faithful says,

Dignity is begotten by firm determination. [37](#)

Excellent work displays firm determination. [38](#)

A man's worth is determined by his determined action. [39](#)

The individuals in a society must direct their determination toward production rather than consumption.

Economy in consumption, alongside determination in production, is another factor conducive to social dignity and pride. The Prophet says,

He who is content with the substance that God has provided him is among the wealthiest of people. [40](#)

Also, Imam 'Ali states,

With economy comes dignity. [41](#)

Of course, we must be careful to avoid laziness in production with the pretext of economy, just as it is important to realize that we cannot compensate overconsumption by overexertion in production. To conflate these two principles may result in laziness, on the one hand, and consumption mania, on the other, and the latter two in turn entail baseness and degeneration.

But if we pursue production diligently, while striving to enhance productivity in industry and agriculture and other sources of revenue, with the intention to fulfill the needs of human society and, at the same time, lead a simple and content life and be willing to sacrifice for the benefit of others, we will succeed in bringing to fruition the angelic aspect of humanity and secure our psychological stability.

This, in fact, forms one of the central purposes of Prophethood as ordained by God. The following Qur'anic verses attest to this truth:

وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا

And you love wealth with much fondness (89:20).

وَأَحْضَرَتِ الْأَنْفُسُ الشُّحَّ

The souls are prone to greed (4: 128).

الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ

[Woe to him] who amasses wealth and counts it over (104:2).

The above–quoted verses reprove those who indulge their vegetative and animal aspects to the detriment of their human aspect. The verses quoted below, on the other hand, induce us to nourish our human aspect:

عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ

[They] prefer [others] to themselves, though poverty be their own lot (59:9).

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

Do not extend your glance toward what We have provided certain groups of them as a glitter of the life of this world (20: 131).

Islam's Insistence On Cleanliness Of Body And Home

The main lines of the Islamic value system are composed of very important factors that can be summed into two major categories: justice and freedom concerning legal and moral issues and cleanliness in relation to sanitary and health issues. Just as God's wrath is subsumed by His mercy ("His mercy extends over His wrath"[42](#), Islam's instructions concerning the various aspects of life revolve around justice and freedom, on the one hand, and cleanliness, on the other. The noble Prophet of Islam says,

Verily God, exalted is He, is clean and likes cleanliness, is neat and likes neatness, is noble and likes nobility, is generous and likes generosity, so tidy your thresholds. [43](#)

This saying implies that from the Prophet's viewpoint, environmental concerns have a spiritual aspect. Observing cleanliness in our home and work place is a duty that stems from the human being's status as God's viceroy who must practice the values honored by his King, and so humankind must cherish cleanliness and fragrance as values cherished by God.

Cleanliness and fragrance help in purifying the soul, for the soul accompanies the body and interacts mutually with it. It is through bodily cleanliness and fragrance that the angelic character of the soul may be cultivated, thus enabling it to ascend to the lofty heights of human perfection.

On examination, we may infer that the above prophetic saying is general, timeless, and absolute. That is, it applies to everyone, to all times, and to every respect. All human beings, men and women alike, throughout all stages of life must keep their house and workplace clean and refrain from defiling them,

and in the event that they be defiled, we must endeavor to clean them.

This principle is among the mutual rights and obligations that people must honor among themselves and that the government and the people must respect in relation to one another.

Cleanliness and fragrance, in addition to pleasing people, can be influential in promoting brotherhood and fidelity, for a clean and fragrant environment is cherished by God, who is beautiful and loves beauty. The following verses may correctly describe such an environment:

The Easter Wind has come to the greeting of the old Wineseller,
As the season of jubilation, feast, flirtation, and drink is come.
The air assumes a Messianic breath, the wind carries musk,
The tree grows green, and the bird is aroused to sing.
Dispel the thought of disunion so as to become united,
For as Ahriman leaves, the herald enters.[44](#)

Islam's Emphasis On Maintaining A Clean Environment And A Pure Air

The Prophet of Islam says,

Verily Islam is [the religion of] cleanliness, so cleanse yourselves, for indeed only the cleanly enter Paradise;[45](#)

Observe cleanliness in every respect you are capable, for indeed God based Islam on cleanliness; and only the cleanly enter Paradise. [46](#)

Islamic doctrine is founded on the principle of unity purged of polytheism and disbelief; it's ethical system rests on kindness as contrasted with injustice, vengeance, envy, and all vice; and its system of practical law eschews deviation, living in disorientation, and dying in madness. Thus, the believers of such a religion are expected to be purged of all vice and filth.

The Prophet avers cleanliness as a concomitant of piety and a general, timeless, and absolute obligation. It is in this light that he strikes an identical note with the Qur'anic verse: ***So be wary of God, as far as you can (64: 16)***, in saying,

Observe cleanliness as far as you can[47](#)

This means that we should strive for cleanliness in every way possible. If we do so, we would deserve being described by the following verses:

Come in and illumine our chamber;

Infuse with fragrance the air of our spiritual company.

Say to the Treasurer of Paradise that the soil of this company

Pray take to Paradise and distill fragrance from it.[48](#)

Fragrance pleases God and His beloved, the Prophet; thus he said,

[God) endeared to me of your world ... fragrance[49](#)

And in encouraging the use of fragrance, the Prophet says,

Were the residents of Paradise to be allowed to take up commerce, they would trade wheat and fragrance.[50](#)

This saying underscores the importance with which Islam considers economic wellbeing in its mention of wheat as the traditional source of food—and social cleanliness, which is one of the elements conducive to a wholesome environment.

Thus a community that aspires to heavenly joy should avoid an economy in which there is deep class difference between the rich and the poor; it should strive for a wholesome environment by purging sea, land, and air of pollution; it should work for an environment that enjoys wellbeing in the absence of destructive weapons.

But on the contrary, evil governments rise to reduce justice-seeking nations to poverty by imposing economic sanctions and exploiting biological weapons so as to attain false prosperity, but in so doing they tend to neglect that the treacherous world will not allow their oppressive rule to live for long.

There is no gain in egoism, so avoid it,

Lest it should reduce your existence to dust.[51](#)

The Spiritual Reward Of Conserving Nature

The Prophet says,

There are three things that enlighten the eye: greenery, flowing water, and a well-favored countenance.[52](#)

Since the brilliance of the eyes is nurtured by the sight of green vegetation, one can infer that the planting of trees and forests is a commendable deed in Islam. Thus, we are not justified in failing to plant vegetation, to preserve the natural resources, or to tend to parks and gardens.

The Prophet says,

He who plants a tree, indeed no human being eats from it nor any other of God's creatures but that it is

recorded for him as an act of generosity.[53](#)

This hadith demonstrates God's Mercy as including, not just human beings, but all creatures. Thus, benefitting any creature is rewarded as a generous act.

