

Perfect Man

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Perfect Man

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Perfect Man

The subject under discussion is the perfect man from the viewpoint of Islam. A perfect man means an exemplary human being, who is superior and exalted, or any other interpretation that one can make. Like everything else, a human being may be perfect or imperfect, and sound or defective. A sound person, too, may be both sound and perfect or sound and imperfect.

To know a perfect or exemplary human being from the viewpoint of Islam is necessary for Muslims because it is like a model and example, by emulating which we can, if we wish, attain our human perfection under Islamic teachings. We should, therefore, know what a perfect man is, how he looks spiritually and intellectually, and what his peculiarities are, so that we may improve ourselves, our society and other individuals based on that model. But if we do not know what a perfect human being is in Islam, surely we cannot become a perfect Muslim, or even a relatively perfect human being.

From the viewpoint of Islam, there are two ways of knowing a perfect person: One way is to see how the Qur'an in the first place and tradition in the second place have defined a perfect man, even if it is meant to be a perfectly faithful and good Muslim. A perfect Muslim is a person who has attained perfection in Islam; a perfect believer is one who has attained perfection in his faith. Now we must see how the Quran and tradition have portrayed such a person and with what peculiarities. As it happens, we have many things to quote from both of these sources.

The second way is to regard real individuals who are built up on the model of the Qur'an and Islam, not an imaginary and idealistic being, but a real and objective personality who exists in various stages of perfection at its highest level or even at slightly lower stages.

The holy Prophet himself is an example of a perfect man in Islam. Imam Ali is another example. To know Ali (as) is to know a perfect man, and that means to know him thoroughly, and not only his name, lineage and apparent identity. We may know that Ali is the son of Abu Talib and the grandson of Abdul-Mottalib, and that his mother is Fatima, daughter of Assad-bin-Abdol-Ezi, and his wife is Fatima Zahra (as) and he is the father of Hassan and Hossain, and at what dates he was born and died, and what battles he fought etc. But this knowledge is only about his apparent identity, and not about him as a perfect man. Recognition of Ali means knowing his personality, rather than his person.

To the extent that we get acquainted with his whole personality, we will know him as a perfect man of Islam; and to the extent that we take him as a model and accept him in actuality and not literally as our leader and Imam, and follow and emulate him, we will then be a Shi'a follower of this perfect man.

A Shi'a means one who accompanies Ali, not only with words and sentiments, but with the act of following him in practice and act in philosophical and academic terms.

These two ways of recognition of a perfect man are not only theoretically useful, but we must also use this knowledge to follow the ways shown by Islam to become a true Muslim and make society truly Islamic. The way is thus shown and the result is explained.

But the question arises as to the meaning of 'Perfect'. Some things may seem obvious, but explicit things are sometimes harder to explain than difficult matters.

In Arabic the two words meaning 'Perfect' and 'complete' are close to each other but not exactly similar in meaning, and both of them have an antonym meaning 'defective'. The difference between the two words is as follows: The word 'complete' refers to something which is prepared according to a plan, like a house and a mosque, and if any part of it is unfinished, it is incomplete or defective. But something may be 'complete' and yet there may exist a higher degree of completion or many degrees higher than that, and that is called 'perfection'. 'Complete' is a horizontal progress to maximum development and 'perfect' is a vertical climb to the highest degree possible.

When we speak of a 'perfect wisdom or knowledge', it refers to a higher degree of an already existing wisdom or knowledge. A man may be complete in a horizontal sense, without being perfect vertically. There are people who are half-complete or even less than that. But when perfection is attained, there are still higher levels of perfection until a perfectly perfect state is reached.

The term 'perfect' did not exist in Islamic literature until the seventh century of the *Hejira*. It is now used frequently in Europe, but was first used in the Islamic world by the well-known Gnostic 'Mohyedin Arabi Andalusi Ta'i', who is the father of Islamic Gnosticism, and many Islamic Gnostics, including Iranian and Persian-speaking ones, and even Rumi, have been his pupils. Rumi with all his greatness is small compared with Mohyedin in Gnosticism. He is of Arab extraction and a descendant of Hatam Ta'i, from Andalusia, that is modern Spain. He has traveled in Islamic countries and died in Damascus where he was buried. He has a pupil called Sadredin Ghownawi who is rated second to his teacher as a Gnostic. Islamic Gnosticism has been given a complicated form by Mohyedin and commentaries of Sadredin. Rumi is a contemporary of the latter and his follower through whom he imbibed the ideas of Mohyedin.

This man used the term "perfect man" from the special viewpoint of gnosticism, but we intend to discuss it from the viewpoint of the Qur'an. We have human beings who are physically sound or defective. But you do not consider blindness, deafness, paralysis, or shortness as defects of virtue, personality or humanity. For example Socrates, the famous Greek philosopher, who is sometimes rated as a prophet, was a most ugly man, but this ugliness is not counted as a defect. Abol-Ala Mo'arra, and Taha Hossain of our time were blind. Is this blindness a defect of personality? This means then that a person has a physical personality and a spiritual one, with two distinct reckonings. It is a mistake to suppose that the spirit is a dependent of the body. Can the spirit be sick while the body is sound or not? This is a question in itself. Those, who deny the genuineness of the spirit and believe spiritual peculiarities to be the direct influence of the nervous system, have no belief in the spirit and for them everything is dependent on the body, According to them if the spirit is sick, it is because the body is sick, and mental sickness is, in fact, the same as physical sickness.

Fortunately, it has been proved to-day that the body may be perfectly sound with regard to blood composition, nerves, vitamins, etc, and yet, one may be mentally ill, such as suffering from what they call a "complex". Consequently, the way to treatment mental illness may not be medicine and drugs at all. Can we find a drug for someone who is suffering from narcissism, which is a kind of mental disorder? Can we change a person's haughtiness into modesty, or his cruelty into kindness by means of a pill or an injection? It is deprivations, which produce such illnesses, and cause someone for example not to rest until he takes revenge.

What is this feeling of revenge? What is this envy which rouses a person to dislike other people's enjoyment of a blessing, and long to deprive them from it. Such a man is not thinking of having that blessing for himself. The envy of a sound person always gives priority to his own goal, and this is not a fault. But desiring harms and defeats for others is an ailment. You find that such individuals are prepared to hurt themselves wholly in their bid to even partially harm the envied person.

A historical story is told in this connection. In the time of a caliph, a rich man bought a slave whom he treated, from the beginning, like a gentleman, giving him the best of food and clothes, and money exactly like his own child or even more lavishly. But the slave noticed that his master always felt uneasy. Eventually he made up his mind to set him free and provide him with some capital. One night as they were sitting together, the master said: "Do you know why I have treated you so well?" The slave asked the reason. The master said: "I have one request to make which if you fulfil, you would enjoy all I have given and will give you! But if you refuse, I will be discontented with you." The slave said: "I will obey whatever you ask. You are my benefactor who has given me my life." The master said: "You must promise me in good faith to do it, for I am afraid you may refuse it." The slave said:

"I promise to do what you want." The master said: "My proposal is that you must behead me at a specific time and place." The slave exclaimed: "What? How can I do that?" The master said: "That is what I desire." The slave said: "That is impossible." The master said: "I have got your promise. You must do it." One midnight, he awakened the slave and gave him a sharp knife and a bag full of money and climbed up a neighbor's roof, and told the slave to behead him there and then go wherever he liked. The slave asked the reason for such an act. He answered: "I hate this one man and prefer death to seeing his face. We have been rivals but he has gone ahead of me and excels me in everything, and I am burning with hatred. I desire him to be jailed for this fake murder and this idea is a relief to me. Everyone knows him to be my rival, and so he will be condemned to death for this act." The slave said: You seem to be a foolish man and deserve this death." So he beheaded the man and ran away, His rival was consequently arrested and imprisoned, but no one believed that he would have killed his rival on his own roof. It had become a mystery. At last, the slave felt a prick of conscience, went to the authorities and confessed the truth. When they understood the matter, they freed both the slave and the neighbor.

This is a fact that envy is a disease. The Qur'an says in Chapter "The Sun" (Shams), Verses 9 and 10. "He will indeed be successful who purifies it, and he will indeed fail who corrupts it." Thus, the first proposal of the Qur'an is purification of the self from ailments, complexes, ignorance, deviations and metamorphoses. You could have heard that in the past there were people who, because of excess of sins, were cursed by the Prophets of their time and were thus metamorphosed, that is, they were transformed into animals such as a monkey, a wolf, a bear etc.

One may not become physically metamorphosed, but he may be mentally or spirituality transformed into an animal the like of which in wickedness and nastiness may not be found in the world. The Qur'an speaks of those "who are in worse errors" and who are lower than quadrupeds.^[1] How can that happen? Man's personality depends on his ethical and spiritual qualities, without which he would be a beast. Thus, a defective man may be lowered to the level of a metamorphosed being. Some may think this a fancy, but it is real and true.

Someone said: "We had made a pilgrimage to Mecca along with Imam Sajjad and when we looked down at the Desert of Arafat it was full of *Hajis* (pilgrims). There were so many of them that year. The Imam said: "There is much uproar, but few are true pilgrims." The man says: "I don't know how the Imam gave me the insight, but when he asked me to look down again, I saw a desert full of animals, like that in a zoo, among whom a few human beings were moving about." The Imam told him how things looked to those who had a clear sight and were concerned with the inward concept of things.

This is quite obvious but if our so-called modernized mind does not accept it, we are at fault. In our own time there have been and are individuals who have discerned the real character of others that, like animals, knew nothing but eating, sleeping and sexual intercourse. They had lost their human qualities and been turned into beasts. We read in the Qur'anic Chapter, the "Great Event" (Naba) Verse 6. "The day on which the trumpet shall be blown, so you shall come forth in hosts, and the heaven shall be opened so that it shall be all openings."

Religious leaders have repeatedly said that only one group of people is to be raised from among the dead in the shape of human beings; others would appear as animals, tigers, monkeys, scorpions, snakes and ants. Does God do so without a reason? No, there are reasons. When a human being has done nothing in this world but to sting and hurt others, he takes his real form in the next world and that is a scorpion. He who acts like a monkey in this world, will appear as a monkey in the next world. And a person with a dogish nature will be a dog. Thus, all people will be raised from the dead according to their intentions, desires, and true character. Are your desires in this world those of a human being, or an animal or a bird? You will take the same form on resurrection. That is why we are forbidden to worship any but God. If we worship anything else, we will have it with us in the hereafter. If we worship money it becomes a part of our nature, and as the Qur'an says in Chapter "Immunity" (Baraat), Verse 35 that molten metal will be with us on resurrection: "And (as for) those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah's way, announce to them a painful chastisement, on the day when it shall be heated in the fire of hell, then their foreheads and their sides and their backs shall be branded with it; this is what you hoarded up for yourselves." Do not say that currency notes have taken the place of coins; in the next world, these banknotes would be turned into a fire as scorching as gold and silver coins!

So, a human being with a complex is defective, and one who worships a matter is imperfect and metamorphosed. Perfection in every kind of creature is different from perfection in another kind. A perfect human being is different from a perfect angel, and each has separate degrees of perfection. Those who have told us of the existence of angels, say that they are created with pure intelligence and thought in whom the earthly aspect, lusts, anger etc are absent, whereas animals are wholly earthly, and lack what the Qur'an terms as divine spirit.

But man is a mixture of the two, both angelic and earthly, both high and low. This is described in a narration in the book "Usul al-Kafi", and Rumi, the poet, has turned it into a poem the translation of which is as follows:

"A narration says that the Glorious God created three different groups of creatures: The first group is the angels who are pure intellect, knowledge and liberality, and know only prostration. They lack every element of greed and passion, but are pure light, and alive with the love of God. Another group lacks knowledge altogether, and is fattened like animals in the pasture. They see nothing but the stable and fodder and are ignorant of both villainy and honor, The third group are human beings who are half angel and half donkey, the donkey half is inclined to the low and the other half is inclined to the sublime; one must see which half wins the day, and which one conquers the other."

The Qur'an says in Chapter "The Man" (Insan) Verse 2; "Surely we have created man from a small life-germ uniting' (itself): We mean to try him, so we have made him hearing, seeing. Surely we have shown him the way. He may be thankful or unthankful."

This means that he has been granted many talents and left free to show whether he deserves a reward or punishment by his acts, whereas other creatures do not possess such deservedness, He must choose his own way and attain perfection through moderation and equilibrium and by employing all his talents.

A child grows up and is sound in all his organs and limbs, and these develop harmoniously. But if he grows up cartoon-like, some parts of whom develop to excess and others not growing at all or growing insufficiently, he cannot attain perfection. But a harmonious and well-rounded development may result in a perfect human being.

The Qur'an says in Chapter "The cow"(Baqara), verse 124:

"And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make you an Imam of men. Abraham said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the unjust, said He."

Abraham was tested in many ways, including his readiness to sacrifice his son for God, when a call from God said (the Qur'an, Chapter "The Rangers" (Safat), Verse 104:

"And we called out to him saying: O Abraham! You have indeed shown the truth of the vision." When Abraham successfully passed through various trials, the Qur'an said about him: Chapter "The Bee", (Nahl) Verse 120:

"Surely Abraham was an exemplar, obedient to Allah, upright, and he was not of the polytheists."

He stood alone fighting against all unbelievers, and it was then that God called him an Imam, a leader and a model for others to follow. Imam Ali is a perfect man since all the human values have had their maximum growth in him and in a harmonious manner.

You have watched the low and high tide in the sea, which is caused by the gravitational attraction of the moon. The spirit of man, too, as well as that of society shows a similar tide, Human beings undergo such ebb and flow, and this attraction is sometimes to one direction to such an extent that all other values are forgotten. In this way, they are like defective beings that show growth in one respect, and lack of it in other respects. Society, too, may lack harmony in its development; this is true that it is not wholly deviated but it is very often corrupted in one way or another.

One of the human values confirmed by Islam is devotion, which is communion with God. Of course, in Islam every act performed for God is devotion. Having a job and a trade to support oneself and one's family and to serve society is in itself a form of devotion. But devotion, in its special sense, is private communion with God in prayer, hymns, remaining awake for vital acts at nights etc., all of which are part of religion and can not be omitted. Sometimes, you see individuals or society being drawn only to one aspect of devotion, and performing the recommended acts of prayer, ablution etc, all of which, done in excess, will ruin society.

Sometimes this way of devotion becomes fashionable in an Islamic society, and once one gets used to it, it is difficult to observe moderation. Such a person cannot say to himself that God has created him a human being, not an angel, and as a human being he should develop every aspect of himself harmoniously.

