

The Goal of Creation

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?">

One of the fundamental problems to investigate is the goal of life. Man always asks questions like what he lives for and what his objective in life should be. From the viewpoint of Islam, one would as well ask: "What is the objective and purpose of prophetic missions?" The objective of the prophetic missions is not dissimilar to individual goals of men (peoples), for whom the prophets have been appointed; for, the prophets are sent to guide men towards certain goals. Going one step further, we could ask: "What is the goal of creation, of man as well as other creatures? "

This point requires an exact analysis. It may pertain to 'the goal of the Creator in Creation, the manifestation of His Will and Purpose. We cannot assume a goal for God, and believe that He wishes to attain something by His acts. Such a supposition implies a shortcoming in the doer of an action, which may be true of creatures with a potential power, but not of the Creator; since it would mean that He intends to move towards perfection and secure something which He does not have.

But sometimes by the goal of creation is meant the goal of the created action, not of the Creator. This would involve the movement of the created towards perfection, not the perfection of the Creator Himself. In this sense, if we think that the nature of creation has always been movement towards perfection, then there is a motive in creation.

This is actually the case, that is, each thing that is created has an independent stage of perfection ahead of it to be attained; and so for everything there exist stages of deficiency or perfection until the maximum limit is reached. The question of the 'motive in the creation of man' is basically one that refers to the 'nature of man'.

It pertains to whatever talents are inherent in him, and whatever individual perfections are possible for him. Once perfections are accomplished by one, we may say he was created for them, There is apparently no need to elaborate on the purpose and goal of the creation of man as a separate topic. It will be sufficient to see what kind of a creature man is, and what abilities are inherent in him. In other words as our discussion concerns the Islamic aspect of the matter, and not a philosophical one, we must see how Islam regards man and his abilities .

Naturally the mission of the prophets, too, is believed unanimously to facilitate man's perfection and to aid him to remove the deficiencies which neither he, as an individual, nor his society is able to remove. It is only with the aid of their divine revelations that he can advance

towards enhancing perfection .

Accordingly, every individual must see what he can be after identifying his potentialities, so as to bring them to fruition. That is the goal of our life.

So far, the subject is treated in general, Now we must go into detail: Whether the Qur'an has discussed the goal of man, and whether it gives the reason for his creations as well as the mission of Prophets .

Very often we say that man is created for seeking happiness and God neither wants nor gets any benefit from man's Creation. Actually man is destined to choose his way freely, His guidance is a matter of duty and belief, not instinctive and compulsory. So, as he is free, he might as well choose the right way. [The Qur'an, Sura Al-Insan, Verse 3: "We have shown man the way to be grateful or ungrateful." (76: 3)] But what is happiness according to the Qur'an? It is often said that the purpose of man's creation and prophetic missions is to make man strong in knowledge and resolution, so that he may learn more and more, and secure the power to do what he desires .

Thus the purpose of creating a seed is to realize its potential to become a mature plant. Likewise, a lamb ' s herbivorous development into sheep manifests a purpose of creation (useful to man. Ed.). Man's potentiality is much superior, he is meant to be knowledgeable and able. The more he knows, the more he can use his knowledge and the nearer he will be to his human goal and purpose.

Sometimes it is said that the goal of human life is happiness in the sense that during the time one is alive, he should live comfortably and happily enjoy the blessings of Creation and nature, suffer less pain from either natural causes or from fellow- creatures. This is considered happiness. This means, then, getting maximum pleasure and minimum pain .

It is also said that the prophets too are sent to make it possible for man to secure maximum pleasure and have minimum pain. If the prophets have introduced the subject of the next world, it is meant as a continuation of this life. In other words, as a way has been shown for human happiness and as following it requires the granting of a reward, and opposition to it involves punishment, this reward and punishment are presented on the models of this world, so that the laws of this world would not be futile. Moreover, as the prophets were in no position as executives in this world to grant rewards or deal punishment, another world had to be offered where the good would be rewarded, and the wicked punished.