Islam's Command To Create Parks And Forests

It is important to note that the benefit of planting trees and vegetation is not restricted to where one derives personal gain; rather, where one is certain of the lack of personal gain, the reward of planting trees still applies. Thus, below two hadiths are presented concerning planting trees, one of which involves hope and the other lack of hope. First, the Prophet says,

Indeed hope is a grace from God unto my nation. Were hope lacking, no mother would suckle her infant and no gardener would plant a tree.[54](#)

Second, on another occasion the Prophet says,

Should the time [of the final judgment] come due while one of you holds a shoot in his hand, he must, if possible, plant the shoot before the advent of the hour [of judgment]. [55](#)

Planting Trees As One Of The Most Sacred Deeds

Islam's emphasis on planting vegetation, especially those productive of fruit for human beings, is clearly evident in the sayings of Islamic authorities, which rank this deed among the most sacred. Thus it is reported that the Prophet said,

Seven things continue to benefit one while dead and buried in grave: teaching knowledge, digging a canal, excavating a well, planting a date palm, constructing a mosque, bequeathing a Qur'an, or leaving behind offspring that ask one's forgiveness from God.[56](#)

In this hadith, planting trees is enumerated alongside such sacred activities as teaching, constructing a mosque, and passing on a Qur'an. This reveals the great value of this deed and the worth Islam deems for it.

In this light, the corpus of Islamic literature contains numerous hadiths that encourage planting trees or prohibit felling trees unless necessary. The Prophet says,

He who waters a talh (acacia or banana) or a lotus tree is as if he had quenched the thirst of a believer.[57](#)

The Master of the Faithful says,

Felling a rank and green tree is prohibited unless necessary.[58](#)

In the same vein, there are hadiths related from Imam Rida¹ and Imam Al-Sadiq to the effect that protecting trees is more crucial in arid regions and that it is permitted to fell trees if new trees are planted in their place.⁵⁹

The Necessity Of Preserving Air, Water, And Land Unpolluted

It is reported that Imam Al-Sadiq said,

*Life is not pleasant but for three things: clean air, abundant fresh water, and fertile land.*⁶⁰

God has furnished all the necessary elements for human life and recognized as a human right the ability to use them and obliged humankind to preserve them against disease, dearth, and the like. As such, it would be a violation of a religious obligation should the individual or society fail to discern these elements or preserve them.

That is, it is necessary, for instance, that the nature of air be examined, that the ways to utilize it be scrutinized, that the factors that pollute it be distinguished, and that the necessary facilities for purifying it be constructed and put to use. The same obligations pertain to water and soil.

Animal Rights In Islam

Any benefit that nature may provide to the human being or any other animal is deemed valuable in the Islamic value system. Religious authorities have always been kind to harmless creatures. Once when passing by the seashore, Jesus cast a morsel of food into the water. One of his disciples asked, "O Spirit of God, what was this for?" And he replied, "For the creatures of the sea, so that they may eat it, and the reward of this deed is indeed great."⁶¹

Imam al-Baqir says,

*To quench a creature, even an animal, deserves such reward as God on the Day of Judgment, when there is no shade to protect one from the heat, will give one refuge in His shade.*⁶²

It is from these verbal and practical instructions offered by the sacred authorities of Islam that we may infer how obedience and morality relate to environmental concerns. In these instructions, a religious element seeking God's reward, comfort in the Hereafter, etc. is manifestly infused in such seemingly mundane matters.

¹. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, p. 58.

². Refer to the following Verse:

وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي

And [I] breathed into him of My spirit (Qur'an 15:29).

³. Refer to the following Verse:

هُوَ أَنشَأَكُم مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا

He brought you forth from the earth and delegated to you its development (Qur'an 11:61).

[4.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, vol. 13, p. 460; Kanz al-'Ummal, vol. 3, p. 892.

[5.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 85.

[6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 46, p. 10.

[7.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon no. 151.

[8.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon no. 87.

[9.](#) See Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, pp. 34 and 66.

[10.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, p. 29.

[11.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, p. 31.

[12.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 942.

[13.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 1, p. 55.

[14.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 681.

[15.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 8, p. 65.

[16.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, p. 10.

[17.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5 p. 74.

[18.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 85.

[19.](#) Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam, vol. 3, p. 112.

[20.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 175.

[21.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 100, p. 65.

[22.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 76.

[23.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 148.

[24.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5, 113.

[25.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 110.

[26.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 10, p. 143.

[27.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 683.

[28.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 691.

[29.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 6, p. 220.

[30.](#) See Qur'an 41:30.

[31.](#) See Qur'an 72:16.

[32.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Aphorisms, no. 386.

[33.](#) Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam, vol. 2, p. 239.

[34.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 17, p. 73.

[35.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah vol. 21, p. 390.

[36.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 19, p. 34.

[37.](#) Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam, vol. 2, p. 106.

[38.](#) Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam, vol. 1, p. 365.

[39.](#) Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam, vol. 4, p. 500.

[40.](#) Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih, vol. 4, p. 358.

[41.](#) Sharh Ghurar al-Hikam, vol. 3, p. 324.

[42.](#) Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah, supplication no. 12.

[43.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 606.

[44.](#) Divan Hafiz, ghazal no. 175.

[45.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 998.

[46.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 998.

[47.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 606.

[48.](#) Divaan e Hafiz, ghazal no. 397.

[49.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 73, p. 141.

[50.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 607.

- [51.](#) Hadiqah al-Haqiqah, p. 474.
- [52.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 1, p. 292.
- [53.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 563.
- [54.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 713.
- [55.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 2, p. 713.
- [56.](#) Nahj al-Fasahah, vol. 1, p. 497.
- [57.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 9, p. 212.
- [58.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 76, p. 319.
- [59.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 19, p. 39.
- [60.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 234.
- [61.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 9, p. 408.
- [62.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 93, p. 170.

Chapter 5: The Positive Effect Of Cordial Relationship Among People In Securing A Wholesome Environment

Securing a wholesome environment, in addition to being a human right, is a human obligation. Thus, it is necessary to examine, in addition to the human being's relation to the cosmos, his relation to himself and to other human beings.

One of the factors conducive to a wholesome environment is the healthy and civil interaction of individuals in a society. For this reason, Islam instructs the human being to promote a cordial relationship with his family, society, and the human world at large.

Islam's Praising Cordial Relationships

The Qur'an addresses the faithful with plural nouns, suggesting that people should engage in their activities collectively. It educates the believers in a social decorum that promotes human dignity and is consistent with the man's "excellent constitution" so that the environment humankind inhabit may be blessed with peace, security, and tranquility. As such, Islam condemns the elements of hatred and strife and, on the other hand, praises affection and unity as virtues.

The Qur'an approves ethnic, temporal, regional, and other differences only inasmuch as they function as devices for acquaintance, not as excuses for vainglorious boasting. The only factor that Islam recognizes as determining one's superiority is shunning vainglory, vice, power-seeking, arrogance, etc.