It was once reported to the Prophet that a number of his companions had sunk in devotion. The Prophet felt uneasy, came to the mosque and shouted it out loud: "O People, what has happened to some groups who have appeared among my people. Even I as your Prophet do not show devotion in this way to keep awake all night. I rest part of the night and attend to my family. I do not observe fast every day. Those who are following their new way have deviated from my tradition:" Thus, when the Prophet notices that an Islamic value is about to eliminate other Islamic values, he combats this trend severely,

Amr ibn Aas had two sons called Abdullah and Muhammad. The former was noble and advised his father to follow the way of Ali, while the latter, who like his father loved the world and position, urged him to follow Muawiah. Abdullah was mostly inclined to devotion. One day, the Prophet met him on the way and said: "I hear that you spend the whole night in prayer and the whole day fasting." He replied in the affirmative. The Prophet said: "But I am not so, and I do not agree with your way."

Sometimes a society is drawn towards asceticism. Asceticism is a fact which is undeniable, and is a value which must exist in a prosperous society. But when everything in a society is based on asceticism and nothing else, there is something wrong with it. Another value is to serve people, and it is fully supported by Islam, the Prophet and the Qur'an in Chapter "The Cow" (Baghara), Verse 177:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah," and the Verse ends emphasizing the value of serving God's creatures. But sometimes people go to excess and, as the poet Sa'di says: "Devotion is nothing but serving people", The next step is to negate the value of devotion, asceticism, knowledge or jihad, all of which are the exalted values for man in Islam.

Today some of our intellectuals imagine that they have found a very lofty principle called "humanity and humanitarianism". Serving people is fine and we should serve them. But if we provide them with food and clothes alone, we would be treating them like animals, especially if we suppose no higher values exist for them. If service is confined to this, what would be the difference between Abu Dhar and Muawiah? This is another example of going to excess, similar to the overvaluing of freedom.

Freedom is among the highest of human values which is above man's animal nature and material values. You can see that those who possess humanity are willing to bear hunger and nakedness, and live under hard conditions, provided they are not enslaved by another human being and can live freely. A story is told in the book of "The Mirror of Scholars", about Avicenna who held the rank of a minister for some time. One day, he was passing through a street with great pomp and show when he noticed a scavenger removing putrid stuff from a pit. Avicenna heard him murmuring to himself a couplet meaning that he honored his 'self' for finding his world easy. Avicenna laughed to hear a man who was doing the lowest task so contently. He drew the vein of his horse called the man to him and remarked sarcastically: "What a way to choose to honor the 'self'! The man on recognizing Avicenna by his appearance said: 'I have chosen this job so that I would not be the slave of another in the way you are! To enjoy freedom while being a scavenger is far better than your rank, assets and dependence.'" It is said that Avicenna became red in the face with shame and had no answer to give.

According to the worldly and animal aspirations, there is no point in forsaking the best food, and having servants and all that pomp and show and becoming a scavenger, and then speaking of freedom. Is freedom something tangible? No, but for a vigilant conscience, it is so worthy that a man prefers scavenging to slavery. This value is sometimes forgotten in some societies, but when it is awakened in them, they claim freedom to be the only value and forget about other values like justice, wisdom etc. Others may consider love as the only value, and forget the intellect, as the Gnostics do; while some go to the other extreme, thinking love to be a fancy, and intellect as the only worthy thing

Love, intellect, justice, freedom, service and devotion are all values. Who is a perfect human being? One who is an absolute devotee, or ascetic, or freeborn, or in love, or intelligent? None of these results in a perfect man. But if all these values are developed in him in a harmonious way, he may be considered perfect.

Imam Ali was such a man, In *Nahjul-Balagha* you meet mostly the eloquent side of him, and in reading this book, you get different pictures of him. Sometimes in reading the sermons, you suppose that Avicenna is there lecturing. At other times, you observe Rumi or Mohyedin Arabi speaking to you. Then you feel the epic of Ferdowsi, or a man of liberty, or an ascetic or a retiring devotee in a state of giving discourses. All human aspects show themselves in Ali's words, and then you discern how great he is, and how small we are.

In the past and until fifty years ago, our society was inclined, in religious matters, towards asceticism. Preachers often confined themselves to those sermons of *Nahjul-Balagha* which were related to ascetic matters, calling this world a transient place and the next world eternal, and advising people to prepare

for the hereafter.

The rest of the sermons had no place because the society could not absorb them, as it had turned to a series of values only. For a period of a hundred years, no one read the decree of Imam Ali to Malik Ashtar, which is full of social and political injunctions [2]. There, Ali speaks of an utterance of the Prophet that "no people can attain the degree of sanctity and freedom from defect until they reach a position where the weak stand against the strong and claim their right without stuttering". Fifty years ago the society could not understand this, because it was a society of a single value, while Ali's words contain all human values as shown in his biography and personality.

I do not intend to praise our present society, but fortunately some worthwhile values have appeared in it. I fear, however that once more they may become single-dimensional and destroy other values. If we wish to have Imam Ali (as) as our model and a perfectly well balanced man, this should not happen. He is a man in whom all human values have developed harmoniously. At night and during the communion with God, no Gnostic can rival him in his divine ecstasy and his flight towards Him. He is so deep in his devotion that nothing can divert his attention, and this divine love seems to have taken him to another world. This is how he is in the altar of worship at night.

In daytime, he is a different man. Unlike many ascetics, he is cheerful sitting with his companions and even witty. Amr ibn Aas criticized him and termed him as unsuitable for the Caliphate since he was so cheerful, as if a caliph must always look glum to frighten people. In battle too he was cheerful and smiling, while in the altar he was tearful.

The Qur'an says in Chapter "Muzzamil", Verses 6-7: "Surely, the rising by night is the firmest way to tread and the most corrective of speech.. Surely, you have, in the day time, a long occupation."

The night is for worship, and the day for living and mingling with society. The poet Hafiz is sometimes alluded to a pretext to mislead the young. They say this great poet was addicted to wine, whereas in reality, his poems are wholly spiritual and mystical, and his wine is of a spiritual nature. He was a religious man who was an interpreter of the Qur'an, and, later on, became famous as a poet. He has expressed the above Verse of the Qur'an in a poem, saying that daytime is for work and effort, and nighttime for the wine of devotion.

Ali is such a man, and has been recognized in this way for over a thousand years. The compiler of "Nahjul-Balagha", Sayed Razi, says: "The amazing thing about this book is that you see Ali in so many different worlds as you read it, that is in the words of devotion, philosophy, mysticism, military affairs, court of justice, religious jurisprudence and so on, and he is never absent from any human world."

Safiyedin Hilli, a poet of the sixth century of the Hejira, says about Ali that he is a collection of all contraries, he is both a ruler and a sage, docile and brave, poor and generous, gentle and resolute, and a devotee and a man of action. He is a hero in all human spheres, something that we cannot be, but we can at least maintain a certain degree of equilibrium among all values to be called a true Muslim in different walks of life,

Notes:

[1]. Chapter A'raf, Verse 179

[2]. Nahjul Balagha, letter 53

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Nature of Man

We know that there are different views about the nature of man, two of which stand opposed to each other: the view of the spiritualists and that of the materialists.

According to spiritualists, man is a reality composed of body and spirit. The spirit is eternal and does not perish with death, and we know that religion and Islamic texts affirm this view.

According to materialists, man comprises only this machine of the body, which is destroyed with death, and its dismemberment means the dissolution of his personality.

In spite of this great difference of opinion, there is something about which both groups are unanimous, and that is that there are certain non-material elements which may be called intellectual, and which give a man his value and personality. If he is deprived of them, he will sink to the level of animals. Sa'di, the poet, has expressed this idea in the following poem:

"Man's body is ennobled by his soul,

And this fine garment is not a sign of humanity

If man were known by his eyes, nose, mouth and ears,

What difference would there be between a picture on the wall and humanity?"

There is a saying: "How easy it is to become a scholar and how difficult to be a human being." It requires so many qualities that depend on one's personality and worth.

Deviations which take place in an individual or society are of two kinds: 1) Those anti-values which stand against values, such as tyranny against justice, suppression against freedom, atheism and lack of discipline against devotion and worship, and foolishness and stupidity against wisdom and intelligence. Most deviations do not belong to this group, because such anti-values are soon defeated. 2) Another group of deviations takes the form of a cancerous growth of one value which obliterates all other values. For example, asceticism is a value and criterion of humanity, but a person or a society may turn to it to the extent of ignoring every other value. Human values may be said to come under one heading, as expressed by Gnostics and modern theologians, and that is a feeling of pain, something which animals lack.

Pain is a source of discomfort, but at the same time it gives an awareness and alertness to find the cause. In this way, it is a blessing even though it causes some loss. Rumi expresses this idea in a poem:

"The sigh and groaning which are in sickness, Provide a wakefulness at that time. When you fall ill, you feel penitent of guilt. And a sin will seem ugly to you. Then you resolve to follow the right path And promise to obey thenceforth. So it is certain that sickness has this benefit that it grants you alertness and care. Know then, you who are searching for causes, that he who feels pain, the greater is the awareness and the greater the awareness, the paler the visage."

Feeling no pain is like having no feeling and understanding. It is tantamount to being ignorant. Which is better, to be stupid and ignorant and feel no pain, or to be aware and alert and feel pain?

It is sometimes said that being a lean Socrates is preferable to being a fat pig. Being learned and wise but deprived of comforts is better than a fool enjoying all comforts. Literature is full of complaints of having intelligence, for, it deprives its owner of comfort and ease. A poet says:

"My intelligence and wisdom are my enemies, I wish that my eyes and ears were not open."

Another poet says:

"Do not be wise to grieve for the crazy,

Be crazy to be grieved for by the wise

But such an attitude is wrong. He who attains the level of humanity and understands the worth of sensitivity and pain, never says that his intelligence and wisdom are his enemies. He would rather repeat the utterance of the Prophet that "The true friend of a person is his intelligence and his real enemy is his ignorance."

He who considers his intelligence to be his enemy never feels the uneasiness and misfortunes caused by ignorance, otherwise he would not make such a remark. In physical illness, too, there must be pain, otherwise the illness could not be diagnosed and consequently treated. An illness which is sudden and without pain is most dangerous.

What is human pain? It does not mean only physical pain. It is a pain considered sacred by mystics and is peculiar to human beings and for this reason, a human being is preferable to an angel, for, an angel is free from pain. That human pain is the pain of seeking God. Man is a reality produced by divine breath in another world, and is not wholly homogeneous with the things of this world. He has a feeling of strangeness and alienation with all other creatures here since they are all changeable and perishable and not worthy of attachment. Man, however, has a perpetual anxiety, and this is what draws him towards devotion and worship of God, communion with Him, and proximity to Him, as his origin.

There are many parables in mysticism about returning to one's origin. Poets speak of a parrot brought in a cage from India always longing to break open the cage and flying back home. Rumi tells the story of a reed which is cut off from its reed-bed, and you hear the moan of the pipe lamenting this separation and longing for the reunion. Sometimes they compare a person to an elephant which must be constantly knocked on the head so that it gets no chance to think of its Indian homeland.

Most of these parables mean to say that a human being is anxious to return to the next world, feels the pain of separation and longs for a divine reunion. Imam Ali, in a conversation with Kumayl-bin-Ziad, declares that there is no one to whom he may divulge the secret of his heart. But he says there are some individuals in the world who have attained the point of perfect certainty in knowledge and feel that there is no space to separate them from the spirit of certitude. That thing, namely livelihood, which is difficult for men of pleasure and materialists to achieve is tame and easy for them, and what is the source of terror for the former, namely privacy with God, is the means of companionship for the latter. They go along with people but their spirits soar high, and while they are here they are also simultaneously in the next world going through the mystic and devotional pains and communions that Ali had.

This love of God makes the devotee wholly unconscious of what goes on around him and he does not feel any pain even if an arrow is being pulled out of his body. This pain of separation from God, and longing for divine proximity do not end until he attains his goal of joining God. The Qur'an says the heart is soothed by one thing only, and that is the remembrance of God.

Rumi quotes the parable of a man who was constantly in communion with God and kept on repeating the divine name. *Satan* came to him once and tempted him in such a manner that he stopped his invocations henceforth. One day, *Satan* came to the man again and said: "With all your repetition of the name of God and your wakefulness at dawn for devotion and your longing, did you ever hear once from Him saying: "Here am I?" If you had gone to any other door and groaned so much, you would have received a response at least once." This remark appeared logical to the man, so he kept silent. In a dream, an invisible voice asked him as to why he had abandoned his communion. He answered that despite all his longing and pain of

love, he had never received an answer. The voice said: "I am sent by God to give you an answer. The pain of love that He has put in your heart is the response."

Imam Ali, in his prayer (dua) of *Kumayl*, says: "O God, forgive that sin which causes my praying to be confined and the pain of it to be removed." Thus, prayer is a goal in itself and not always the means of receiving a favorable answer.

Another group claims that the criterion of humanity is to feel the pain of God's creatures and as Sa'di, the poet, says:

"It is not poverty that has made me pale, I am pale because of grieving for the poor."

If the hunger and pains of others become more difficult to bear than one's own hunger and pain, it is a value which is the basis of personality and a source of other human values. It involves a feeling of responsibility towards other human beings and their needs and sufferings.

We see its perfect example in Imam Ali, especially the last fasting month of *Ramadhan* in his life. For him it had a new delight, and for his household it was full of anxiety, because his behavior in that month was quite different from the fasting months of previous years.

"Ali (as) speaks of the following Qur'anic verse: Chapter "Spider" (Ankabut) verse 2::

"Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, We believe, and not be tried? And certainly we tried those before them, so Allah will certainly know those who are true and He will certainly know the liars."

He says: "As soon as this Verse descended, I knew that great seditions and trials lay in store for these people, and I asked the Prophet what the Verse meant!" The Prophet answered: "After me, my people will be tested and tried." I said: "Those who were martyred in the Battle of Uhud were seventy in number headed by Hamza-bin-Abdul-Mottaleb, while I was uneasy not to receive the blessing of martyrdom. Why was I deprived of this?" The Prophet said: "If you were not martyred there, you will be martyred in the way of God."

In the battle of *Uhud*, Ali (as) was just twenty-five, had newly wedded Fatimah (as), and had Hassan (as) as his first offspring. A young family usually expects a gradual progress in life whereas the only great wish of Ali was to get martyred in the way of God. The Prophet then asked Ali (as): "How much fortitude will you show in martyrdom?" Ali answered: "Please do not speak of fortitude; ask me rather how grateful I will be."

In consequence of the Prophet's utterances and of the signs, which Ali (as) recognized and explained, his family and companions became worried. In that last fasting month, he went as

a guest to different places to break his fast, but ate very little. His children asked him sympathetically why he abstained from food so much. He answered that he wished to meet his God with an empty stomach. Then, they realized that Ali (as) was waiting for something close at hand. Sometimes, he looked up at the sky and said:

"What my beloved Prophet has told me is true and quite near." On the night before the 19th of *Ramadhan*, the children were with him for a time.

Then, Imam Hassan went back to his own house. Ali (as) had a private place for prayer where he retired for communion with his Lord after attending to his private and public affairs. The sun had not risen yet when Imam Hassan went there to see his father. Ali (as) had a special affection for Fatimah's children. He said to his son: "As I was sitting there last night, I fell into a slumber and dreamt of the Prophet to whom I said: "I have suffered so much through your people." He said: "Curse them", I cursed them and prayed God to take me away from them and send an incompetent person to them."