But we come across none of these statements in the Qur'an, where the purpose of creating jinns and human beings is given as 'worship'. [2 The Qur'an, 51:56] This may seem to us too difficult to understand. Of what use is worship for God? It does not benefit Him. Of what use is

it to man? But this point has been explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an as the purpose of Creation. Contrary to the view that the next life is subsidiary to this one, the Qur'an says: "If there were no Resurrection, Creation would be futile." And again it says: "Do you suppose that we have created you in vain?" [The Qur'an, 23:115] It is suggestive of something wisely done.

Is it assumed that creation is meaningless, and man does not return to God? In the verses of the Qur'an the question of Resurrection occurs repeatedly with the matter of the rightfulness of creation. Its reasoning is based on the implication that this world has a God, and He does nothing in vain, and all is rightful and not in play, and there is a return to Him who accounts for the whole universe. We never come across this idea in the Qur'an that man is created in order to know more and act more to attain his goal. He is created to worship, and the worship of God is in itself a goal. If there is no question of knowing God which is the preface to worship, then man has failed in his advance towards the goal of creation, and from the viewpoint of the Qur'an he is not happy. The prophets, too, are sent to guide him towards that happiness which is the worship of God.

Thus the goal and ideal that Islam offers is God, and everything else is preparatory to it, and not of an independent and fundamental importance. In the verses where the Qur'an mentions perfect human beings, or speaks on their behalf, it says they have truly understood the goal of life and endeavored to attain it. It says for Ibrahim ("I have devoted my worship to Him who has created heaven and earth, and I am not a pagan." [The Qur'an, 6:80] This Sura, too, says: "My prayer, worship, life and death are for God, who is the Lord of the Universe .

" [The Qur'an, 6:163] This monotheism of the Qur'an is not merely an intellectual one, thinking that the origin of universe is one thing and its Creator is another. It includes the faith and conviction of man that there is only one Creator, and his goal, which is the only worthy one, is He alone. All other goals are the product of this one and subsidiary to it.

Thus, in Islam everything revolves round the axis of God, including the goal in the mission of prophets and individuals' goal of life. Now let us study the question of worship. In the second verse, Ibrahim's words show pure devotion and he shows himself a thoroughly devoted servant of God who is ruled by no thought but that of God.

Concerning the reason for the mission of prophets, the Qur'an offers several explanations. In Sura Ahzab, Verses 33, 45 and 46 it says: "O, Prophet, We sent you as witness, harbinger and giver of warning, to invite towards God by his leave, and to be a bright light." Thus a prophet is a witness to the people's deeds; a harbinger of the good deeds recommended by the prophets; an agent of warning against evil acts, and a man who calls human beings towards God, which is by itself an ultimate goal.

Elsewhere a prophet's mission is mentioned as a duty to bring people out of darkness into light. So, it is clear that the people are called upon to know God. The prophets are the link between creatures and the creator.

In another verse another point is mentioned as the goal in the mission of the prophets: "Truly we sent our prophets with clear proofs and with them we sent the Book and true measure, so that the people rise in justice, and we sent iron in which there is great firmness and benefits for people ..." [The Qur'an, 57:25] In this verse by measure is probably meant law, so that justice will prevail. Thus, the prophets have come to establish justice, and this is another aspect of their objective.

Justice cannot, as people like Ibn Sina argues, be truly established among people without an equitable law, which for two reasons cannot be devised by man. Firstly, man cannot distinguish truth completely or free himself from personal bias, Secondly, there is no guarantee for its execution, for, man's nature makes him prefer himself to others. So, when the law is in his favour, he accepts it, and when it is against his interest, he rejects it.

A law must be of a kind to which man submits, and such a law must come from God to induce obedience in man's deep conscience. This just law is from God, and to have a guarantee for its execution, rewards and punishments must be devised, and to enable people to have faith in them, they must know God himself. Thus, knowing God is? for several reasons, a pre-requisite for the establishment of justice.