Islam does not define cordial relationship as restricted to the believers – though it strongly encourages

Muslim brotherhood. ***The faithful are indeed brothers (49: 10)***. In accordance with its claim to universal guidance, Islam teaches love and affection for all humankind, ordaining that so long as people refrain from acting treacherously, they should be treated with respect and equity:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُقْسِطِينَ

God does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes that you deal with them with kindness and justice. Indeed God loves the just. (60:8)

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ تَوَلَّوهُمْ ۗ وَمَنْ
يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

God forbids you only in regard to those who made war against you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them it is thy who are the wrongdoers (60:9)

Associating In The Best Possible Manner

As God created the human being in the "best constitution,"¹ it behooves him that he should associate with others in the best possible manner. Thus God says,

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزِعُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُبِينًا

Tell My servants to speak in a manner which is the best. Indeed Satan incites ill feeling between them (17:53)

وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا

Speak kindly to people (2:83)

(It need be pointed out that speaking in this context encompasses, in addition to verbal communication, any form of association.)

Although it is necessary that Muslims should defend the Islamic nation against foreign invasion, but when it comes to internal conflict, Muslims should not destroy the other Muslims that they perceive as enemies.

In such a case, enmity should be destroyed rather than the Muslim enemy. Destroying the enemy is an easy task compared to destroying enmity and restoring friendly relations—a feat that can be accomplished only by the righteous:

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ۚ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

Good and evil [conduct] are not equal. Repel [evil] with what is best. [If you do so,] behold, he between whom and you was enmity, will be as though he were a sympathetic fiend (41:34).

The community of Muslims is akin to the family wherein love and affection are predominant, and as such when dealing with other Muslims we should hearken to the Qur'an where it says,

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُ أَعْدَاءُ اللَّهِ إِلَى النَّارِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ

Consort with them in an honorable manner (4: 19).

Within the Muslim nation, even the severance of relation, as its continuation, should be done in an honorable manner:

فَأْمْسَاكُ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحُ بِإِحْسَانٍ

Then [let there be] either an honorable retention, or a kindly severance (2:229).

The elderly deserve respect—

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۚ إِذَا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرُهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا

[He has enjoined] kindness to parents. Should they reach old age at your side, one of them or both, do not say to them, 'Fie!' And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words (17:23).

just as children should enjoy the affection of adults, such an affection as derives from reason.

Equality And Equity As The Bases Of Legal Relations

From the viewpoint of the Qur'an, legal relations in human society should be founded on equality and equity. Islam forbids yielding to oppression as well as oppressing. Thus, in certain instances the Qur'an proclaims the mission of the prophets to consist in upholding justice, such as in the following verses:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

Certainly We sent Our apostles with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that humankind may maintain justice (57:25).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ

O you who have faith, be maintainers, as witnesses for the sake of God, of justice (5:8).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ

O you who have faith, be maintainers of justice and witnesses for the sake of God (4: 135).

And on other occasions, the Qur'an condemns both oppressing and yielding to oppression, declaring the latter as offensive as the former:

وَإِنْ تُبْتِغُ فَلَکُمْ رُءُوسٌ أَمْوَالِکُمْ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ

Neither oppressing others nor suffering oppression (2:279).

Condemnation Of Derision, Slander, And Exploitation In Islam

The Noble Qur'an explains the difference of talents and abilities among people as a means for the just distribution of labor in society and a basis for fair employment. It, however, strongly condemns treating others with contempt, making slanderous statement about others, or binding others in slavish employment:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَکُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضُکُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِيَبْلُوْکُمْ فِي مَا آتَاکُمْ ۗ إِنَّ رَبَّکَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ
وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

It is He who has made you successors on the earth, and raised some of you in rank above others so that He may test you in respect to what He has given you. Indeed your Lord is swift in retribution, and indeed He is all forgiving all-merciful (6: 165).

أَهُمْ يَفْسِمُونَ رَحْمَتَ رَبِّکَ ۗ نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَعِیشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَرَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِيَتَّخِذَ
بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا سَخِرِيًّا ۗ وَرَحْمَتُ رَبِّکَ خَيْرٌ مِمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ

Is it they who dispense the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life, and raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service, and your Lord's mercy is better than what they amass (43:32).

We may infer from these verses that God's bounties are tests, neither implying His favor nor His disfavor. They are meant as a basis for the just distribution of social obligations.

Verse 11 of Surah Hujurat, prohibits vainglorious boasting and decrees it necessary to observe mutual respect in relation to all and to associate with other individuals in society courteously, in order to prepare the way for the establishment of the ideal state and a wholesome environment:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْأَسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

O you who have faith, let not men ridicule one another, for it may be that they [i.e., the ridiculed] are better than thy [i.e., those ridiculing]. Nor let women ridicule one another, for it may be that they are better than thy. And do not defame one another, nor insult one another with [disparaging] names. (49: 11).

The Heavier Responsibility Of Authorities In Honouring Cordial Relationships

One's responsibility concerning civil relationship is proportionate to one's status. As such, this responsibility weighs heavier on the authorities of the Islamic government. It was in this light that God instructed Moses and Aaron to preach the word of God to Pharaoh in a polite manner:

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَيِّنًا لَعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ

Speak to him in a soft manner (20:44).

God thus instructed Moses despite His knowledge that Pharaoh would reject the truth and incur His wrath. Likewise, God commands the Prophet to be affectionate and humble in dealing with people:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ

It is by God's mercy that you are gentle to them, and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you (3: 159).

And in the same vein, God enjoins the Prophet to consult with the Muslim community in making decisions. Such consultation, in addition to being a sign of respect for the opinions of Muslims, is an effective measure in bringing about unity, encouraging competent individuals, cultivating concurrence among the intellectual elite, and ensuring a mature decision.

The Prophet's attitude toward the believers, which was inspired by God, was one of humility:

وَإِخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِمَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

And lower [humbly] your wing [of compassion] for the faithful who follow you (26:215).

("To lower one's wing" in the Qur'an is used either to express humility and faithfulness, as in the case of parents, or to show compassion, and it is in the latter sense that it is used of the Prophet.) But, in confronting the disbelievers who refused to submit to God, he was clear in distinguishing himself from them:

فَإِنْ عَصَوْكَ فَقُلْ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

If they disobey you then say, "Verily disavow your actions" (26:216).

One of the main purposes of the Qur'an in enjoining cordial relations is to cultivate the superior civilized society, wherein people would trust one another as opposed to corrupt societies in which distrust is rife.

The Innate Human Predisposition To Cordial Relations

The human being is by his nature² predisposed to collectively His nature calls him to associate with other human beings and to respect their rights. This cooperation and mutual respect, as the basis of civility, is rooted in human nature. The following lines by Sa'di eloquently phrase this human inclination:

The children of Adam are parts of one body,
For in creation, they are from one essence [or gem].
Should vicissitudes pain one of the parts,
The other parts will be deprived of peace.³

These verses, in addition to being an eloquent expression of the content of a number of Qur'anic verses and hadiths⁴ are a definite articulation of the human being's natural pred is position. Man naturally feels anguish at seeing others suffer just as he delights in seeing others prosper.