It is so strange to see people not showing harmony with Ali (as) in following his way, and causing him so much suffering. Such were Ayesha's companions who broke their allegiance, and Muawiah with his cunning and cleverness, knowing well what would hurt Ali (as) most, and those 'Outsider' rebels (*Khawarij*) who heartily and faithfully excommunicated Ali (as). When someone hears of all such tragic events, he wonders at Ali's fortitude, and realizes as to why, in his dream, he spoke of his sufferings to the Prophet,

The cackling of ducks is heard from outside the house, and Ali (as) predicts that very soon the sound of wailing and lamentation will dominate that cackling. His family came forward to stop him from going to the mosque that day and suggest sending someone else to lead the congregational prayer instead. At first, he mentioned the name of Ja'dat-bin-Hobeira, his nephew, as substitute. But he changed his mind and said he himself would go to lead the prayer. He is asked to have someone as company, but refuses. Later that day when he was laid down with his terrible wound, he said: "I swear by God that the blow of the sword on my forehead was like a lover being united with his beloved, or like a person looking in a dark night for a well where he could pitch his tent, and is overjoyed to find it."

Anyhow, while setting off for the mosque he was very excited and tried to discover the reason. He felt that a great event was about to take place after he cried out the call of summoning the faithful to prayer, he bade farewell to that dawn, and said:

"O dawn, has there been a day in Ali's life when you appeared to find him asleep? Henceforth, his eyes will be closed for ever." As he descended from his pedestal, he said: "Open the way to a fighting believer." We see him as a perfect man who, in all his epic-creating struggles, always remembered God and feared nothing in the way of Him. As former men of learning said, man is himself the gate through which he enters the world of spirituality. Therefore,

there are elements in man's essence, which are not in harmony with the world of matter. This is not only what old psychologists believed, but modern ones, too, admit it explicitly.

The holy Prophet (saw) says: "He who knows himself knows God", and the Qur'an devotes a separate account for man as against all other creatures. It says in Chapter "Ha Mim", Verse 53:

"We will soon show them our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth. Is it not sufficient as regards your Lord that He is a witness over all things?"

You may ask what are those elements in man which cannot be accounted for by material things? This requires a long discussion, and is related to human values and man's humanity. In the case of animals, there is no separation between them and their entity. A horse is a horse, a dog is a dog, a tiger is a tiger, But man may lack humanity, that is, those qualities which are the basis of personality, and though they belong to this world, they are not tangible, and are spiritual rather than material.

Secondly, what is the criterion of man's humanity and gives him personality, is not framed by nature or anyone else, but by man himself. Imam Ali-bin-Mussa-Reza, the eighth Imam, says: "What is there is known through what is here." As it was mentioned before, all the human values may be summed up into a single value, and that is, having a feeling of pain above various human pains or the pain of every living creature. It is the pain of being a stranger to this world, and being separated from his origin in the other world. He longs to return to his own home and to God, from the earthly world to heaven from where he was driven out. Yet, his coming into this world has not been wrong and futile, and has been sent for a purpose.

No matter what sublimity and perfection a man attains, he still feels he has not reached the ultimate. He desires something, and when he secures it, he feels no attachment for it. Someone said: "I was going round a foreign museum, when I saw the statue of a very beautiful woman lying down on a bed and a fine young man standing on the bed with one leg on the floor and his face turned away from the woman, as if he was on the point of running away." He could not understand what the sculptor had meant by this scene. He asked someone what it meant, and was told: "This scene illustrates the thought of Plato that a man turns with great love and zeal to something, but on attaining it, that love dies away and gets buried there. It is the beginning of weariness dislike and escape."

Others who have pondered more deeply over this issue say that man is a creature who cannot be in love with what is limited and perishable. He longs for absolute perfection and loves nothing else. That means love of God. Even those who deny God or even abuse Him are unaware that in the depth of their nature they love God, but they have lost the way and their beloved. Mohyedin Arabi says no human being has loved anyone but his own God. The

Prophets have not come to teach creatures the name of God and His worship, for this is inherent in human nature. They have come to show the difference between the right and wrong paths, and tell men that they are really in love with absolute perfection. If you think that money or rank of life is perfection, you are wrong. The Prophets came to remove false veils and enable men to find their beloved through loving devotions, which we have seen in Imam Ali (as). The Qur'an says in Chapter "Thunder" (Ra'd), Verse 27:

"Those who believe and whose hearts are set at rest by the remembrance of Allah; now surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts set at rest."

The Qur'an does not ask people not to seek wealth, rank or comfort, but it says that these things do not give peace and tranquility, for, they are not their ultimate goal.

Other schools of thought emphasize human pain for God's creatures and not for God. The Gnostics, while referring to man's progress towards perfection, say that he embarks on four journeys:

- 1) Man's journey towards God.
- 2) His journey with God in God, meaning knowing Him.
- 3) His journey with God towards God's creatures
- 4) His journey with God among creatures for their salvation.

Nothing can be said better than the above, as long as man is separated from God, everything is wrong, But after communion with God, and knowing and approaching Him and feeling Him with himself, he returns to His creatures in the company of God, to help and salvage them and bring them near God. If we say that a man journeys from people towards God, he does not attain anything. And if we say he moves towards human beings without moving towards God, he will be like materialist human schools of today, unable to do anything, because it is absolutely false. Only those who have delivered themselves first can deliver others from being enslaved by nature and other human beings. It means freedom from one's carnal desires in the first place and from the domination of external nature and others in the second place.

From the viewpoint of Islam, is a man someone who feels the pain of others, or feels for God and then feels the pain of His creatures?

The Qur'an says in Chapter "Cave" (Kahf), Verse 6:

"Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they do not believe in

this announcement."

This Verse shows the Prophet (saw) to be so eager to guide and deliver people from the captivities and difficulties of this world that he wants to kill himself with grief.

Then, two other Verses refer to the same thing:

Chapter "Ta Ha", Verse I:

"We have not revealed the Qur'an to you that you may be unsuccessful."

And Chapter "immunity" (Baraat), Verse 128:

"Certainly, an Apostle has come to you from among yourselves, grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you, to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful"

Thus, the Prophet feels for other human beings and does his utmost for them.

A Muslim must feel both for God and for His creatures. Sometimes you have seen a father taking so much trouble and spending so much money for his children's education that he is called ravenous with respect to their trading. The Prophet, too, shows the same zeal for his people.

Imam Ali (as), too, shows the same feeling as mentioned in "*Nahjul-Balagha*". He receives a report from Basra that Othman-bin-Hanif has taken part in a feast. There has been no drinking, gambling and debauchery. But Ali (as) reproaches this Governor for attending a wholly aristocratic feast where no poor person has been present, Then, Ali (as) begins to describe his own pains, saying that he could obtain all means of comfort and pleasure himself if he wished, but would not leave the reins of his life in the hands of desires. He is thinking of all those in various lands who are poor and in great need. This is what 'feeling the pains of others' means, He says: "Should I be satisfied with the title of Caliph and commander of the faithful without sharing the troubles of the faithful?"

Avicenna compares this pain to itching which is painful, but pleasant when someone scratches himself. It is not a bitter feeling. In mourning for Imam Hossain, tears are shed because one feels the pain, and yet one loves to do so and to participate in such ceremonies. There, one feels the spirit not to be alone, but it is the spirit of all the bodies. Such a spirit prompts one to wear patched up shoes inspite of all available resources in order to be one with a spirit like Ali' s.

A poet says woe upon that spirit which is great, for in being great it feels everyone's pain and its task becomes crucial. Ali (as) sees a woman carrying a waterskin and thinks that she must be lonely to be forced to perform such a task. He approaches her and politely offers to help her, She accepts the offer, and on reaching her house, he asks her if she has someone to help her. She says that her husband has been killed in the service of Ali-bin-Abi-Talib, and she has no one to look after her, On hearing this Ali's whole body was set afire with pity and he could not sleep all night. Next morning, he and his companions carried some provisions to her house, and then and there he cooked some meat, fed her orphans and caressed them, saying: "Forgive Ali for having neglected you". Then, he lit the oven and came near to feel its heat, and said to himself: "Ali, feel this heat so that you could not forget the heat of hell for neglecting the orphans, the poor and others". This is an example of a perfect Islamic man.

As I said before, when some radical values emerge, these eventually eliminate other values, such as an inclination to worship to the extent of forgetting other duties. Now I feel that another radical wave is about to develop, and that is an inclination to social matters of Islam and neglect of godly duties. If we are to deviate from the path of moderation in Islam, what difference would there be between forgetting the society by turning to worship and vice versa?

The Qur'an says in Chapter "Victory" (Fat 'h), Verse 28:

"Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves, You will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Old and New Testaments; like a seed produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them; Allah has promised those among them who believe and do good, forgiveness and a great reward."

Below in Verse 4 of Chapter "The Ranks" (Saff), the Qur'an says:

"Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall."

Here, the Verse describes the Prophet's companions and those trained by him, and calls those as the enemies of truth" who cover the face of truth, while believers stand firmly against these enemies, and when they are among faithful people, they are perfectly kind to and united with them.

This is the social characteristic of Islamic society, which has been neglected for so many

centuries. The Qur'an continues to say in Chapter "Victory", Verse 28 referred to above that these people who are highly social, always ask God for more and more for society and desire God's satisfaction, and this is the highest degree of their devotion. In Chapter "Immunity¹" (Baraat), Verse 112, the Qur'an says:

"They who turn (to Allah) who serve (Him), who praise (Him), who fast, who bow down, who prostrate themselves, who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and who keep the limits of Allah and give good news to the believers."

These are the divine qualities of a people and those who reform society. And in Chapter "Al e-Imran", Verse 16, it speaks of:

"The patient, and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend (benevolently) and those who ask forgiveness in the morning times."

The word 'patience' in Qur'an stands for 'resistance, especially for those who are honest and truthful ones in battle; and all the qualities mentioned in the verse are inseparable.

There is a description of the companions of Imam Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, in various narrations saying: "All night, they are monks and in daytime lions." There is another narration about the Prophet's companions, which says: "The Prophet went one day to visit the companions at Safa according to his habit. It was between dawn and sunrise. He saw a young man staggering along, his eyes sunk in their socket, and looking very pale. The Prophet asked him: "How did you begin your morning?" He answered: "I have begun it with certainty," meaning what "You have told us through the tongue and ear, I have found it through insight". The Prophet said: "There is a sign for everything. What is the sign of your certainty?" He answered: "Its sign is that it keeps me thirsty in daytime, and sleepless at night." meaning his certainty does not allow him to break his fast or to sleep, The Prophet said: "This is not enough. I want further signs." He answered: "Now that I am in this world I have a vision of the next world and I hear the voices of those who are in both heaven and hell. Let me name those of your followers who are in heaven and those in hell. (Rumi has expressed all this in a poem.) Then, the Prophet asked him: "What is your wish?" He answered: Martyrdom in the way of God." Thus, this man is a true Muslim with that wish and in the way he spends his days and nights. It is his feeling for God that has produced his other feeling of pain. The Qur'an says in Chapter "The Cow" (Baghara), Verse 153:

"O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient."

To be an authentic Muslim in society, you must pray in all sincerity. Some people scorn prayer, consider it be suitable for old woman, and think it enlightenment to be only sociable.

You may have heard that Omar omitted the sentence of "Hasten to good deeds" from the call to prayer. He thought it as an enlightened step, but he was wrong. His time was the peak of Islamic victories and effervescence of Islamic Jihad. Soldiers attacked the enemy in groups and, in spite of being small in number, vanquished it. Their number was no more than fifty to sixty thousand, and yet they fought against two empires, each of which had an army of several hundred thousand. The soldiers of Islam fought on two fronts, and were victorious in both. Umar's reason for that omission was that as the people are called to pray, which is the best devotion and the best deed, they would think that there is no need to call them to other good deeds such as the jihad, for, it would divert them and substitute prayer for other deeds. He suggested substituting the sentence: "Prayer is better than sleep" for "Hasten to good deeds."

He did not think as to why the small army of Islam was victorious. Was it the superiority of weapons of the Arabs over those of the Iranians and the Romans? No, because the two civilized countries of that time were well equipped while the Arabs' arms were insignificant. Was it because the Arab race was stronger? Again no, for, we have seen what Shahpur, the King of Iran, did to the Arabs and how he fastened iron chains to their shoulders. It was the power of faith that defeated the Iranian and Roman armies and the power that is derived from that sentence in ritual prayer: "Hasten to good deeds." When a man stands at night to have communion with God, he gains a morale-boosting power. Prayer means renewal of faith, and the repetition of the phrase "God is great" in prayer makes everything else seem so small and insignificant. Such a man, on seeing so many hundred thousands of soldiers before him, says to himself: "God is greater than all, all powers belong to Him, and we should rely on Him." It is this prayer that gives him strength. When going to holy war is a duty for a person he must go, and his staying on for prayer in the mosque is prohibited. The condition for the prayer to be acceptable to God is to go on a jihad, while the condition for the jihad to be acceptable to Him is to perform his prayer. Prayer without jihad is null and void and jihad without prayer is likewise null and void.

In the system of Islamic values, devotion comes at the top but it must be such whose conditions correspond with Qur'anic criteria. Prayer is real only when it shows its effect by checking wicked acts. It is then that prayer leads to other worthwhile values.

Ali (as) is the sun of all Islamic values and a comprehensive personality. On one occasion we see him as an epic-producing fighter, as if he had been a soldier all his life. Then, we find him elsewhere as a mystic who knows nothing but loving communion with God. As an example, we cite two cases from "*Nahjul-Balagha*". In the first military encounter of Ali (as) with Muawiah in Siffin on the bank of the Euphrates, Muawiah ordered his men to block the way to the river so that Ali's men could have no access to water and thus be forced to flee.

Ali proposed to hold parleys with them to solve this problem and to prevent unnecessary bloodshed between two groups of Muslims. Muawiah discussed the matter in his war council and it was decided not to let Ali's men have access to water. Ali (as) delivered a discourse to

his men, which was more effective than a thousand drums, trumpets and military songs. He told them the bare fact that Muawiah had gathered a number of perverse men and had blocked the way of Ali's men to water, and said: "You must choose one of the two alternatives, first you must quench your swords with evil blood, and then quench yourselves next."

Then he uttered a sentence which created much excitement among all of them. He asked them as to what life and death meant, and said: "Is life just walking, eating and sleeping? Is death the act of being buried under the earth? No, that is not life, and this is not death. Life is to die victoriously, and death is to live as condemned and vanquished.

Ali's men advanced swiftly and drove back Muawiah's army, which was now deprived of water. Muawiah wrote to Ali begging for access to water, but Ali's companions were opposed to it. Ali (as), however, was against acting unchivalrous, and said that they must not fight the enemy by creating difficulties for it. Winning victory in such a way is unmanly and unworthy of him as a Muslim. Thus, he showed that manliness and magnanimity are loftier than valor. Rumi, in his poem, calls Ali the lion of God, in courage, but he says no one can describe his magnanimity.