Even worship is set up to prevent people from forgetting the legislator and to remember Him always as an overseer, With this argument, calling people to God is another goal, otherwise there would be no motive for knowing Him, In this way, we have three types of logic, The first one is that the goal in the mission of the prophets is only the establishment of justice among people and securing for them a happy life in this world, Accordingly, knowing God and having faith in Him and in Resurrection are all pre-requisites to that.

The second logic is quite the reverse, that is, knowing God and worship and proximity to God are the main goal, and justice is secondary. Man's spirituality in this world is predicated on his social life, and social life without law and justice is not possible. So, law and justice are pre-requisites for worshipping God. Thus attending to social problems which we consider so important today in connection with justice are objectives of the Prophets, but its importance remains secondary.

The third view questions the necessity of envisaging a separate goal for the prophets' mission and another for Creation and life, and thereby the need of considering one of them as the principal goal and the other as a subsidiary one. We may say the prophets have had two

independent goals, one of them as a link between man and God for the sake of worshipping Him, and secondly to establish justice among people; so we may put aside the idea of one of them being a pre-requisite to the other.

You can find examples of this in the Qur'an, where the matter of the purification of self is emphasised, and salvation is stated to depend on it. Is self-purification a goal in Islam? Is it a goal or a pre-requisite, pre-requisite for what? For knowing God, and linking to Him and worshipping Him?

Or for the establishment of social justice? According to this view, as the prophets' mission sought the establishment of social justice, social evils and goodness are distinguished. They recommend human beings to avoid the evils, such as envy, pride, selfishness, sensuality, etc, and cherish virtues such as truthfulness, integrity, affection, modesty, etc. Or should it be claimed that self-purification is in itself an independent goal?

Which of the above views should be accepted? To our way of thinking the Qur'an never approves of dualism in any sense. The Qur'an is a monotheistic book in every sense of the word. It says: "God has no like or equal" [The Qur'an, 42:11]. It represents all the Attributes of God in their utmost perfection. [The Qur'an, 20: 8: "All the best Names are His," "The Most Exalted Attribute is only God's." (16: 60)] It admits of no partners for Him, and no rival, and says all power belongs to Him and to none other.

It is also monotheistic in not attributing any goal as a fundamental, independent and ultimate to the universe but God. For man, too, in both his creation and his obligations and actions, no goal but God is recognised. There is all the difference between a man who wants Islam, and a man who believes in just schools of philosophy. Many of the things said by Islam are the same as those of others, but not in the same perspective. Islam always regards matters in a monotheistic perspective.

In philosophy, as we said before, man has reached a stage where he says that the world is governed by a series of constant and unalterable laws. The Qur'an says the same but in the divine context. [The Qur'an: 35: 43; "You will never find God's Way alterable."] The Qur'an does not only accept the principle of social justice, but considers it most significant, though not as an ultimate goal, nor as a pre-requisite to what we understood by worldly happiness.

Islam accepts worldly happiness within the practical constraints of monotheism, that is, to be wholly devoted to God.

According to the Qur'an, man gains his happiness only from God, and it is He who fills all the gaps in his life, and satisfies him. The Qur'an says: "Those who have faith and their hearts are tranquil in thinking of God, know that all hearts find peace by remembering God." [The Qur'an:

13:28] Only God brings repose to the anxious and inquisitive hearts of man. Other things are subsidiary and preliminary matters, not the final stage. The same is said of worship: "To remember God, pray." [The Qur'an: 20:14]

Also, the following verse says: "Prayer checks wickedness and injustice, and remembering God is more important." [The Qur'an: 29:45] Islam thinks of man as created to worship God, to seek proximity to Him and to know Him, all of which give him power. But knowledge and power are .not the ultimate goal, nor is self-purification