Another aspect of this natural human sympathy is the inclination to desire for others what one desires for oneself and to dislike for others what one dislikes for oneself. This is a requirement of faith, for the

Prophet says,

The believer perfects not his faith until he likes for his brother that which he likes for himself.⁵

And as such it is also a requirement of human nature, for human nature is founded on the true faith:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of God according to which He originated humankind (30:30).

The natural inclination in the human being toward civility is opposed to destroying natural resources, polluting the environment, or encroaching on the rights of others. Although he seeks material benefits so as to fulfill his material needs, the undefiled human being never wishes to fulfill such needs at the expense of other creatures. Not only does he avoid harming others, he strives, as far as is possible for him, to help others to his own detriment:

عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ

[They] prefer [others] to themselves, though they be afflicted with poverty (59:9).

This state of moral excellence can be achieved as a result of conforming one's conduct to the pristine human nature as bestowed by God, for when human conduct is so conformed, one's motivations are no longer limited to the material. The pristine human nature yearns for the illimitable fountainhead of divine effusion and so cannot be quenched by material rewards; the undefiled human being always seeks in his actions his true longing. Thus when giving food to the needy, true believers say,

إِنَّمَا نَطْعِمُكُمْ لَوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكْرًا

We feed you only for the sake of God We do not want any reward from you nor any thanks (76:9).

The Vulnerability Of The Inherent Human Dispositions

It may be assumed that the inherent human dispositions are unalterable, the human being fully possessing them throughout his life. This conception, however, is wrong, for one of the aspects of being inherent is, owing to its delicateness, its vulnerability.

And for this reason, it requires constant and conscious care. Thus, God warns human beings lest they

should defile their nature with the filth of egotism and desire. Such defilement would indeed entail great loss, and so if one is infected with such defilement, one must struggle tirelessly to purge it so as to reform and attain felicity:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا

One who purifies [the soul] is certainly felicitous (91:9).

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

And one who betrays it certainly fails (91: 10).

To convey the sense of defilement in the above–quoted verse, God employs the verb *dassa*, which derives from the root *dasw*, which means to bury something in the earth. Thus, the verb eloquently depicts how the human being can bury his nature as endowed by God by negligence and carelessness, rendering it impotent. So much so that he may end up with the mere resemblance of humanity devoid of its essence and truth. Such a human being is driven simply by his brute desires and hence is no different from other animals:

His countenance is that of a human being, but his heart is that of a brute.⁶ God describes such a person as being on a par with the brute or even worse:

أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ

They are like cattle; rather they are more astray (7: 179).

The reason that he may be worse than the brute is that the latter acts in accordance with his natural capabilities: apprehension and imagination in cognition and lust and anger in conation. But the human being who is endowed with the practical and theoretic intellect and yet fails to obey them, thus ends up falling lower than animals.

Violating The Rights Of Others

A look at the present global situation illustrates how contemporary human beings like those of the past–are engrossed in lust and desire, and ignorance in thought and action, neglecting their divine nature and burying it.

Human beings have forgotten the directions of their divine nature, especially in respect to social obligations. This fact is evident in the general, though perhaps unexpressed, assumption that helping our

fellow human beings is futile or even dangerous.

Those who harbor such mentality are concerned exclusively for themselves, diseased by an extreme feeling of alienation toward others. Their values are confined to what promotes their comfort interpreted in an individualistic way.

The cooperation and sympathy that they feign are deprived of their essence and employed simply as hypocritical means for achieving success. This is manifest in the unfortunate state of marriage in contemporary human society and the inability to form this fundamental nucleus of social life. Human beings are no longer able to obey their divine nature and enter into a pact with a partner to live under the same roof.

The Gravity Of The Family Problem

The crisis with which the family, which is the nucleus of social life, is afflicted is so deep and grave that sociologists and legislatures, though aware of the consequences that it will have for modern societies, are incapable of resolving it. Not only are they incapable of resolving it, they find themselves hopelessly at a loss as to finding a way to stop it from worsening.

So much so that the more the modern world advances in the way of science and technology, the more the values of family life wane. This is reflected in the increasing rate of divorce and promiscuity and the growing number of abandoned children. And these, in turn, lead to greater violation of people's rights.

To study the consequences of such natural defilement on an international scale would produce even graver conclusions. The oppression of the stronger countries against the weaker ones is on a steep rise. Though weaker nations are no longer labeled as colonies, they are exploited and subjugated more than ever before: political, cultural, and financial relations among countries are determined exclusively by that evil principle condemned by the Qur'an:

وَقَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْيَوْمَ مَنْ اسْتَعْلَىٰ

Today, he who has the upper hand triumphs (20:64).

Such is the law of the jungle, a concrete example of which is the veto power of the few superpowers in the United Nations, by which they are entitled to violate the rights of the weaker nations for the sake of their own interests.

In conclusion, though human beings are possessed of a pure and sacred nature at birth, they can defile it, thus erasing from their souls the divine directions infused therein by God, especially with regard to social intercourse. Such defilement results in irreparable damage in the social as well as international sphere. This is our state in the modern world.

The Positive Effect Of Maintaining Affectionate Relationships With Kindred On The Mental Health Of Society

In order to guarantee the wholesomeness of the environment, in addition to the material aspect, Islam ministers to the spiritual aspect as well. It advocates friendship, trust and cordial relationship as the bases of interaction among human beings. To promote these bases, it enjoins the strengthening of ties among kindred and among societies. Islam strongly praises the strengthening of such ties and denounces breaking them:

الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الْخَاسِرُونَ

[The transgressors are] those who break the covenant made with God after having pledged it solemnly, and sever what God has commanded to be joined, and cause corruption on the earth it is they who are the losers (2:27).

God teaches us that the human being is related to his Lord. To serve this relation of bondage to God is reprehensible. It is an instance of severing a tie which God has ordered to preserve (as expressed in the above–quoted verse), and as such is a violation of our pledge to God.

Moreover, as God created man as a social creature, He has promulgated certain guidelines for regulating how to associate with kinfolk and other believers, how to submit to the ruler of the Islamic community, and how to interact with non– Muslims societies.

These instructions are treated of, to different extents, in the Qur'an and in the corpus of Islamic tradition. One who violates the ties promoted by these instructions has in essence violated a tie that God has ordered to preserve and as such has broken the divine pledge. Below we will look at some of the relations whose maintenance God has declared sacrosanct.

Relations With Kinfolk

To break up one's relationship with one's parents and children is a clear instance of breaking a tie that God has ordered to preserve (as mentioned in the above–quoted verse). Concerning the parents, the Qur'an says,

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا

We have enjoined the human being to be good to his parents (29:8).

This is emphasized to a greater extent in relation to the mother:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ

We have enjoined man concerning his parents: His mother carried him through weakness upon weakness, and his weaning takes two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the return (31: 14).

In this verse, parents are mentioned directly after God, and this stresses the importance of respecting them. Parents are vessels of divine effusion, and so disrespecting them is a grave sin.

Breaking one's ties with close kinfolk is also an instance of breaking a tie that God has ordered to preserve. The Noble Qur'an states,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ

Be wary of God in whose Name you adjure one another, and the blood ties (4: 1).