Then, we find Ali in a different scene and a different garment when he is free from public duties and is engaged in his devotion and worship, and utters the following prayer: "O God, you are a greater companion for your saints than any friend. You are readier than anyone to aid those who trust you. You observe the innermost thoughts and secrets of your friends and lovers, and are well aware of their insight and knowledge, and know that their hearts beat and long for you."

You should listen to the Du'a Kumayl, which is Ali's prayer, and, in content, it rises to the height of mysticism. There is something in it beyond the two worlds. It shows solely the relation of a sincere, humble and loving servant to the holy essence of providence. The way Imam Ali (as) and Imam Zain al -Abedin (as) commune with God in the dawns of the month of Ramadhan shows us as to how we should approach God as our first step and then perform our other duties towards ourselves and society. We should abstain from one-sided inclinations.

Imam Sadiq (as), just moments before passing away, summoned his kith and kin and uttered one sentence before breathing his last. He said: "Our intercession does not apply to those who take prayer lightly."

The life of Ali (as) may be divided into six phases, the most amazing of which is the last of them. The first period is from his birth to the ordainment of the Prophet. The second period is from the Prophet's ordainment to his Emigration to Medina. The third period, different from the other two, is from the Emigration to the death of the Prophet. The fourth phase is from the Prophet's death to Ali's own Caliphate, a period of twenty-five years. The fifth phase is his

four and a half years of Caliphate. And the sixth or the last phase is of only two days from his receiving a sword blow on the head till his martyrdom.

The last phase is the most amazing of all because Ali shows his perfection as a human being the way he faced death. On receiving the blow he uttered two sentences, namely: "Get hold of man", and "I swear by the God of the Kaaba that I have received my salvation through martyrdom."

A physician, called Assad-bin-Amr, was brought to him, and he diagnosed that poison had entered Ali's blood. He said he could do nothing and recommended the Imam to make his last will.

When Umm Kulthum, the Imam's daughter, saw ibn Muljam, she spoke harshly to him and asked as to why he had acted thus towards her father and expressed the hope that Ali (as) would recover. The cursed man said: "Have no hope, for I have bought this sword for a thousand dinars and paid another thousand for smearing it with poison. The poison is so strong that it will not only kill your father; it could kill all the people of Kufa if used against them,"

They brought Ali (as) some milk, and he told those around to treat the assassin kindly. Then he addressed his kith and kin and said: "O descendants of Abdul Muttalib, after my death do not go among people saying what has happened to me and accusing such and such a man. No, my assassin is only one man."

He then said to his son Imam Hassan: "My son, this man has given your father only one stroke of the sword. After me, you have the choice either to set him free or punish him. If so deal him only one blow whether it kills him or not." Then, he asked if they have fed and treated the man well. This is how he treated his enemy and that is why Rumi, in his poem, calls him the lion of God and says no one can describe the extent of his magnanimity.

All this shows Ali's manliness and humanity. The poison is affecting him more and more and his companions are weeping and groaning, but they see his smiling lips uttering this sentence: "I swear to God that what has happened to me is not disagreeable, This death and martyrdom in the way of God is something for which I had longed all my life, and so much the better that it has happened during the act of devotion." Then Ali uses a simile that is well known among the Arabs. The desert Arabs were in the habit of staying where there was grass, and when it was exhausted, they moved elsewhere. In hot weather, they sought a place at night where water could be found. He said: "I am like a lover who has found his beloved, or like one looking for water on a dark night who is overjoyed to find it."

In those last moments, they were all around Ali's bed. Poison had done its work, and from time to time Ali (as) fell into a coma, and whenever he opened his eyes, he preached to those

present. His last words which were fiery contained a twenty-point address directed first at his sons, Hassan and Hossain, and then at his other children and finally at all people who may hear his words until the day of Resurrection.

Generally, everyone who has pioneered a school of thought has a theory about man's perfection or a perfect man. What is called ethics is related to what should be, not what is, and if man can acquire those ethical qualities, he will attain the peak of humanity. The views of various schools in connection with perfect man may be summarized as under:

1) One view is that of intellectualists who view man in terms of his mental qualities, and think that his essence is his mind and his faculty of thought. This is the view of ancient philosophers including Avicenna. For them, a perfect man was a sage, and his perfection lay in his philosophy. By theoretical philosophy, they meant the proper general understanding of the whole existence, and that is different from science, which means understanding only a section of existence.

To show the difference between science and philosophy, the following explanation will illustrate the issue. You might wish to know something about a city. This knowledge may be general or specific. A municipal engineer can draw the plan of the city to show its limits and divisions into various precincts, parks, streets and squares, in which you would not be able to locate your house. Another man can supply all the local information of a precinct, which a general engineer cannot. A philosopher gives you a plan and picture of the whole existence and tries to find its origin and cause, its beginning and end, and its phases and general principles. If you ask this man something about a plant, an animal, a stone, a star, or the sun, he may not be able to answer your question. For the philosopher, the picture of universe as a whole is significant even though the details may be vague or even unknown.

To intellectualists, finding the general picture was the goal, and its attainment the sign of perfection, in which the world of intellect corresponds with the objective world. They thought this was possible through the use of reasoning, logic and reflection. They believed in two types of philosophy: a) theoretical philosophy or understanding the world as it is, and b) practical philosophy which meant the complete predominance of human intellect over all of his instincts and faculties. Books of ethics judge matters on this basis, and our ethics is a Socratic one based on intellect. Does your intellect dominate your passion, or vice versa? Does your intellect dominate your anger and fear, or vice versa? Thus, if you can manage to understand the world through reasoning, and allow your intellect to dominate the self, then you are a perfect man.

2) Another school is the school of love or Gnosticism. By love is meant affectionate devotion to God. Unlike the intellectual school which is the school of reflection and not movement and in which all movements are intellectual, the school of love is all movement, a vertical rather than a horizontal motion, though at a later stage it assumes a horizontal direction. At first it is

an upward flight towards God. They do not believe in reasoning and reflection as the means of advancement; it is the spirit of man that moves ahead until it reaches God. It berates the school of intellect, and this attitude is the basis of one of the finest debates in literature between love and intellect, and those who are engaged in such discussions are themselves mostly Gnostics who have given love victory over intellect. This school considers intellect as a small part of man's existence and only a means, whereas the essence of man is his spirit, which belongs to the world of, love involving nothing but moving towards God. That is why the followers of this school, such as the poet Hafiz, prefer love and its intoxication to intellect.

Their monotheism is the unity of existence, which takes the form of absolute truth once a human being attains that position. It means that a perfect man becomes ultimately God or a part of Him.

3) Another school of thought thinks of perfect man depending neither on intellect nor on love, but on power, meaning thereby force, strength or something similar. In ancient Greece, there was a group called Sophists who explicitly claimed that might was right, and weakness meant absence of right. Thus, justice and injustice had no meaning for them, since might is right and every human being endeavored to gain power without any condition or limitation.

In the last two centuries, this idea was revived by Nietzsche, the German philosopher. He and his followers say truth, honesty and goodness are all nonsense. If a person is weak, it is his own fault and he deserves to be vanquished. He believes religion is invented by the weak, and he himself is opposed to religion, and this is opposite to Karl Marx's view that religion is invented by the strong to enslave the weak. Nietzsche thinks the weak have invented it to limit the power of the strong, and the treachery of religion to mankind has been to propagate such ideas as generosity, kindness, humanity and justice etc. among the people, and this has deceived the strong into diminishing their power for the sake of humanity.

He (Nietzsche) thinks those who say that 'one should combat the self' are wrong; rather, the self should be nourished. Those who speak of equality are wrong; there should always exist inferiors to work for superiors so as to enable them to grow and produce the superman. He is against the equality of the sexes because the male is created as the stronger sex and the female is to serve the male. Thus, this school thinks superman or the perfect man to be at par with a strong and powerful man, and perfection means power.

Such ideas have consciously or otherwise become prevalent among the Muslims, and sometimes we carelessly speak of life as the "survival of the fittest," whereas this phrase means that defense of right and truth is permissible. Without such a war, no priest, monk or clergy could peacefully engage in worship in churches, temples or mosques; and they should all be thankful to the soldier who makes this worship possible.

It would be fine for mankind to reach a stage of education and perfection where no aggression

exists, in which case no legitimate war would be needed. Islam presents such a society in the form of the rule of Mahdi, the upcoming Imam (as). It is said that then even wild beasts will be reconciled with one another and there will exist no war and aggression.

A sentence is attributed to Imam Hossain (as), which is neither correct nor verified as having been uttered by him. This sentence has become prevalent in the last fifty years and says. "One should fight a jihad for the sake of one's opinion". Such a sentence is in agreement with Western ideas, while the Qur'an says that a jihad must be waged in the way of right and truth.

A belief may be right or wrong. Another school of thought says that one should have a belief, and an ideal for which one must put in efforts, no matter what that belief is. But the Qur'an says these efforts must be made in the way of right, and if the belief proves to be wrong, it must be reformed. Very often, it is necessary to combat one's own belief to discover the truth, and then begin combat in the way of truth. The idea of the "survival of the fittest" is the basis of the supposition that "might is right", an idea derived from Darwin's philosophy about animal life and applied even to human life.

But we cannot consider human beings to be at the same level with animals with regard to the fact that war is the only way of survival. If this is so, then what can they say about co-operation, unity, sincerity and affection among human beings? They may say these acts and sentiments, too, are for survival, and are imposed on human beings by a superior enemy. It is a necessity to have these elements to face a stronger enemy, The proof of this is that no sooner the enemy is removed, than unity turns into dispersion, and differences and disputes arise among them even when there are only two individuals left.

As the schools of intellect and love meet with opposition, the school of might, too, is faced with those who scorn it and say that man's perfection lies in his weakness not in his strength for, if he has power, he will show aggression. Sa'di, the poet, has made the same mistake by saying:

"I am the ant that is trampled on, And not the wasp to make others groan with the pain of my sting. How can I express my thanks for this blessing That I have no strength to hurt people." [1]

There is no reason, in fact, to be an ant or a wasp. One should be thankful to have strength without hurting others. Sa'di speaks also of an ascetic who had retired to a cave, and when he was asked as to why he did not live in the town among people, he answered: "There are too many elegant and pretty ones, and an old man slips on an abundance of flowers."

Sa'di also expresses the opposite view in another poem describing the difference between an ascetic and a man of learning, and says an ascetic wants to save his own skin, whereas a man of learning tries to save a drowning man.

The Qur'an speaks, in Chapter "Yusuf" which is called "The Best Story", Verse 90, of him "Who guards against evil and is patient," meaning Yusuf who, in spite of all the available resources for seeking pleasure, controls himself and guards his chastity. He is threatened with death if he does not yield to lustfulness, but he says in Verse 33 of the same Chapter:

"My Lord! The prison house is dearer to me than that where they invite me to; and if Thou turn not away their device from me, I will yearn towards them."

This proves that man's perfection does not lie in his weakness, even though the opposite view is expressed in many of our poems. For example, Baba Taher Hamadani says:

"Help me against the eye and the heart, for, what the eye sees, the heart desires. I must make a dagger with a steel blade, To hit the eye in order to liberate the heart."

This poet should also have hit his ears so as not to desire what he hears! What an example of a perfect man who cannot control himself except by getting rid of his organs and limbs!

We have many examples of such weak and abject-producing morality in literature, but we should remember that human beings are prone to err and go to excess. When we compare other schools of thought with the genuine Islam, we realize that Islam must have come from God. Socrates concentrates on one aspect of man while each one of Plato, Avicenna, Mohyedin Arabi, and foreign scholars stress other specific aspects. But all of them are led astray. If so, then how can a prophet rely only on his human brain and produce such a fine, progressive and comprehensive school of thought? All those thinkers are children compared with him, and he is their teacher who speaks last and best.

There is another school of thought about a perfect man that is based on love and self-realization. This school dates back to several thousand years, and has produced lofty ideas in ancient Indian books, some of which have also been translated into Persian, such as *Upanishads*. The great scholar Tabatabai who had read this book was greatly impressed by its lofty thoughts. In this school, self-realization is the basis of all human accomplishments. Socrates and various prophets as well as the Prophets of Islam express this point. But this school concentrates on the above single point only. Gandhi's collection of essays and letters called "This is my faith", is a fine book in which he says: "I discovered three principles by the study of Upanishads, which have been my guide in life: firstly, there is only one reality and that is to know the self. This is the point by which he criticizes the West and says those in it have understood the world, but not discerned themselves, and for this reason they have brought misfortune upon themselves and the world.

Secondly, he who understands himself will understand God and others. Thirdly, there exists only one power, the power of dominating oneself. If one can dominate oneself, it would be

possible for him to dominate everything else. Gandhi also says there is one goodness and that is to desire for others what one desires for oneself. Indian philosophy is based on self-realization, contemplation, and renunciation of desires and discovery of one's reality, which, in turn, produces affection.

In modern times, that is, in the last three centuries, a number of schools of thought have appeared which have a social tendency. One school considers a perfect man as a classless individual, and believes that belonging to a class, particularly a high class, is the sign of being imperfect and perfection means equality with others. Another school like existentialism emphasizes liberty and social awareness and responsibilities. Another school agrees with this, but says that being quarrelsome is a requisite for this attitude.

Another school believes in enjoyment, a school that is somewhat close to the school of might. It says that one should get maximum benefit out of the blessings of creation to attain perfection. Those who consider knowledge as the height of perfection desire it in order to know nature and thereby dominate it to serve mankind. Thus, for them knowledge is a means, not an end. Such people belong to the school of maximum enjoyment.

These were the various views that have been expressed about a perfect man, and we will elaborately describe the views of Islam in this connection and show the relative value of Intellect, might, social responsibilities etc. in it. Another manifestation of man's perfection is the way he faces death, because the thought and fear of death is a weak point in man which produces many miseries and submission to much cruelty.

If there is no fear of death, the whole life will be transformed. Very great men are those who face death courageously or even seek it cheerfully and smilingly, not a death which is suicide, but one which is for a goal to attain which they feel to have a mission and responsibility. Suicide means abandoning responsibility, while death for the sake of duty is happiness. This kind of death is welcomed only by saints for whom death is nothing other than a change of abode, or as Imam Hossain says "It is like crossing a bridge to reach a place which is inconceivable." It is reported that when he was being beheaded, there sat a smile on his lips.

Such men have both a great power of attraction and repulsion; they have very loyal friends as well as wicked enemies that knowingly oppose what is right. The noble Imams of Islam were such perfect men and models for their society

Thus, man is the only creature who can separate "self" from himself, whereas stones, plants and other living creatures are unable to remove from themselves the qualities given to them in creation. But man should acquire his humanity, which has nothing to do with his biological aspects. As Sa'di says:

"Man's body is ennobled by his soul, and this fine garment is not a sign of humanity:"

Being born a human being does not make him human. He has the potentiality of being human in the same way that he has the potentiality of being learned. A biologist or a physician cannot show this humanity to us. It is something which is not denied even by the most materialistic school of thought, and yet there are no material criteria for it.