Of course, by extension this verse also includes ties by marriage, for in some religious teachings, ties by marriage are compared with ties by blood. In the Prophet's sermon on the occasion of his daughter's marriage to 'Ali or the sermon on the occasion of Imam Jawad's marriage, we read,

Indeed God established relation by marriage as a secondary [kindred] relation.[7](#)

Thus one is also obliged to honor one's relatives by marriage.

In Islamic law, there are precepts that apply only on the condition of being Muslim, such as prayer and fast. Although such precepts are binding on non-Muslims as well, yet their prayers and fasts would be unacceptable should they perform them.

On the other hand, there are certain precepts that apply even to non-Muslims such as is the case in regard to parents. Thus, even if one's parents are non-Muslims, one is still under an obligation to respect them and to fulfill their needs:

وَصَاحِبُهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا

And associate with [your disbelieving parents] honorably in this world (31: 15).

Honoring the ties of kinship is more than just visiting one's relatives. The primary purpose of such relationships is to go to their aid before others do so.

The Noble Qur'an also addresses the conjugal relationship, which is at the core of the family, affirming that spouses should maintain a healthy relationship:

وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ

Associate with (your wives) in an honorable way (4: 19).

As such, when the husband fails to treat his wife honorably, he is breaking a tie that God has ordered to preserve. The Qur'an establishes mutual rights between the spouses:

وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ

The wives have rights similar to the obligations upon them, in accordance with honorable norms; and then have a degree above them (2:228).

To violate the wife's rights is again an instance of breaking a tie that God has ordered to preserve.

These instructions pertaining to ties of kinship hold even with respect

to non-Muslims. But these relations are honorable so long as they do not conflict with other religious obligations. In such a case, these relations are harmful and should be avoided. If disbelieving parents, for example, try to convince their believing children to revert to unfaith, the children should resist their parents:

وَإِنْ جَاهِدَاكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا

But if [your parents] urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them (31: 15).

One of the main instructions of the Prophet, which is a general principle in light of which other religious instructions should be understood, is,

Obedience of a creature in violation of the Creator is impermissible.[8](#)

Thus, we would be unjustified in following another human being, even if he were "superior", should it lead to a violation of an Islamic precept. To say, "I was only following directions from superiors," will in no way absolve us of the wrong we helped to perpetrate.

Relations With Fellow Believers

Believers are brothers:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ

Indeed the believers are brothers (49: 10).

To fail to honor this brotherhood is also an instance of breaking ties that God has ordered to preserve. Imam Al-Sadiq says,

*A friendship of twenty years (earns) kinship.*⁹

Up to forty houses in every direction constitute one's neighbors, in relation to which we must observe special rights¹⁰. This is of course, not limited to horizontal vicinity but includes also vertical vicinity as is the case in modern housing.

Relations With The Islamic Community

To set oneself apart from the Muslim community is yet another instance of breaking ties that God has ordered to preserve. Concerning unity in the Islamic community, the Qur'an says,

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

Holdfast, all together, to God's cord and do not split up into factions (3: 103).

Thus, it would be wrong to seek for God's cord while staying aloof of the Muslim community, for this would be an instance of breaking ties that God has ordered to preserve. The above-quoted verse conveys two points: one, holding fast to God's cord and, two, doing so collectively. This is exemplified by the congregational prayer that combines both elements. The Master of the Faithful says,

Indeed he who digresses from the society is a prey for Satan, as a stray sheep is a prey for the wolf.¹¹

Thus the Qur'an warns us against being distanced from the Islamic community and instructs us to seize God's cord in unity. Furthermore, the Qur'an denounces those who kindle discord:

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so be wary of Me. (23:52).

فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

But they fragmented their religion among themselves, each party exulting in what it had (23:53).

Unwarranted disagreement is seen by the Qur'an as a sign of weak intellect:

تَحْسِبُهُمْ جَمِيعًا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ شَتَّى ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

You suppose them to be a [united] body, but their hearts are disunited. That is because they are a lot who do not apply reason (59: 14).

Relation With The Ruler Of The Muslim Community

The most serious instance of breaking the ties that God has ordered to preserve is dishonoring one's relation with the ruler of the Muslim community. In this connection, the Qur'an says,

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَإِذَا كَانُوا مَعَهُ عَلَىٰ أَمْرٍ جَامِعٍ لَمْ يَذْهَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَسْتَأْذِنُوهُ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَأْذِنُونَكَ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۚ فَإِذَا اسْتَأْذَنُوكَ لِبَعْضِ شَأْنِهِمْ فَأُذِنَ لِمَن شِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Indeed the faithful are those who have faith in God and His Prophet, and when they are with him in a collective affair, they do not leave until they have sought his permission. Indeed those who seek your permission it is they who have faith in God and His Prophet. So when they seek your permission for some work of theirs, give permission to whomever of them you wish and plead with God to forgive them. Indeed God is all forgiving all-merciful (24:62).

True believers are those who participate in social affairs and do not abandon their leader when they are expected to help, such as in time of war. Those who fail to participate from the start are guilty of abandoning their entire duty.

Those, however, who consent to participate but then decide to leave, must be genuinely justified in so doing, for to leave an affair without the leader's permission is a flagrant instance of breaking ties that God has ordered to preserve.

In the above-quoted verse, God commands the Prophet to pray for the forgiveness of those who are excused in failing to aid him so that some of their spiritual loss may be rectified in this manner. The verse also gives the Prophet discretion over whom he wishes to pardon, for he is in charge and he should decide, based on his reasoned judgment, as to whom he should pardon.

God admonishes the weak believers who, when the Prophet calls on them to participate in a hard social

obligation such as war, would seek an opportunity to escape:

قَدْ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ يَتَسَلَّلُونَ مِنْكُمْ لِوَاذًا ۗ فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

God certainly knows those of you who slip away under cover. So let those who disobey his orders beware lest an ordeal should visit them or a painful punishment (24:63).

And addressing those believers who did help the Prophet, God warns them against abandoning the front line:

مَا كَانَ لِأَهْلِ الْمَدِينَةِ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُمْ مِنَ الْأَعْرَابِ أَنْ يَتَخَلَّفُوا عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَرْغَبُوا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ

It is not fitting for the people of Medina and the Bedouins around them to lag behind the Apostle of God and prefer their own lives to his (9: 120).

Living Peacefully Along With The Adherents Of Other Faiths

To live peaceably with adherents of other faiths is not a necessary evil that must be: suffered with the knowledge that they are condemned to Hell. Muslims should realize that though non-Muslims are wrong in their belief, they may be excused rather than condemned to Hell. Not every wrong deserves punishment in Hell.

The non-Muslim may be honest in his rejection of Islam in so far as his unbiased studies have led him to believe and-though he will naturally be deprived of the invaluable benefits of true faith-he would not be cast into Hell.

In other words, living peaceably with adherents of other faiths and ways of life is a peace made on the grounds of what we share in common as human beings; it should not be seen as a tormenting experience in the process of which we must of necessity feign peace for political reasons.

We should keep in mind that the non-Muslim may be unknowingly rejecting Islam, not out of obstinacy. That is, he has endeavored to find the truth but has at length failed to realize it. Such people are pardoned by God:

ۗ وَأَخْرُونَ مُرْجُونَ لِأَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِمَّا يُعَذِّبُهُمْ وَإِمَّا يَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ

[There are] others waiting God's edict: either He shall punish them [should they sin], or turn to them clemently (9: 106).

The Criterion For Leading A Peaceful Life

The verses of the Qur'an suggest that the adherents of different faiths may live a peaceful life together on the basis of the general principles of religion that they share in common. That is, there must be one predominant religion, which forms the basis for the public matters of society, but alongside which other faiths may be practiced in the private sphere. Thus, addressing the People of the Book, the Qur'an says,

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا
مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

Say, "O People of the Book, come unto a word that is common between us and you: that we will worship no one but God, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords beside God" (3:64).

The content of this verse is that we should all believe in monotheism and refrain from imposing our beliefs on others, while accepting the general guidelines of Revelation. This, of course, should not be understood to imply pluralism of religion, meaning that divergent religions can be simultaneously true and genuine.

Islam is the final and only true religion, and the other faiths are true to the extent that they agree with Islam on the main principles. The adherents of other faiths, when residing in an Islamic state, are under the protection of the Islamic government. Nevertheless, the people of salvation, those who will attain felicity, are the Muslims, for there is but one way that leads to the end.

There are two questions here that must be distinguished. First, is it right to live peacefully with the adherents of other faiths? In other words, can the adherents of various faiths come together and live peacefully in order to preserve the state's security?

The answer to this question will be treated below. But the second question: is the factor leading to human perfection one or multiple? Is there one truth that leads to human perfection or more than one? Let us take up this question here.

Regarding the question of human perfection and eschatology, there is undoubtedly only one way that can fulfill that purpose. But as regards the question of governance and how to collect the opinions of various people, there are two ways. One way is that all people believe in one faith.

The alternative is that people of various faiths, while maintaining their distinct doctrines, comply with the law of one particular religion in public matters and in this way promote peaceful coexistence. In this world, no one individual or party can claim to rule over people's thoughts, and so it would be wrong to impose one thought to the exclusion of others on the society. All people are free to think. Confirming this

truth, the Qur'an says,

وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

[Let us] not take each other as lords beside God (3:64).

Peaceful coexistence with adherents of other faiths and their freedom in thought and expression is altogether different from the question of felicity in the Hereafter. For, as explained previously, God's creation pursues one purpose, human being's share one and the same nature, and so their path is one, the path of human nature, which they must traverse to reach the one purpose.

Hence, if we consider the question of multiplicity of thoughts in relation to the Hereafter, then we must say that there is only one truth and one path of salvation. But concerning the life of this world, people with different beliefs may coexist while exercising freedom of opinion, without transgressing the red lines established by reason and Islamic tradition, and in this way strive for their worldly purposes. It is in this sense that Islam advocates peaceful coexistence with adherents of other faiths.

Peaceful Coexistence As Encouraged By Islam

Islam teaches Muslims to interact with their fellow believers and believers of other faiths in a spirit of justice and equality. This is a Qur'anic injunction and as such must be endorsed in practice by the Islamic government. Regarding peace among Muslims, the Qur'an affirms,

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

The faithful are indeed brothers. Therefore make peace between your brothers and be wary of God, so that you may receive [His] mercy (49: 10).

Moreover Muslims are to relate peacefully to non-Muslim monotheists such as Jews and Christians—living under the protection of the Islamic state.

This peaceful coexistence in addition includes those non-monotheists, whether followers of a religion or materialists, that wish to live peacefully along with Muslims without conspiring to subvert the Islamic state. Obviously, those infidels who are intent on overthrowing the Islamic state must be repelled and destroyed. Concerning how to deal with non monotheists, the Qur'an states:

لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ

God does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes that you deal with them with kindness and justice. Indeed God loves the just. (60:8).

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَن تَوَلَّوهُمْ ۗ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

God forbids you only in regard to those who made war against you on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them it is they who are the wrongdoers (60:9).

Based on this verse, Muslims should treat with equity the disbelievers who have not harmed Muslims, whether prior to the establishment of the Islamic state or afterward.

Thus during the time of the Prophet, Muslims had to respect the Arabian disbelievers who avoided harming the Prophet and his followers in Mecca and afterward in Medina, when they had established the Islamic state there, and those who remained neutral in the conflicts in which Muslims were engaged against the heads of disbelief, meaning that they refrained from abetting the army of disbelief financially, ideologically, militarily, or politically.

Muslims must treat these non-monotheists with utmost justice and equity, for these are virtues even in respect to disbelievers, just as injustice is evil, even if it is against disbelievers.

The Difference Between Peaceful Coexistence And Indifference

We should not confuse peaceful coexistence with indifference. Islam has set certain conditions for Muslims' coexistence with disbelievers without in any way encouraging them to be indifferent to the true faith. One of the pillars of the Qur'an's teachings is uncompromising opposition to falsehood and those who have sided with it:

فَلَا تُطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ

So do not obey the deniers, who are eager that you should be pliable (68:8).

وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ

So that they may be pliable [towards you] (68:9).

This verse condemns being lenient in the face of falsehood. In other words, this verse warns the Prophet

against approaching the false suggestions of the disbelievers with a compromising attitude.

Truth-seeking human beings cherish purposes that are sacred to the, and they are not willing, under any circumstance, to abandon them in compromise or show the least indifference to them. In this regard, the Master of the Faithful says,

I swear by my soul that in fighting those who oppose the truth and walk in deviation, I will not compromise or show lenience. [12](#)

The devout believer never slackens in the face of falsehood, whether in his actions or in his beliefs; he remains true to his ideological stance without turning away from his fundamental tenets.

A source of confusion in this relation is a number of hadiths related from the Infallibles in which they describe Islam as a "lenient and easygoing [faith]." But this should not be conflated with compromise and indifference. What these hadiths denote is that Islamic doctrines and precepts, due to Islam's harmony with human nature, are free of excruciating requirements and as such can be observed by the ordinary man.

Shaykh Kulayni reports that the wife of one 'Uthman ibn Ma'un once came to the Prophet and complained that her husband fasts during the day and keeps vigil during the night and devotes no time to his family. Infuriated from hearing this, the Prophet went to 'Uthman and found him immersed in worship. On seeing the Prophet, 'Uthman faced him; the Prophet then said:

O 'Uthman, God did not appoint me to teach monasticism. Rather, He entrusted me with the Primordial Religion, which is easy and tolerant. I fast and pray and copulate with my wife. Thus he who likes my tradition should embrace it, and indeed conjugal relationship is part of my tradition. [13](#)

Imam Al-Sadiq says,

Indeed God, exalted and blessed is He, bestowed on Muhammad the traditions of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus—monotheism, sincerity, dismissal of partners for God, and the primordial and tolerant religion but not monasticism nor siyahah [14](#). By it [i.e. by means of the true and tolerant religion] God has made purities permissible and impurities impermissible and has freed [the believers] of their burden and shackles that enfettered them.