We begin the discussion with the school of intellect. According to ancient philosophers, the essence of man is his intellect. As man's body is not a part of his personality. His spiritual and psychological peculiarities, too, are not a part of his true personality. Only his power of thinking is the measure of that personality. What he sees is nothing but a tool and a means for his thought; so are his desires. A perfect man is he who has attained perfection in reflection, and has understood the world of existence as it is. According to this school, intellect is capable of discerning the reality of the world, and can, like a mirror, truly reflect that reality in itself. Islamic philosophers who accept this view believe that this is what Islamic faith, which is mentioned in the Qur'an, means. To them, it means understanding the universe, its origin and process, its system, the direction of its return, faith in God and angels as the steps of existence, faith in the world as a created thing, faith in the idea that God has not left the world to itself but guides it through prophets, and faith in the fact that everything has come from God and returns to Him, namely Resurrection. These Philosophers consider this discernment to be philosophical and general, and not a scientific one which is a partial understanding.

The schools that have opposed the intellectual school are the Illuminati or Platonian philosophers, and the Gnostics and school of love, and the school of traditions and annals. In modern times and in the last four centuries, the school of sentiments has risen against the school of intellect, and it claims that intellect is in the service of the senses and can only make use of the product of the senses, like a factory turning raw materials into some substance or object. Nevertheless, the intellectual school holds its own against various onslaughts.

Let us see how the school of intellect compares with the view of Islam. The first point is the validity and genuineness of intellectual understanding. Many schools deny this validity for intellect. In Islamic texts, however, we come across an extraordinary support of intellect, which is not seen in any other religion. Compare Islam with Christianity, and you will see that Christianity gives intellect no right to interfere in matters related to faith, and it is the duty of the clergy to check every reflection and reasoning in the question of faith.

Islam, on the contrary, believes that nothing but intellect has the right to interfere in religion. For example, when you are asked as to how you came to believe in the first principle which is monotheism, your answer must only be that it was through intellect. If your reason is based on imitating the elders or following the example of others, such a belief is not acceptable, and it should only come through reasoning.

The Qur'an constantly speaks of reasoning. Annals and traditions, too, consider intellect to be

great importance, so much so that the first chapter of such books is devoted to intellect. Imam Musa ibn Jafar (as) says that God has sent two signs for man, the internal messenger, which is man's intellect, and the external prophet, which means those men who, are to guide human beings. These two are complements to one another, and without them man cannot attain happiness. Sometimes, it is said that a wise man's sleep is worthier than an ignorant man's worship and the former's refraining from fasting is better than the latter's fasting; and his remaining stationary is wiser than the latter's movement. No prophet was ever ordained by God before he was granted intelligence. We consider our Prophet as having divine wisdom and this is in contrast with Christian belief in which intellect and religion are quite apart.

From the viewpoint of philosophers, the essence of man is his intellect, and all other things such the senses, memory, imagination, talents and aptitude are tools and the means for that intellect. Islam does not confirm this point, but says that intellect is one of the branches of man's existence and not the whole of it. The idea of philosophers, who declare that faith is limited to only understanding, does not correspond with what Islam says. In Islam, faith is a reality which is more than mere understanding. It is also inclination, submission, humility and love. An astronomer knows the stars, but he has no love and inclination for them. A mineralogist does not necessarily have a feeling for mines and minerals. A person may have the knowledge of something, and dislike it at the same time. In politics very often one knows one's enemy better than oneself. For example, in Israel there may be individuals who know the Arabs and Muslims better than the Arabs and Muslims know themselves. In the same way in Egypt or Arabia, there may be specialists on Israel. But do these specialists also have an inclination towards the country of their study? Very often, this knowledge is combined with hatred.

The Qur'an gives the best examples of those who know God, the prophet and basic principles of religion highly, and yet they are pagans and infidels. Does Satan not know God and yet act against God? He knows God better than any other creature and has worshipped Him for thousands of years, Has he not been an angel for thousands of years in the company of other angels? He knows the prophets too, and is well aware of Resurrection and hereafter. And yet the Qur'an calls him an unbeliever (Chapter "Saad", Verse 74). If what the philosophers say about understanding were true, Satan would then be the top believer. But he is not, and opposes the truth that he knows so well.

The Qur'an says in Chapter "Fig" (Teen) Verse 1 to 6:

- 1)"I swear by the fig and olive,
- 2) And Mount Sinai,
- 3) And this city made secure,

- 4) Certainly we created man in the best make.
- 5) Then we rendered him the lowest of the low.
- 6) Except those who believe and do good.

The Verses 1 to 5 are the basis of theoretical wisdom and Verse 6 is practical wisdom.

So far, three points have been explained in connection with the school of intellect:

- 1) Intellect is the basis, its perceptions are reliable, and it can secure true knowledge.
- 2) Intellect is not the whole of human essence, and Islam does not confirm it as such.
- 3) What is called Islamic faith is the perception of intellect or understanding.

But what is important is that faith is preliminary to action and has no genuineness of its own, and this, in turn, brings two schools of thought face to face. What is meant by the genuineness of faith? Is it because faith is the basis of human deed, and one should constantly endeavor according to a plan and for a goal, using faith as its foundation? For, activity is inherent in man's nature and this requires a basis of thought and belief, a matter which can be compared to building a one-room house as a goal, and all other acts or things or parts such as the base and walls etc. are subsidiary to that goal.

In today's social schools, such as communism, a set of views and beliefs exists which is based on materialism. There also exists a series of social, political, economic and moral principles, which are considered as the foundation, but not the goal. Materialism cannot be considered as a goal for a communist. This inclination was due to a stupid conflict of the church with such social and political thoughts and especially with freedom, so that this view became prevalent in Europe that man must be free and have a right in society and forget God, or believe in God and forsake the right and liberty. Thus, in order to find a solution, they rejected religion as a foundation. A communist thinks wrongly that without materialism, no social, political and economic principles can be explained.

Recently a number of communists have appeared in the world who say that materialism is not a necessity, and communism could be had without materialism. For them faith in those mental principles has no genuineness of its own, and these are used only as a basis of world vision on which they can build up their school.

In Islam there is faith in God, angels, prophets, Imams and Resurrection, but do these faiths figure only as the basis of thought and belief without being genuine in themselves? No, this is not true. In Islam while faith is the foundation of thought and belief and Islamic ideology is

built on them, this foundation has a genuineness of its own, and here philosophers are right in thinking that faith has its own authenticity. If its value is for action, then action without faith is nothing at all. Faith is one pillar of happiness, and action is another. In Islam the perfection of man in this world, and especially the hereafter, depends on his faith, for, in Islam the spirit is really independent.

The spirit has its own perfection, and is everlasting, and if it does not attain perfection, it is deficient and cannot secure happiness. The Qur'an says in Chapter "The Israelites", Verse 72:

"And whoever is blind in this world, he shall (also) be blind in the hereafter; and more erring from this way."

Here by blindness is of course not meant physical blindness, but mental and spiritual blindness, which prevents man from discerning truth and having faith in it. If someone performs even all the good deeds possible in this world, enjoys the good and forbids the evil, and lives like an ascetic, and devotes his life to the service of mankind, but at the same time he does not understand God and Resurrection and the world of existence, he is undoubtedly blind here and will also be blind in hereafter. The Qur'an says in Chapter "Ta Ha", Verse 125:

"He shall say: My Lord! Why hast Thou raised me blind, and I was a seeing one indeed? He will say: Even so: Our communications came to you, but you neglected them; even thus shall you be forsaken this day"

Nahjul-Balagha believes in the genuineness of faith, and says about men of God that when they call God and beg forgiveness, they feel within themselves the breeze of salvation, and there are people in every era who have communion with God, Fakhr Razi says in a quatrain; "I fear that I may pass away without having truly understood the world, and without going out of my physical being into my spiritual existence."

In Islam, knowing God, and knowing angels as the media of the world of existence, and knowing prophets and saints who are, in another respect, the media of God's blessing to us, and the knowledge of the reason for our coming to this world and where we are going to, and of our ultimate return to God like every other created thing, all these understandings are genuine, and, at the same time, they are the basis of Islamic ideology.

Therefore, neither faith should be sacrificed for deeds, nor deeds for faith. Consequently, it can be said that the perfect man of philosophers, on the whole, is not perfect, for, he possesses a partial perfection by seeking that perfection only in his intellect, Such a man is full of knowledge but without yearning, zeal and motion.

In Gnosticism, knowledge and intellect have been much scorned. Islam while accepting love and heart does not scorn intellect, reasoning and logic but respects them. That is why in later

periods of Islam, there appeared a group that respected both love and intellect. Sheikh Shahabeddin Sohrverdi of the Sect of Illuminati is one of them, and to a greater extent is Mulla Sadra Shirazi who thinks this way of love and intellect must follow the Qur'an, and has no desire to scorn the heart like Avicenna, or Sufis who look down upon intellect.

Another matter that is found in Gnosticism and is unacceptable to Islam, is its introvert nature which dominates its extrovert side, and its individualistic aspect which almost obliterates its social side. In Gnosticism, a perfect man is engaged with his own self and that is all. But in Islam, in addition to love, righteousness, self-purification and spirituality, a perfect man is also an extrovert and sociable.

The companions of Imam Mahdi (as) are said to be monks at night and lions in daytime, The Qur'an speaks of both aspects in Chapter "Immunity" (Bara'at) Verse 112:

"They who turn (to Allah), who serve (Him), who praise (Him), who fast, who bow down, who prostrate themselves, who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and who keep the limits of Allah; and give good news to the believers."

In this Verse, the points mentioned upto the subject of prostration are internal acts of devotion, and the remainder of the Verse is related to social duties.

Qur'an refers to similar matters in Chapter "Victory" (Fat'h), Verse 28:

Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among them selves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Old Testament and their description in the New Testament; like as seed produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them; Allah has promised those among them who believe and do good, forgiveness and a great reward."

In this Verse, the first part speaks of the social side of the Prophet and his companions, while the next part refers to acts of worship and devotion. But in this devotion, they are trying to win God's satisfaction which is the highest thing for them,

This devotion to win God's satisfaction is extravagantly seen in the perfect man of the *Sufis*. Some Gnostic leaders who have been deeply influenced by Islamic teachings, and have often pointed it out observe this weak point. And yet there has been an excess of introversion, so that extroversion has been effaced.

There is another aspect and that is mortifying the self, by which is meant purification and

avoiding selfishness, egotism and egoism, but the Gnostics, in emphasizing these things, have forgotten the positive aspect of purification which is magnanimity and qualities that are beyond materialism and biology, that is, non-material human values.

Without a survey and analysis of various schools of thought, we cannot fathom the depth of Islamic views in this connection. We mentioned before that the Gnostics have scorned the intellect and have exalted love to a position much higher than intellect, but it is an extravagant attitude to consider reflection, reasoning and logic as invalid.

It is said that Avicenna who lived in late fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century of *Hejira* and was a great Philosopher of the intellectual school, was a contemporary of a very distinguished Gnostic called Abu-Sa'id Abol-kheyr. Avicenna lived in the Transoxania region of Balkh and Bokhara, but after refusing Sultan Mahmood's invitation to join his court, he fled in fear to Neishapur where he met Abu~Sai'd. It is narrated that these two retired into privacy together for three days to discuss their views and came out of their privacy only for the purpose of offering congregational prayer. After this visit, Avicenna was asked about his impression of Abu~sa'id and he said: "He sees what we know." And when Abu-Sa'id was asked about Avicenna, he said: "This blind man follows with his stick the way that we see and follow", an answer which shows a contempt for intellect.

What we say is that if we place the view of the Qur'an on one side and the Gnostic view of intellect on the other, we would realize that they are incompatible. The Qur'an attributes a great worth to and respect for intellect, reflection and even pure intellectual reasoning as compared to Gnosticism.

Imam Ali (as) is considered as the pivot of Gnosticism by all groups and sects of *Shi'a* and *Sunni* (about seventy sects in number), and only one group follows Abu-Bakr. In *Nahjul Balagha*" Ali (as) has, according to Ibn-Abil-Hadid, expressed the nucleus of Gnosticism in just four lines whereas all Gnostics have discussed this in so many books. But, the same Ali elsewhere becomes a philosopher whose reasoning no philosopher can rival. Thus, the perfect man of Islam differs from the perfect man of Gnosticism in its growth of intellect. Another view of Gnosticism is that what one wishes to offer others should be from within the self. For them to become perfect, one should purify oneself, pay attention to God only and to nothing else, retire within oneself, and sever one's relations with external things. Thus, they attribute no worth to discussion and reasoning, and as Rumi, the poet, says.

"The leg of a reasoner is wooden, and a wooden leg is very unruly."

Elsewhere he says:

"If an intellectual discussion is pearl and coral

Something else the essence of life;

Talk of life is in a different rank

And the wine of life is of a different order"

What was the end of the road for the philosopher? It was to be a world of thought and reflection, a mirror in which to see the world.

What is the end of the road for the mystic? To reach God by self-purification and love and cover the road under the care of a more perfect being. The Qur¹an says in Chapter "Bursting Asunder" (Inshiqaq), Verse 6:

"O man! Surely you must strive (to attain) to your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him."

It means that after attaining Him, you will have everything, What is puzzling is that after attaining that rank, one desires nothing but God¹s grace. Abu-Sa'id says in a quatrain:

"What can one do with life after knowing you? What can he do with a wife, children and household? You turn him crazy and then grant him both worlds. What does he need for both worlds who is mad for you?"

The above points show what a perfect man is from the viewpoint of Gnostics: that when he attains God, he becomes His perfect manifestation and a mirror of His essence. What does Islam think of self-purification? The Qur'an says in Chapter "The Sun" (Shams), Verse 9:

"He will indeed be successful who purifies it, and he will indeed fail who corrupts it "

Is self-purification in Islam the way of knowing God, or is the recognition of God possible through reflection and reasoning? Concerning self-purification, a sentence of the Prophet is quoted by both *Shi 'as* and *Sunnis*, that is, if anyone can purify himself for God for forty days, i.e. if he regards God's satisfaction as the only worthy thing and abandons all desires, he will become a man like Abraham, of whom the Qur'an says in Chapter "Cattle" (Anam), Verse 162;

"Say: indeed my prayer, my devotion, my life and death are all for God."

Thus, a knowledge that springs from within is acceptable to Islam. God says to Moses in the Qur'an, Chapter "Cave" (cahf), Verse 65; [2]

"Then they found one from among our servants whom we had granted mercy from us, and

whom we had taught knowledge from ourselves."