Describing the Qur'an, God says,

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of admonishment. So is there anyone who will take admonishment? (54: 17).

Qur'anic instructions and precepts are simple such as the ordinary person can observe without much difficulty. But God has also described the Qur'an as "weighty," meaning that, though simple, it is substantial and profound:

إِنَّا سُنُّقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا

Indeed soon We shall cast on you a weighty word (73:5).

Weighty in this context conveys substance and profundity. The message of the Qur'an is profound and deep, and though, it may be expressed in such a way as could be easily grasped, its true essence is beyond the ken of the ordinary mind.

In conclusion, we may once again reiterate that though Islam is easy and tolerant, it does not promote indifference and compromise, for the latter two are human weaknesses that the Qur'an defines as pliability. Islam, on the other hand, is characterized by ease and tolerance, which are positive features.

The Role Of Islam M Universal Peace And The Wholesome Environment

Islam, as the timeless and universal religion introduces itself as the ultimate judge on universal peace. To elucidate this, we must offer a brief explanation regarding Islam, peace, universality, and the other concepts and propositions on which this position rests.

Islam is the most potent vitalizing factor in human society:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

O you who have faith, answer God and the Prophet when he summons you to that which will give you life. Know that God intervenes between a man and his heart and that toward Him you will be mustered (8:24).

Human life, which transcends material life, is unachievable without just peace.

As life and peace are embedded in the essence of Islam, it alone is capable of leading the world to universal peace. Thus, the Prophet is described as a mercy unto all creatures:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

We did not send you but as a mercy unto all creatures (21: 107).

Universal peace is one of the clear manifestations of this divine mercy.

Islam is the sole religion revealed to all prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, and as such its final manifestation encompasses all the truths taught in Abraham's Scriptures, David's Psalms, Moses' Torah, and Jesus' Evangel, albeit in a more comprehensive and perfect manner.

The difference in the teachings of these prophets is merely in some practical precepts, otherwise their essence is one. When speaking of the essential unity of all divine revelations, the Qur'an states,

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ

Indeed the sole religion with God is Islam (3: 19).

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him (3:85).

It explains their differences as only a matter of practice:

﴿ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَا ﴾

For each [community] among you We had appointed a code [of law] and a path (5:48).

The essential unity of all revelations is due to the immutable human nature, which all human beings of all times share in common:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ﴿ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of God according to which He originated humankind. There is no altering God's creation; that is the upright religion (30:30).

Nevertheless, there are certain natural needs in the human being that change in time. It is to fulfill these varying needs that God has ordained various laws. Islam as the primordial religion, and the only religion, has a set of fixed principles that cater to humanity's immutable nature but also possesses various manifestations to bring peace to the evolving aspect of human needs.

Peace Among All Religions, All Prophets, And All Believers

By demonstrating the peace present among all religions, all divine prophets, and all their true believers, Islam paves the way to universal peace for all those who aspire to a peaceful coexistence. Islam shows how governments can achieve peaceful relationships among themselves, how nations can enter into peaceful coexistence, and how governments can interact with their people in peace. It is only in this way that human rights may be protected, especially the rights of children, women, and the elderly, who are more vulnerable to being aggressed by the more powerful.

The peace that exists among all divine religions is due to their springing from the divine source of the absolute wisdom of God, for whatever flows from this fountainhead is undoubtedly free of tension and disharmony:

أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا

Do they not contemplate the Qur'an? Had it been from [someone] other than God, they muld have surely found much discrepancy in it (4:82).

Religions are afflicted neither by internal discrepancy nor by external tension with one another, for they are all from God.

Prophets are also at peace with one another, for they are infallible and free of error, both in knowledge and in conduct. Hence, it was the custom among the prophets that the prior prophet would foretell the coming of the subsequent prophet and the latter would confirm the teachings of his predecessor:

وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدُ

And when Jesus son of Mary said, "O Children of Israel, indeed I am the prophet of God to you, to confirm what is before me of the Torah, and to give the good news of a prophet who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad" (61:6).

But peace among the followers of God's prophets is achievable since following the messengers of peace prevents treachery and conflict:

يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ

O prophets, eat of the good things and act righteously. Indeed I know best what you do. (23:51).

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord, so be wary of Me (23:52).

Now that we have furnished the principles, we may give heed to the call of universal peace as voiced by divine Revelation:

وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا

Speak kindly to people (2:83).

Speak in this context does not denote speech as contrasted with action and written communication; it, rather, reflects the social aspect in human life, just as people in the following verse does not designate a particular class:

فَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَالْمِيزَانَ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ

Observe fully the measure and the balance, and do not cheat the people of their goods (7:85).

This injunction includes, not just commerce, but any type of profit human beings may derive, whether it pertains to technology, innovation, or exploitation of nature.

Cultivating Stable Universal Peace By Rejecting Injustice

Reiterating the necessity of honoring human rights, the Qur'an, after condemning cheating in particular, makes a general denouncement concerning any form of vice and corruption:

وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْنُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

Do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption (26: 183).

In order to attain to stable peace in the world, we must not be content with simply refraining from oppressing others but must go further to oppose any act of aggression, for otherwise, we would be aiding in corrupting the centers of worship as well as the entire earth.

There are two verses in the Qur'an that explicitly address the destructive effects of undermining peace and brotherhood:

الَّذِينَ أَخْرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بَغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَهَدَمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعُ

وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدٌ يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

Those who were expelled from their homes unjustly, only because they said, “God is our Lord. “Had not God repulsed the people from one another, nun would have befallen the monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which God’s Name is mentioned greatly. God will surely help those who help Him. Indeed God is all-strong, all-mighty (22:40).

فَهَزَمُوهُمْ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَقَتَلَ دَاوُدُ جَالُوتَ وَآتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَهُ مِمَّا يَشَاءُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ الْأَرْضُ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

Thus thy routed them with God’s will, and David killed Goliath, and God gave him the kingdom and wisdom, and taught him whatever He liked. Were it not for God’s repelling the people by means of one another, the earth would surely have been corrupted; but God is gracious to the world’s creatures (2:251).

Although opposition to injustice has a general effect in bringing about universal peace, yet its more conspicuous results are the benefits it has for the impoverished and the defenseless women and children, as mentioned in this verse:

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانَ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَلْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا وَاجْعَلْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ نَصِيرًا

Why should you not fight in the way of God and the abased men, women, and children, who say, “Our Lord, bring us out of this town whose people are wrongdoers, and appoint for us a guardian from You, and appoint for us a helper from You”? (4:75).

The above clarification should suffice to explain that the pristine Islam as taught by the Prophet is the sole key to attaining universal peace: Islam is the way, the companion, the guide, the provision, the origin, and the end. This is effectively demonstrated in Imam Khomeini’s thought and the Islamic movement he initiated. It was out of the fabric of this genuine Islam that the Islamic Republic was weaved; and it is based on this firm foundation that it advances toward its ultimate fruition in domestic as well as international arenas.

The Influence Of Islamic Political Thought On Universal Peace And Environmental Security

One of the most critical of the humanistic disciplines is political science, the discipline dealing with how to govern a country. Islam port rays religion as the legal constitution in all matters, whet her private or

social, relating to culture, economics, military, etc., which invites people to uphold justice as the pillar of universal peace:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ

Certainly We sent Our prophets with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that human kind may maintain justice (57:25).

God's messengers remained steadfast in this tortuous path, offering their life and wealth. To cultivate just peace in the world and prepare the wholesome environment for human coexistence, they welcomed martyrdom for God's sake:

وَكَايِنُ مِنْ نَبِيِّ قَاتَلَ مَعَهُ رَبِّيُونَ كَثِيرٌ فَمَا وَهَنُوا لِمَا أَصَابَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَمَا ضَعُفُوا وَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ

How many a prophet there has been with whom a multitude of godly men fought. They did not falter for what befell them in the way of God, neither did they weaken, nor did they abase themselves; and God loves the steadfast (3: 146).

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقِّ

They would defy the signs of God and kill the prophets unjustly (3: 112 & 2:61).

But in this path, the aggressive oppressors also made every effort to establish an unjust and coercive peace in their own favor in lieu of the just peace that God's prophets endeavored for. To achieve this, they devised numerous deceptions: At times they would dismiss religion as superstition or call it outdated nonsense. In modern times, however, the snare has been separation of religion and state.

The purpose that oppressors seek in this separation is to disarm religion so as to render it incapable of defending itself. After thus weakening religion, they then assail and captivate it in order to distort it to satisfy their own evil desires and interests. In allusion to this truth, the Master of the Faithful says,

Verily this religion was a captive in the hands of the wicked; it was manipulated for egoistic purposes and sought for worldly gain. [15](#)

One of the fixed policies of political powers is to manipulate religion for their interests, as they are aware of its appeal to people's hearts. It is for this reason that unjust rulers, past and present, employ corrupt clerics and so-called spiritual men to pursue their evil intentions. But we should know that such manipulation succeeds only when religion has been separated from state and reduced to the latter's

servitude.

The Divine Prophets' Efforts In Promoting Universal Peace

The most praiseworthy struggle of God's prophets throughout history, besides preaching monotheism, has been their combating injustice in an effort to establish universal peace. God commends Abraham's aversion to polytheism in these words:

قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَاءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

There is certainly a good exemplar for you in Abraham and those who were with him, when they said to their own people, 'Indeed we repudiate you and whatever you worship beside God' (60:4).

But Abraham's struggle was not confined to championing monotheism. He fought oppression and injustice and thus was condemned to be thrown into fire:

قَالُوا حَرِّقُوهُ وَانصُرُوا آلِهَتَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ

[The disbelievers] said, "Burn him, and help your gods" (21:68).

Moses commenced his ministry with an overt political approach to faith and an unequivocal opposition to injustice, declaring,

قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ فَلَنْ أَكُونَ ظَهِيرًا لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ

He said, 'My Lord, as You have blessed me, I will never be a supporter of villains' (28:17).

It is guidance to this Straight Path for which we beseech God in every canonic prayer, asking Him,

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

Guide us onto the straight path (1:6).

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

The path of those whom You have blessed (1:7).

God's commandment to Moses for supplanting the rule of injustice by that of peace and justice was,

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا أَنْ أَخْرِجْ قَوْمَكَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَذَكِّرْهُمْ بِأَيَّامِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ

Certainly We sent Moses with Our signs: "Bring your people out from darkness into light and remind them of God's [holy] days. There are indeed signs in that for every patient and grateful [servant]" (14:5).

God's command to Moses to fight injustice still resonates in the halls of history:

اذهب إلى فرعون إنه طغى

Go to Pharaoh. He has indeed rebelled (20:24).

And the miracle of the earth's devouring Korah and his wealth is still on display in God's collection of mysterious wonders:

فَخَسَفْنَا بِهِ وَبِدَارِهِ الْأَرْضَ فَمَا كَانَ

So We caused the earth to swallow [Korah] and his house (28:81).

Following the lead of God's prophets will make the harshest ways easy by God's Grace:

وَلَقَدْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَسْرِ بِعِبَادِي فَاصْرِبْ لَهُمْ طَرِيقًا فِي الْبَحْرِ يَبَسًا لَا تَخَافُ دَرْكًا وَلَا تَخْشَىٰ

Certainly, We revealed to Moses, [saying], 'Take My servants on a journey by night. Then strike out for them a dry path through the sea. Do not be afraid of being overtaken, and have no fear [of getting drowned]" (20:77).

On the other hand, to disobey God's prophets renders the easiest of ways cumbersome:

قَالَ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً ۚ يَتِيهُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ

[God] said, 'It shall be forbidden them [to enter the city] for forty years; they shall wander about in the earth. So do not grieve for the transgressing lot" (5:26).

Jesus' struggles against oppression are also recorded in God's Book:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا أَنْصَارَ اللَّهِ كَمَا قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ لِلْحَوَارِيِّينَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ

أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ فَاَمَنْتَ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَكَفَرْتَ طَائِفَةٌ فَأَيَّدْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّهِمْ فَأَصْبَحُوا ظَاهِرِينَ

O you who have faith, be God's helpers, just as Jesus son of Mary said to the disciples, 'Who will be" helper for God's sake?" The Disciples said, 'We will be God's helpers." So a group of the Children of Israel believed, and a group disbelieved. Then We strengthened the faithful against their enemies, and they became the dominant ones (61: 14).

It is important to bear in mind that global development, whether economic or political, is possible only on the condition of a just universal peace. Otherwise, global development will lead to the spread of corruption and insecurity. In this way, we should be steadfast, for only the steadfast can enlist the succor of God's angels:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

Indeed those who say, "Our Lord is God" and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, [saying,] Do not fear, nor be grieved. Receive the good news of the paradise which you have been promised" (41:30).

The splendid historic event of the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a fruit of steadfastness confirms the truth of this verse.

In the end, we pray and hope for the advent of the Final Savior, who will establish peace once and for all over the entire earth.

[1.](#) An allusion to Qur'an 95:4.

[2.](#) God forged the human being's nature with a propensity toward good and righteousness:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقِيمُ وَلَكِنْ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of God according to which He originated humankind. There is no altering God's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know (30:30).

[3.](#) Gulistan, Sadi.

[4.](#) See al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 166.

[5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 257.

[6.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon no. 87.

[7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 43, p. 119.

[8.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Aphorisms, no. 165.

[9.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 157.

[10.](#) The Prophet says, "Forty houses in front of yours, behind yours, on the right hand of yours, and on the left hand of yours constitute your neighbors." See al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 6694.

[11.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon no. 127.

[12.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon no. 24.

[13.](#) Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 494.

[14.](#) A form of religious devotion in which the zealot leads an itinerant life.

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