The Prophet is also quoted as saying: "Is it not true that devils move round the hearts of Adam's sons and create dust and gloom whereas Adam's sons could see the angels with their heart's eye." And again the Prophet says: "If it had not been for your talkativeness and if it had not been for your heart which is like a pasture in which every animal grazes, you would be able to see what I see and hear what I hear." [3]

Thus, it is not necessary to be a prophet to see and hear. Many could do so; and so could Ali (as). He was ten years old when he accompanied the Prophet (saw) to the temple and the cave of Harra, and when revelation came to Muhammad (saw) for the first time which carried him into ecstasy, Ali, too, could hear the sounds from the occult. He says: "I told the Prophet that when revelation came I could hear the groans of Satan." The Prophet said: "O Ali, you can hear what I hear, and see what I see, even though you are not a prophet." [4]

In this way, the only effect of self-purification is not only to make the heart pure and sincere and remove carnal desires, but its greater result is to produce knowledge and wisdom from within. It is narrated that one day the companions of the holy Apostle said to him: "We fear to be hypocrites." They were true believers and yet they felt this anxiety. The Prophet asked the reason. They said: "When we come before you, and you preach of God, resurrection and sin, we have a deep feeling of penitence that is so pleasant. But when we leave you and go back to our family, we find ourselves as we had been before. Is this not hypocrisy?" The Prophet answered: "No, this is not hypocrisy which is the act of being double-faced. What you describe about is about two conditions of the mind, when it is downcast." Then he continued: "If you remain in the same state as when you are with me, then the angels will shake hands with you, and if it becomes a habit with you, you can walk on water without being drowned."

Our Gnostic literature which is considered to be among the masterpieces of the world, owes everything to Islam, All the delicacy that you find in the works of Rumi, Hafiz, Sa'di and Naser Khosrawi is derived from Islam. Hafiz says explicitly that he owes everything to the Qur'an. Sa'di says something similar in the story of Jacob and Joseph. When Joseph made himself known to his brothers in Egypt, he gave his shirt to his brothers to carry to his father who had gone blind with the sorrow of separation from his dearest son. According to the Qur'an, Jacob on taking the shirt said (Chapter "Yusuf", 94):

"Most surely I perceive the greatness of Yusuf, unless you pronounce me to be weak in judgment, "

Sa'di in his poem says; "Someone asked that man who had lost his son, O wise old man of sound judgment, You got the scent of his shirt from Egypt; How was it that you could not know of his fall into the well?" He answered: "Our condition is like lightning, One moment it appears and then it is gone. If the humble man stays in his own place, He would be exalted in

both worlds."

To confirm the above points. The following passage is quoted from Ali's utterance from Nahjul-Balagha;[\[5\]](#). Speaking of a mystic wayfarer: "He has revived his intellect and killed his passion, so that divine asceticism has made him delicate and the coarseness of the spirit is changed into tenderness. In this condition, a spark strikes out of his interior and illuminates his way, and he follows it until he reaches his destination which is his safe and permanent dwelling and his ultimate goal." Thus, a perfect man should have purified his self first.

Islam says that a wayfarer of humanity holds an exalted position in having covered various stages of travel and reaching a place where there no longer stands a veil between him and God. He sees Him with the heart's eye, and he no longer requires any outward manifestations such as the sky, the earth, nature, leaves of trees etc, in order to discover God. Someone asked Imam Ali (as) if he had seen God. He answered; "I never worship a God that I have not seen. But this act of seeing is not with the eye or in a certain direction, but with the heart and in all directions."

There are, however, some matters in the school of Gnosticism, which are scorned, contrary to Islam's views, and for this reason the perfect man of Gnosticism is half-perfect. The views of the Gnostics in this connection are more important for us than those of philosophers, such as Aristotle and Avicenna, since the views of the latter are mostly confined to their books and have not become prevalent among people. Whereas those of mystics, both in prose and poetry and in the form of parables, have influenced public thought greatly.

This school offers a number of ideas acceptable to Islam, while in other respects it is open to criticism, and its perfect man of Islam. The Gnostics, unlike philosophers, do not consider intellect as a criterion of man, but only as a means, and the real ego is, for them, related to the heart, not the physical one, but the center of sentiments and to what is desired by intellect, A mystic attributes much importance to love and emotion which are the strongest in man, His love is not a sexual one, but a love that rises high until it attains God who is his beloved. He also believes that this love is not confined to man, but exists in all creatures and in all particles of creation, Rumi compares this love to an ocean over which all nature and all skies and heavens are like foam. Hafiz says in a poem:

"We have not come to this door for rank and glory, We have taken refuge here from misfortune. We are wayfarers of love from non-existence, and we have come so far to the realm of existence,"

The last two lines are almost a translation of a sentence uttered by Imam Sajjad, the fourth Imam, in praise of God who created the world and roused it to love Him. Thus, for a Gnostic the ego is what shows love, not what shows thought,

For a philosopher, man can reach perfection by means of logic, deduction, reasoning and reflection, whereas for the Gnostic, talk and knowledge are of no avail, but a pure heart is required, a heart which is purified from all vices, to turn to God, and drive out the devil from the heart to make room for the angel which is the light of God. Hafiz says in this connection:

"I intend if it is at all possible, to do something to end my sorrow.

The privacy of the heart is not for strangers; once the devil goes out the angel comes in. Talk of precepts is for the darkness of the longest night,

Seek the light from the sun and beg it to come out Why sit at the door of the ungenerous masters of the world? How long do you wait for the master to come out? Do not abandon mendicancy if you wish to find treasure, By following the wayfarer who comes forth."

Gnosticism is a school of introversion in which the heart is greater than the world, even if on one side you place the whole universe, on the other the heart which is, according to the Qur'an, the divine spirit breathed into man, Chapter "The Rock" (*Hajar*), Verse 29. They call the world the 'small man', and the heart the 'great man' or the small and big world, Rumi says;

"If you are Adam's offspring, stay like him, and see all particles within yourself,

What is in the vat that is not in the stream? What is in the house that is not in the town? This world is the vat and the heart is the stream' This world is a room and the heart a wonderful city."

Gnosticism negates extroversion and believes that the attainment of God must be from within. Hafiz says in another poem:

"For long the heart desired *Jamshid's Cup*,

And begged from strangers what it had itself,

It sought from the lost ones at the seashore,

A pearl which was out of the shell of existence.

A lovesick man had God with him at all times.

Yet he saw Him not and cried out: 'O, God,

Last night I took my problem to the Magi priest,

Who could solve it by his confirmation?

I asked: "When was this Cosmorama Cup given
you?"

He said: "That day when He built the azure dome,
And that follow who has risen up the gallows
was guilty of revealing secrets."

Rumi describes in a parable a man who kept on begging God for some of the treasure which was hidden by so many people under the earth, One night he dreamt that someone came to him as God's messenger to show him the place of treasure. He pointed out a certain hill from the top of which the man should shoot an arrow, and the treasure would be where the arrow fell. Next day, he found the hill, but he did not know what direction he should shoot at. He decided to shoot at some direction, but failed to find the treasure. Every day he tried a different direction, but his labor of digging the earth with a pickaxe and spade produced nothing.

Another night the same fellow appeared in his dream and the man complained to him for having given him wrong indications. The man was asked if he had found the hill, and he answered that he had and spoke of having pulled the bowstring hard to let the arrow fly, The fellow said; "I never told you to draw the bowstring; I only said; "Let the arrow drop by itself."

Next day, the man went there and put the arrow on the bow and let it drop, and it fell at his feet. He dug the earth at once and found the treasure.

Rumi concludes the story by saying:

"God is nearer to you than the jugular vein, and yet you shot your arrow afar.

You got your bow and arrow and made yourself ready. Your shot went afar, whereas the treasure was near."

One of the recent learned priests said that he had heard the above story from a preacher who had mastered the "Mathnavi", but the priest did not know what it signified and asked the priest its meaning. He answered it in one sentence and said: "It is within your self." Thus, the

outside world as compared to the heart is scorned in Gnosticism, whereas the words attributed to Imam Ali show that the world is the major thing and man is a minor one.

If we compare the Gnostic view with the viewpoint of the Qur'an, we find some positive aspects in it as well as deficiencies. The Qur'an does not ignore nature and says in Chapter "Ha Mim", Verse 53:

"We will soon show them our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth."

Of course, we agree that the highest and noblest enlightenment for man is within himself, but we cannot disregard the outside nature as a manifestation of God.

Here is a very fine point that the Gnostic view has had a deeper influence on the public than philosophical ideas on account of their poetic delicacy, and warmth and beauty. The influence of Rumi, Hafiz and Sa'di is found in every home. That is the reason why we have devoted more space to this discussion than to the school of philosophy.

Notes:

[1]. Sa'di's "Golestan", Chapter 3, Story I.

[2]. This is said to be Khaja Khidhr who by a miracle Is still alive.

[3]. Me'raj-Sa'ada p.11

[4]. Nahjul-Balagha. Semon 190

[5]. Utterance 220. p.337

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Relation of Man with Nature

This is a problem in *itself*, Is this a relationship of two strangers with one another or even the relation of a prisoner with jail, a bird with its cage, and Joseph with the well?

Someone may say that being born is being put in a prison, a cage or a well. If so, then this relationship is one of two opposites, and man's endeavor must be only to set himself free from this prison and cage.

But in Islam, the relation of man with nature resembles that of a farmer with the farm, of a merchant with the market, and of a devotee with the temple. For a farmer, land is not the goal but the means. His home is elsewhere but he uses the land to secure livelihood and the means of comfort and happiness, He ploughs it, scatters seeds, weeds it, harvests it, etc. The world is the farm of the hereafter, and this land should not be taken by a farmer for his permanent home. For a merchant, a market is a place of work in which he uses his capital and efforts to gain profit. This is how man should view the world.

Someone came to Imam Ali and began blaming the world since he had heard that the Imam did the same. He did not know that Ali (as) reproached the worship of the world, which is contrary to the worship of God and truth, and negation of all human values. Ali was angry at this and said: "O the reproaching man, O you who are deceived, the world has not deceived you, but you have deceived yourself." [1]

As an example, I may say that an old woman deceives a young man with her make-up, and her false teeth and hair. The youth realizes suddenly that he has been deceived. Or maybe the old woman comes forward and, admitting her deficiencies makes an offer for marriage. In that case, the woman has not deceived him; rather the young man has deceived himself,

Imam Ali (as) says: "The world has not hidden anything from you to deceive you. Did the world deceive you on the day you buried your father? The world says:

"I am what you see, and I have no stability, discern me the way as I am. Why do you suppose me to be what you wish, not what I really am?" So, the world deceives no one. Let us see whether the world has betrayed you or vice versa. It is you who follow your carnal desires." Then, Ali added: "The world is the trade market of saints, and the mosque of God's friends."

The idea that the world is a prison or a cage is based on a psychological view that had been prevalent in India and in pre-Islamic Greece but is unacceptable to Islam. It says that human spirit has been created in a perfect form in another world and introduced, in a cage, to this world, in which case he has no alternative but to break the cage.

But the Qur'an says in Chapter "Believers" (Mominun), Verses 12 to 14;

"And certainly We created man of an extract of clay; then We made him a small life-germ in a firm resting place; then We made the life-germ a clot, then We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made (in) the lump of flesh bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation"

The last sentence shows that man was made into something else, which is the spirit, and this spirit is produced from matter. Therefore, it has not been perfected elsewhere in order to be put in a cage here. Man lives in nature, which is like a mother's lap for him, and it is here that he undergoes evolution and perfection. Islam says; if you do not rise higher from this natural position, you will remain here in the lowest of the low, and in hell hereafter. The Qur'an says in Chapter "Terrible Calamity" (Qariah), Verses 1 to 11:

"What is the terrible calamity! And what will make you comprehend what the terrible calamity is? The day on which men shall be as scattered moths, and the mountains shall be as loosened wool, then as for him whose measure of good deeds is heavy, he shall live a pleasant life. And as for him whose measure of good deeds is light, his abode shall be the abyss. And what will make you know what it is? A burning fire!"

Therefore, in anthropology of Islam and in the knowledge of the world, man has not been a ready-made bird which has flown in a holy space and then put in a cage, to make it necessary for him to break the cage. If you admit that the world of spirit has priority over the world of matter, and it is a beam illuminating this world from another world, then you cannot believe that spirit has been elsewhere in a perfect form and then brought here to be imprisoned. Such an idea is Indian and Platonic.

Plato of Greece believed that the spirit was created in another world and was then brought here for some reason and put into confinement, to be released later and return. But Islam does not have such a belief.

We do not mean that all the Gnostics have erred so much in this connection. They have not ignored the significance of society or nature, and as the Qur'an has placed nature and men side by side, they, too, believe that nature is a mirror of God and His beauty.

Shabestari, in his poetic masterpiece, speaks thus of humanity:

"In the name of Him who taught life the skill of thought, and illuminated it with the light of the heart, By His grace both worlds were brightened, and by His favor Adam's earth was a garden"

And he goes on to say:

"For him whose life appears with glory, The whole world is the book of God almighty."

If we place the Qur'an on one side and Gnosticism on the other, and pay attention to the Qur'an's regard for nature, we realize that it pays more attention to nature without denying its attention to the self and mind in any form.

Thus, the perfect man of the Qur'an, besides his inclination to intellect and heart, has also an inclination to nature. Another question is that of self-renunciation. Gnosticism respects the heart but scorns the self and believes in its abandonment. This, in itself, is right and Islam accepts it. But there are two types of self in Islam, one of which is negated and the other is revived by Islam, This is like a friend and an enemy placed side by side while our target of shooting is the enemy in which case we must aim very carefully not to mistakenly hit the friend. That self which is to be crushed is meanness and vileness, and the other self, which must be preserved, is the source of all human values.

The miracle of Islam lies in the fact that these two selves are so exactly distinguished that there is no room for error. In gnosticism there is sometimes a distinction between the two, but more often the friend is shot instead of the enemy, that is, instead of killing that self, the man and his heart are killed, Such an attitude, on account of the sweetness of the language of literature and its wider influence among people, has had a deep effect on the destiny of our society, and a perfect man, for most people, is the figure introduced by Gnostics. Therefore, a further explanation is necessary to illustrate this subject.

An important issue in the Gnostic school, in connection with a perfect man, is the relation of man with his self, a problem that is also Islamic in nature, Both Gnostics and Sufis as well as Islamic teachings are in favor of combating selfishness and carnal desires, But the fact is that this jihad against the self is an Islamic view which they adopted. Sa'di says

"You are a fellow-lodger of your own enemy, Why do you bother about fighting strangers"

This idea is also found in the utterance of the holy prophet, saying: "Your most dangerous enemy is your own self, which is between your two side's. In his "Golestan", Sa'di speaks of a mystic who was asked the meaning of the above utterance of the Prophet and he answered: "If you treat an enemy kindly and offer him what he desires, he will become a friend but the more kindly you treat the self, the greater will be its enmity towards you." And this self is selfishness.

One kind and degree of selfishness is to make oneself the axis of everything, and perform all acts for oneself, for one's livelihood, one's clothing and dwelling. To this extent, this selfishness is not vice or sickness, nor is it a value.

The Qur'an believes in man's position to be higher than that of an animal, and in a way of the same level and still in another below that of an animal. Thus, there are three types of human acts:

- 1) Moral, which is above animal level,
- 2) Immoral, which is at the level of animals.
- 3) Anti-moral, which is below animal level.

If someone thinks only of himself, like an animal or a bird, this is neither moral nor immoral. But sometimes in thinking of oneself only, one catches a mental disease, and his humanity is placed at the service of his animal nature, leading to suicide. Greed is such a disease which knows no limit, and when there is the possibility of benevolence and generosity, one is inclined to meanness and miserliness which is another disease in itself. The Qur'an says in Chapter "*Hashr*" (banishment), verse 9:

"Whoever is preserved from the niggardliness of his soul, these it is that are the successful ones."

In such a case only his mental sickness rules over him, not his intellect, thought and resolution. For, if his intellect ruled him, he would know how to spend according to where his true interest, pleasure and happiness lie. But his niggardliness hinders him and lowers him below the animal level to make his conduct anti-moral,

And these are not the only diseases that afflict a human being. There are many more complicated ones which are called complexes, such as envy, where one forgets to seek one's own happiness, and only longs for the misery and misfortune of others. His own joy and happiness are for him trifling as compared with his desire for the unhappiness of others. Such a state does not exist in any other animal except man. Pride is another disease which develops in a person in such a way that he himself is not aware of it. Sometimes the self deceives someone in a very strange way. As the Qur'an says in Chapter "*Yusuf*", Verse 83:

"He said: Nay, your souls have made a matter light for you, so patience is good; may be Allah will bring them all together to me; surely He is the Knowing, the wise!"

Delusion is a very subtle psychological point which is mentioned in the Qur'an, showing that

one may be deceived by one's own self, by adorning that false desire in such a way that one believes it to be the genuine thing.

Today, psychology has derived very delicate and minute conclusions in this respect to show that man sometimes goes mad without any bodily or nervous defect but only by some internal upheaval of the mind caused in turn by some great suffering, In such a case, one says farewell to one's intellect in order to relieve one's great sorrow, So, a poet says:

"Every sober one in the world has a sorrow. Then, go mad, O heart, for, it is a wonderful state.' This self-deception is an important psychological problem, And it is surprising that a thousand years ago such problems were minutely analyzed, the problems which are, in this century, subjects of careful study, even though the Qur'an is the source of all this knowledge. Sometimes, certain vices so penetrate the human mind that the person himself is unaware of them, and only under certain conditions these vices rise from the depth to reveal themselves to their owner, who is greatly amazed at having possessed them at all. Sometimes a person is sure of having a clear heart without envy and rancor towards anyone, and then suddenly he finds himself in the clutches of these vices.

Rumi, compares this to a snake frozen in the winter, with no movement and no apparent sign of being dangerous, so that a child may play with it, and when it gets warmed up by the sun, its true nature suddenly reveals itself. He gives another example of these hidden and dormant inclinations in the following poem:

"Desires are like sleeping dogs, possessing both inherent good and evil. When there is no power they are dormant, looking like pieces of lifeless wood. But the moment a carrion is seen there, The call of greed awakens and when an ass is found dead in that street, hundreds of sleeping dogs will become awaken. The greed which had so far hidden itself, rushes out galloping at full speed, As if every hair of the dog turns into a tooth, And the tail wagging in cunning and craft. In this body of ours are sleeping a hundred such dogs, and they are dormant for lack of prey."

So far, these matters are true and are supported by the Qur'an saying that they must be fought against. The following verses refer to these points:

"Then as for him who is inordinate, and prefers the life of this world, then surely the hell, that is the abode. And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord and forbids the soul from low desires, then surely the garden - that is the abode. Chapter "*Naziat*", Verses 37 to 41

"Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his God" Chapter "*Jasiyah*", Verse 23:

"And I do not declare myself free, most surely (man's) self is wont to command (him to do) evil." Chapter "*Yusuf*", Verse 53;

This is what Yusuf says meaning that he cannot trust the self and its desires. It is the quality of a believer not to rely on his self lest it would be inclined to evil and wickedness.

Islam emphasizes combat (jihad) against self. A number of the Prophet's companions, upon returning from battle, went in a group to him, and he said to them: "Praised be those who have returned from the lesser Jihad, but their greater Jihad is still to come," They asked what the greater jihad was, and he answered: "Jihad against the self." [2]

In the Gnostic school, however, this greater jihad with the self reaches a point which is not acceptable to Islam, one of whose stages is rigorous self-mortification. Islam attributes a right to one's body, and the Prophet strongly opposes those who give themselves such severe physical discipline.

The combat with the self (Jihad al-nafs) is of two kinds:

1) Mortifying the body rigorously by giving it little food and sleep.

2) Combating the mind and spirit by acting contrary to its wishes. This may be right to some extent, but there are matters which do not correspond with Islam and with the idea of a perfect man. One example of this is the way adopted by some Sufis, called "the reproaching way", which is the opposite of the hypocritical way, A hypocrite has an evil mind but pretends to be good, whereas a reproachful one is a good person, but pretends to be wicked so that the people would not consider him good.

He says: "I act thus to kill the self which desires to win honor and popularity", Islam rejects this view and action, and says: "A believer has no right to dishonor and disgrace himself". It says:

"If you are not good, do not pretend to be good, nor resort to a false pretence of wickedness, for, both conducts are false". The reason for employing the language of debauchery and dissoluteness in Gnostic literature is this same pretence to wickedness. We see many examples of this in the poems of Hafiz, the poet, even though he says:

"O heart, let me guide you towards salvation, Show no pride in debauchery, nor pretend to be devout."

Anyhow, the way of reproaching oneself is a type of *Sufi* combat with the self, which is unacceptable in Islam. There are, of course, other *Sufis*, like Khaja Abdollah Ansari, who are

not followers of this way.

Sometimes in the Sufi school, this self-jihad leads to meanness, in order to tame and to make abject that self, which is left undefended where its honor should be protected. Sometimes, the follower, in serving the leader, is forced to perform very humble tasks, which are below human dignity, such as gathering animal residue etc.

Ibn-Abel-Hadid quotes Ibrahim Adham, who was one of the Gnostic elders, as saying that he had never felt such joy as on the following three occasions:

1) I was ill in a mosque and I could not rise. The sexton came and forced everyone to get up, but as I was unable to do so, he got hold of my leg and dragged me like a corpse and threw me out. I felt very happy on seeing the self so miserably humbled.

2) We were on a ship where a clown was amusing people with his tricks and making them laugh. He began telling a story about pulling the beard of a pagan, and looking around him he noticed me. He came forward and while pulling my beard said: "Like this!" Everyone laughed and I felt joyful that he had humbled this self of mine.

3) It was winter and I came out of a lodge and looking at my pelisse I found it so full of lice that I could hardly see the fur in it, I felt happy to be able to bear this and humiliate the self.

Another *Sufi* says: "I was invited to a house one evening to break my fast in the month of *Ramadhan*, When I knocked, he did not let me in. I was invited once more and again the host refused me admission. This was repeated and at last the would-be host said:

"What an amazing fellow you are. I have refused you admission so many times and yet you keep on coming" The *Sufi* said: "Yes, a dog behaves in the same way!"

Islam does not permit such insults to one's personality. Thus, there are two things to be considered in self-discipline according to Islam: self-mortification to a degree, and self-respect to another degree. The self may thus have a sublime side and a low side, and the latter must be checked when it goes to excess.

Philosophers think that the ego of a person is his spirit, and psychoanalysts believe that the ego has a conscious side and an unconscious side, which form the main part of the ego. Psychoanalysts have explicitly contradicted the philosophers' idea that the ego is the spirit. They say that the real ego is much deeper than that, and the real ego discovers itself only when it discovers God. The Qur'an says in Chapter '*Hashr*' (Banishment), Verse 19:

"And be not like those who forsook Allah, So the lie made them forsake their own souls these it is that are the transgressors."

Mohyedin Arabi, who is the father of Islamic Gnosticism and many Gnostics, both Iranians and Arabs, are his pupils, severely scorns philosophers like Avicenna. The Qur'an says in Chapter "Zomar (Companie), Verse 15:

"Say: The losers surely are those who shall have lost themselves"

The spirit of devotion and the reality of devotion, which is to pay attention to God, is to discover one's true self. At the same time, we find little of this belief in Gnosticism that it is through self-respect and on its basis that a man attains high ranks. In this way they have received little inspiration from Islamic teachings.

The Qur'an says in Chapter "*Munafiqun*" (the Hypocrites) Verse 8;

"And to Allah belongs the might and to His Apostle and to the believers."

The Prophet has said: "If you are in need, do not beg for it in abjectness to anyone, ask for it in self-respect:" (Nahjul-Balagha)

Imam Ali says in "Nahjul-Balagha" Sermon 51:

"It is death to be vanquished in life, and it is life to die victoriously."

Imam Hussein says: [3] "It is better to die in honor than to live in abjection." He said: "Ibn-Ziad, this ignoble son of an ignoble man has asked me to choose between abjectness and the sword. How can we submit to abjectness? Neither God nor the Prophet, nor believers permit us to do so. Virtuous parents have brought us up. I shall never offer my hand of abjectness to you and not act like slaves or submit."

Another school of thought is the school of power in which perfection is the equivalent of ability, and defect is equal to weakness. Even good and bad are measured by the same criterion, namely power meaning good, and inability meaning bad.

The German philosopher, Nietzsche, went mad at the end of his life, but in my opinion he showed signs of madness even from the beginning. He introduced the principle of power in ethics. There were two philosophers before him, namely the Frenchman Descartes and the Englishman Bacon, both of whom offered views about science which overhauled previous theories and led to great progress in science and to the theory on human domination over nature and, at the same time, caused human corruption.

Before these two philosophers, religion and philosophy used science in the service of truth, not in the service of power, and for this reason, science possessed some sanctity above human

interests and material things. Knowledge was generally compared with wealth, and given superiority over wealth. This is what Imam Ali says in *NahiulBalagha*. A teacher had a sacred rank, and Imam Ali said: "He who teaches me a word makes me his servant." [4] The Qur'an says in Chapter "*Baghara*" (the Cow), Verse 34:

"We said to the angels: Make obeisance to Adam."

And the reason given was that Adam knew what the angels did not, thus showing the sanctity of knowledge. Bacon¹'s view was that knowledge is not an amusement, but should serve mankind and enable him to dominate nature. Thus, the heavenly nature of knowledge was turned into an earthly one, and the course of research was changed into that of discovery of the secrets of nature, in order to provide man with facilities.

In one respect this attitude rendered a great service to mankind, but at the same time knowledge lost its sanctity. The students of theological colleges, who pursue their studies on the old system of education, observe certain rites in connection with attending religious classes which show that the sanctity and exalted position of knowledge is still important, and a pupil feels deep respect for his teacher.

For them, studying is not for securing wealth, and a teacher considers it below his dignity to turn himself into a wage earner.

But in modern education which is the continuation of Bacon's views and those who preach the same ideas, studying is a preliminary step for living under its specific system, that is, to equip oneself as an engineer or merchant or even a teacher etc. to gain as much money as possible for a comfortable life. Such students are even inclined to abuse their professors behind their backs.

Following Bacon's idea that knowledge means power, everything became dependent on power and in the service of the powerful. Learned men and scientists are the slaves of others, whether it is in the imperialist or socialist camp, it makes no difference. The world is managed by power, not by science and scientists. Every invention and discovery is placed at the service of force, first for wicked purposes, and if there are of no use militarily, then such types of knowledge are employed for other services.

The way followed by Bacon was bound to end into what Nietzsche declared and what Machiavelli believed, to which was added Darwin's theory. Darwin himself was said to be a devout Christian, and it is alleged that on his deathbed he held the Bible tightly to his chest, and his confessions show his faith in God and Jesus. But others misused his views in a way contrary to his own wishes.

Materialists used the evolutionary theory of Darwin to deny the existence of God. Darwin's

philosophy was also misused in ethics. He had offered four principles, firstly love of self which prompted every living being to make an effort for preserving itself. Secondly, survival which made every being combat with others as a result of which the strongest alone survived. This principle has been refuted for several reasons, one of which is that many of the living creatures, which have survived, do not possess the strength and competence for survival. Nietzsche did not only follow this theory of the survival of the fittest, but he also added that it is right that they should survive and said that nature's course is directed towards producing superman, and for him this is the perfect man, meaning a being without any weakness.

For him, affection, benevolence and service are not morality, and it is these that have caused disasters and hindered man's evolution towards becoming superman. He is wholly opposed to Socrates and Christ, for, Socrates has supported virtue, kindness and justice, and Christ has gone even further and preached love and charity. These are, according to him, weaknesses, which hinder man's perfection.

Furuqi in his book "The Course of Philosophy in Europe" says: "All learned men in the world have considered selfishness blameworthy and compassion laudable, whereas Nietzsche thinks selfishness right and compassion a weakness and defect. He has agreed with Schopenhauer that the universal principle is the desire for existence, but he has opposed the view that this is wrong. He says this desire for existence is good and right and this desire means desire for power, Nietzsche has purported Darwin's theory of survival as a struggle, and what has been refuted in Darwin's theory by others, he has approved and said this struggle is necessary for gaining power. All the philanthropists in the world have considered as an obligation the regard for the state of affairs of the majority, and have based world's affairs on public well being. Nietzsche, on the other hand, scorns the majority, and gives priority to a selected few, or minority. The more power a person has, the happier he will be, and the greater his benefits to his desires.

Some say it would have been better not to have been born at all, but man thinks: Now that he is born, he must get as much out of the world as he can, even if it is by means of cruelty, deceit and conflict. Everything which opposes this goal such as truth, kindness and virtue, is bad. Nietzsche's writings are intended partly to destroy the moral principles of the past, and partly to substitute what he considers as desirable and laudable for them.

He thinks it wrong to suppose all people and nations to be equal in their rights, and that such a view is contrary to human progress. There should always exist two groups of superiors and inferiors, and honor and privilege belong to superiors who are the ultimate goal of existence, while inferiors are used as tools and means by the superiors for attaining their aims. Human progress depends on superiors who are few in number, and the majority is at their service. Society and civilization are formed for that noble group, contrary to what is supposed that the superiors are at the service of inferiors. Superiors must be nourished in order to become supermen and rise to the height of progress. Inferiors are like quadrupeds that must carry load for the superiors. [5]

This attitude is quite the reverse of what Sa'di, the poet, says:

"The sheep are not for the shepherd, rather, the shepherd is meant to serve them,"

Western men of learning have a theory of racial improvement which is developed by Alexis Karl in his book "Man, an Unknown Creature" where he says that the weak should not be given the right of reproduction.

According to Nietzsche, the moral principles observed hitherto have been framed in the interests of the majority, namely inferiors, and these principles must give way to those which favor the superiors. Goodness, honesty and beauty are not genuine and real matters. What is real is that everyone desires power. He believes that religions have betrayed humanity since they have preached justice and protection of the weak. When there was no religion and the law of the jungle reigned supreme, it was much better, since the strong destroyed the weak.

The world was, at first, in favor of the strong, and the weak were their slaves. But as the former were in the minority, the latter resorted to the trick of propagating the idea of benevolence, kindness, modesty, justice etc. as something good and beautiful in order to make the weak appreciate the power of the strong, and be liberated from them and thus religion was used as a means of attaining their goal,

But this is quite opposed to what Karl Marx believes. He says religion was invented by the strong against the weak, whereas Nietzsche says that it was invented by the weak.

According to the former, Christian ethics are the morals of servitude, which has ruined the ethics of lordship. The talk of brotherhood and equality, love of peace, and observance of the rights of women and workers which have become prevalent today, originated from that source and are all deceit and trickery, and the cause of poverty, weakness and decadence. These must be replaced by the principles of lordly life. The thought of God and the hereafter must be abandoned, and kindness and sympathy must be put aside.

Kindness means weakness, and humility and obedience mean baseness, and patience and forgiveness show lack of resolution. Manliness is the thing to adopt, since the goal is to become a superman, who is above good and bad and is a man of willpower.

In Europe, there have appeared many such schools, but fortunately we have been free from them. The Charter of Human Rights, which is issued by them, is meant only to deceive others. The true European ethics are the Machiavellian and Nietzschean ones. The act of colonization in the world is based on the same idea.

When we are influenced by such thoughts, we are really led astray, Are the misdeeds of

America in Vietnam anything but the practice of Nietzsche's philosophy? Almost all of their writers follow the same theory, and only very exceptional ones think otherwise.

Nietzsche says: Why should one kill the self? The self should be nourished. Why should one love others? One should love oneself. Let the weak alone be destroyed and thus diminish the pains of this world. A superman is strong and lives strongly, to fulfil his desires, similar to a lord and master who removes every obstacle in his way and fears no danger and war. He then turns to women and says: It is futile to talk of the equality of man and woman or the observance of women's rights. The main thing is a man, who is a fighter and a woman is for his amusement, and for bearing children. This, then, is for them the criterion of a perfect man,

At the opposite pole is a school which favors weakness, and considers goodness in being weak. Christianity belongs to such a school which preaches about turning the other cheek after one side of it is slapped.

What does Islam preach, power or weakness or neither? In one sense it favors power, not of the type of Nietzsche, but a power that is the source of exalted human qualities, from which comes kindness, pity, compassion and charity. In this sense, the Qur'an speaks so much of power that no other religion emphasizes it to its adherents.

Will Dormant, in his History of Civilization, speaking of Islamic civilization, says: "No religion has invited people to strength and power as Islam has ". [6]. The Qur'an says in Chapter "Maryam" Verse 12:

"O Yahya! Take hold of the Book with strength:'

Elsewhere, the Qur'an, speaking of the strength of believers in Chapter "Ale-Imran", Verse 146 says;

"And how many a prophet has fought with Whom were many worshippers of the Lord; so they did not become weak-hearted."

In another place, the Qur'an says in Chapter "Saff" (the Ranks), Verse 4:

"Surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall,"

And in Chapter "Fat'h" (victory), Verse 29, it says:

"And those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves."

Islam approves of having power to the extent of allowing no one to oppress us. The Qur'an says in Chapter "*Anfal*", Verse 60 in connection with fighting an enemy:

"And prepare against them what force you can and horses tied at the frontier, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allah and your enemy."

And again in Chapter "*Baghara*", Verse 190:

"And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits. Surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits"

It is thus recommended that if the enemy puts down his weapon and surrenders, fighting should cease against him. There should be no aggression against women and old men and children, or those who have left the battlefield. There are also traditions beside the Verses of the Qur'an. For example, the Prophet says: "Two things are unworthy in a believer: to be avaricious and to be cowardly." In his prayer, the Prophet said: "O God, I take refuge unto you against two things: avarice and cowardice," Imam Ali says in '*Nahjul Balagha*' (wisdom 333): "A believer's spirit is firmer and stronger than grind-stone."

Imam Sadiq says in '*Safinat-ul-Bohar*': "God has given a believer the choice in everything except one thing, and that is, to make himself abject. A believer is always dear, and higher than a mountain, for, a mountain can be hewed with a pickaxe, but a believer's spirit cannot in any way be cut into pieces," Imam Bagher says: [7] "God has given a believer three gifts:

1) Respect in this world and the hereafter.

2) Salvation in both worlds:

3) Fear in the heart of oppressors.

There are also traditions about sense of honor, The Prophet has said: 'Abraham had a sense of honor, but God's is the greatest.'

Mussolini, the Italian dictator once said; "He who has iron, has bread." (By iron meaning weapon and strength.) Iqbal Lahori changed the above remark into the following: "He who is iron₁ has bread," Imam Ali says in '*Nahjul-Balagha*', Sermons 27 and 29;

"One can never win his right except by endeavor, and an abject person can never check oppression except by effort."

Westerners say: "A right must be secured", But the question is whether it must be secured or

must be granted." Christianity is based on giving a right, and there is no need to rise in order to secure it, Islam says that it is both securable and grantable. He who has usurped a right must prepare to give it back, and he whose right has been usurped, too, must rise to recover it.

Imam Ali (as) in "*Nahjul-Balagha*" in his letter to Malik Al-Ashtar quotes the Prophet as saying: "No people rise to the level of sanctity unless the weak stand up against the strong without a stammer" [8]. No society is Islamic unless it rises to secure its right.

The Prophet possessed both physical and spiritual strength. In the book "*Muhammad, a Prophet to know Afresh*", two points are clearly explained:

1) The prophet was politically and socially placed in a situation in which he had no hope from any quarter, but he never despaired and always stood steadfast. His spiritual strength during those twenty-three years was astounding. Hassan ibn Sabet, an Arab poet, says of him in a poem: "He has many aspirations the greatest of which has no limit, and the smallest is greater than the world."

2) Physically, the Prophet was strong and very brave, so much so that Imam Ali says: "In difficult conditions, we all sought his protection". He always lauded strength and courage, and thus these qualities stand side by side with other human values in Islam, Nietzsche has taken only one value, namely power and strength, as the criterion of perfection, and other values are disregarded, while in Islam many values are collectively the sign of human perfection. In the former school, power is the equivalent of right and justice, and weakness is wrong and means defeat,

There are two errors in the philosophy of that school; firstly, it ignores all human values but one. In the case of God, too, might and strength are not His only attributes; there are also many others to show His perfection. The second error is in the definition of power itself, and that is, only one type of power which is animal strength, either a physical one or his carnal desires, to satisfy which one should suppose that one can oppress others by making use of his strength.

There is a story narrated about the Prophet in this connection. He was passing through a street in Medina where a number of youths were competing in lifting a heavy stone. The Prophet offered to act as referee, and they agreed. Then, the Prophet said there is no need to lift the stone to see who is stronger; he who is attracted by a desire to commit a sin, but resists it, is the strongest.

Here, the Prophet is speaking about the power of resolution, and that is different from physical power, which is common between man and animals. In Islamic ethics and Gnostic literature, this resolution is considered as a power above physical strength, which conquers carnal desires. Sadi says in a poem:

"Bring sweetness to another mouth when you can, It is not manliness to deal a blow on another's mouth." Rumi says:

"Who is a man at the time of wrath and passion? I am looking for such a man in every street"

To be able to control oneself in anger and lust is a power. Of course, sometimes what is really weakness is mistaken for power, and that is why moralists say that sentiments must be combined with wisdom and faith, in order to possess value. Sa'di, speaking about this, says in a poem:

"To show pity to a sharp-toothed tiger, is to show cruelty to the sheep."

Such pity is really doing an injustice to the weak and the oppressed.

There is a verse in the Qur'an saying that if a married man commits adultery, his punishment is death, and a married woman committing adultery must also be put to death, in the presence of believers. If the feeling of compassion is roused in such a case among bystanders, the Qur'an says in Chapter "*Noor*" (the Light), Verse 2:

"And let not pity for them detain you in the matter of obedience to Allah"

For, in this case high divine and human interests are at stake, and compassion here means injustice to society.

Today, it is often said that execution is meaning-less and inhuman. Their argument is that a criminal should be reformed. Reform is all right, but it should come prior to crime. Many societies lack the power of education, whereas means of corruption are plentiful. If the punishment by death is abolished, the potential criminal who is not reformed, will become most active. He is encouraged to commit more crime, either to avenge his being ignored, or hoping to receive the education in prison, of which society had deprived him before.

Others are against cutting off a thief's hand. But you can see how numerous are the cases of theft even leading to crimes simply because the punishment for it is too light or even ignored.

The pilgrims, who visited Mecca fifty or sixty years ago, know how frequent theft was in Saudi Arabia. The caravans did not dare to set off with a number smaller than two thousand or without taking armed guards with them, And yet no year passed without some disaster for the pilgrims in being plundered and killed. The Saudi government took the step of cutting off a few robbers' hands and all the robbery and stealing came to an end suddenly. Now you find the belongings of pilgrims left uncared for here and there, and no one dares touch them.

So, we realize that the school of might has neither known other human values, nor recognized power or might itself, Power means assisting others, Imam Ali (as) says to his two sons, Hassan (as) and Hossain (as):

"Let your strength be used in aiding the oppressed and in fighting the oppressor." [9]. Rancor, envy, malice and all these vices have their root in weakness. He who is vengeful and suffers from sadism is not strong, but very weak. A strong person is rarely envious or vengeful.

A remark is narrated from Imam Hossain saying:

"Power removes rancor". This is opposed to the idea that weakness causes rancor. Another sentence is quoted from Imam Ali about slander, which is noteworthy. He was asked what kind of people loved slander and he answered: "The weak, it is the utmost effort of the weak." A strong person has no need of it. He also attributes adultery to weakness, for, a person, with a sense of honor, does not resort to it.

Islam does not approve of weakness, but at the same time does not consider strength as the only criterion of perfection. Moreover strength is of a greater variety and degree in Islam that is ignored in some other schools of thought. The conclusion is in favor of society. Sympathy is not weakness, but is benevolence and charity.

Another school of thought, mostly prevalent in India and, to some extent, propagated by Christianity, is the school of love. In this school, man's perfection is in serving people and loving them, This is at the opposite pole of the school of Nietzsche. Humanitarianism in the West means doing service to human beings, and the word "human", as used by our press, means being charitable. Sa'di, our poet, speaks of this in an exaggerated way by saying:

"Devotion is nothing but serving people And not by rosary, prayer carpet and cassock."

His remark is obviously leveled at the *Sufis* who know nothing of benevolence.

Others refer to the same idea by saying:

"You may drink or burn a pulpit, but abstain from hurting people."

In this school, there is only one value and that is benevolence, and only one vice and that is to hurt people. The Qur'an recommends benevolence, but does not confine perfection to it. It says in Chapter "*Nahl*" (the Bee), Verse 90:

"Surely Allah enjoins the doing of justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion; He admonishes you that you may be mindful"

Generosity is a Qur'anic principle, meaning to give priority to others to benefit from what is yours and you need it yourself. The Qur'an speaks in Chapter "*Hashr*" (the Banishment), Verse 9 about the Ansar (Prophet's helpers) who preferred the Emigrants to themselves:

"And prefer (them) before themselves, though poverty may afflict them

And in Chapter "*Insan*" (the Man) Verses 8-9:

"And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. We only feed you for Allah's sake; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks"

This Verse refers to the time when Ali's children had observed fast, and in the evening when the time came to break the fast, an orphan came to their door, and they offered him the barley bread they had baked, leaving nothing for themselves. This is an example of the self-sacrifice and generosity, which has always been emphasized in Islam.

A nobleman of the pagan tribes came to the Prophet and saw him with one of his children on his knees and kissing and caressing him. He said to the Prophet: "I have ten sons and I have never kissed any of them even once" The Prophet became uneasy and angrily said: "He who has no compassion towards others, will not receive any compassion from God. What can I do for you if God has removed kindness from your heart" Imam Ali himself is a model of kindness and commiseration.

We stated before that cruelty is in the depth of the Western spirit, This fact is admitted by the Westerners themselves, and they consider indulgence, charity and affection to be Oriental qualities, even such affections as fatherly, motherly, sisterly and brotherly ones. That is why Easterners declare the Westerner to be dry and without sentiments even though they have social justice,

A friend narrates that he was ill and had gone to Austria for treatment. After an operation he was convalescent and sitting with his son in a restaurant, while his son looked after him. A man and a woman were keeping watch on them. As his son passed by them to fetch something, they asked him some questions. When he came back to his father's table, his father asked him what those two were saying, He said: "I told them you were my father. And they asked whether it was my duty to serve you. I told them that you supported me in order to complete my studies." They came to my friend's table and talked about their son studying in another country. But my friend's son found out that they had lied and they had no son. Those two had agreed thirty years before to live together, on the condition that if they found each other compatible, they would marry. And yet they had not bothered to get legally married after all that time. This is a typical Western attitude.

The late Mohagheghi has narrated a story about his visit to Germany. A learned professor used to visit him, He had cancer and Mohagheghi and other Muslims often went to see him in the hospital. One day he began complaining of his son and wife who, after being told that he was suffering from cancer, thought he had no chance of survival and so they said good-bye to him and never returned to visit him. One day, the Muslim friends heard that he had died, and they went to attend the burial ceremony. His son was there that day, but the Muslims found out that he had sold his father's body to the hospital before his death, and now he had come to receive the money.

But it must be remembered that not all affections are true in nature; they are rather a kind of selfishness for, affection means forsaking one's own legitimate right in favor of someone else. Such a person must abstain from transgressing on the rights of others and respect those rights, and then secure his own right and use it in favor of another. Gathering wealth by illegal means and then spending some of it for someone else's sake is neither generosity, nor social benevolence. This is for the sake of winning a good reputation.

Another example is to claim hospitality and to receive people at various times and thereby force the wife to work like a slave. Imam Ali always co-operated with Fatimah in household affairs and was ever fair and helpful.

It is related of the great religious authority, Haj Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi that he never gave orders to anyone. Once he was ill, and his meal was brought and left near the door. He could not get up to carry it, and at the same time he abstained from calling someone to bring it to him. Some hours after they found the food cold and in the same place.

A story is told about some companions of the Prophet in the Battle of Multeh, which is truly amazing. A number of the wounded were lying on the ground and were groaning with thirst. A man carried a pot of water to them. When he offered it to one of them the latter pointed to another and said that he was in greater need of water, and the second man pointed to a third one for water to be taken to him, When the water-carrier approached the third man, he found him dead. So he returned to the second man, but he, too, was dead, and when he came to the first man he, too, had died. This is self-sacrifice and giving priority to others before oneself, is one of the greatest of human values.

Notes:

[1]. Nahjul balagha. 493

[2]. Wasail al-Shiah Vol.11, p. 122

[3]. Life of Imam Hussein", Vol I, p.1831.

[4]. Sobhi Saleh Version, Sermon 147, p.495

[5]. Course of Philosophy in Europe, Part 3, pg 198.

[6]. Vol. 1

[7]. Al-Mawaez. P. 103

[8]. Sermon 29 Nahjul-Balagha,

[9]. Sermon 47. Nahjul-Balagha

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