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Belief in God and the Hereafter

The relation of this world to the hereafter is similar to the relation between the body and the spirit, or the relation of the outer aspect to the inner aspect. This world and the next are not two wholly and entirely separate worlds; this world and the hereafter together are one unit, just as a sheet of paper has two pages and a coin has two sides. This same Earth that exists in this world will appear in the hereafter in its otherworldly form. The plants and objects of this world will appear in the hereafter in their otherworldly aspect. Fundamentally, the hereafter is the celestial, or malaku-t, form of the present world.

The condition for an action to acquire a good otherworldly aspect is for it to be performed with attention to God and in order to ascend to God's higher realm. If a person doesn't believe in the hereafter and isn't attentive to God, his or her action will not have an otherworldly aspect, and thus will not ascend to the higher realm.

The otherworldly aspect is the higher aspect, and the worldly aspect is the lower aspect. As long as an action does not acquire illumination and purity through intention, belief, and faith, it cannot attain to the highest realm; only an action that has a spirit can attain that station. And the spirit of an action is its otherworldly aspect.

How beautiful are the words of the Qur'a-n:

"To Him rises the pure word, and good deeds He raises."[1]

This verse can be understood in two ways, and both have been mentioned in books of exegesis of the Qur'a-n. The first is that good deeds raise pure words and pure belief; the other is that pure words and pure belief raise good deeds and make them otherworldly. The two explanations – both of which are correct and possibly both are intended – together convey the principle that faith has an effect on the acceptance of actions and their ascent to God, and actions have an effect on the perfection of faith and on increasing the degree of faith. This principle is an accepted one in the Isla-mic teachings.

Our reference to this verse is based on the second explanation, though as we indicated, in our view it is possible that the verse has intended both meanings at the same time.

In any case, it is a mistake for us to think that the actions of those who don't believe in God and the Day of Judgement ascend to God and acquire an otherworldly aspect.

If we are told that someone has taken the northbound highway from Tehran and continued to

travel northward for several days, we will obviously not expect that person to reach Qum, Is^faha-n, or Shi-ra-z (which lie south of Tehran); if someone were to entertain such a possibility, we would laugh and tell him that if that person wished to go to one of those cities, he or she would have to take the southbound highway from Tehran and travel on it.

It is impossible for someone to travel towards Turkista-n, yet reach the Ka`bah.

Heaven and Hell are the two ends of a person's spiritual journey. In the next world, every person sees him or herself at his or her journey's final point; one above, and the other below; one the highest of the high, and the other the lowest of the low.

"The record of the pious is indeed in Illiyi-n."[2]

"The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijji-n."[3]

How is it possible for a person not to travel towards a certain destination, or to travel in a direction opposite to it, yet still reach that destination? Moving towards the highest heaven (`Illiyyi-n) requires an intention and desire to reach it, and that in turn requires recognition and belief on the one hand, and facilitation and submission on the other. If a person has no belief in such a destination, or lacks the quality of facilitation and submission, and in short has neither any desire nor takes even the smallest step to reach it, how can one expect him or her to attain that destination? Without doubt, every path leads to its own destination, and unless God is that destination, the path does not lead to God. The Qur'a-n says:

"Whoever desires this transitory life, We expedite for him therein whatever We wish, for whomever We desire. Then We appoint hell for him, to enter it, blameful and spurned. Whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it with an endeavour worthy of it, should he be faithful—the endeavour of such will be well-appreciated."[4]

That is, if a person's level of thinking is no higher than this world and he or she has no goal higher than this world, it is impossible for that person to attain the high target of the hereafter; but Our Divine grace and benevolence demand that We grant him or her something of the worldly goal he or she desired to achieve.

There is a subtle point here: this world is the world of nature and matter; it is the world of causes and reasons. Worldly causes are in conflict with each other, and constraints also exist in this material world. Thus, for a person whose goal is this world, there is no guarantee that he or she will definitely attain that goal. The words the Qur'a-n has chosen to impart this point are as follows:

"We expedite for him therein whatever We wish, for whomever We desire."

However, one who has a higher goal in his or her spiritual makeup has not given his or her heart to trifling goals, and who, moving forward with faith, takes steps towards a Divine object

will certainly attain the goal, since God recognizes the value of good deeds; He accepts and rewards those good deeds that are presented to Him.

Here, effort and endeavour are necessary, since it is impossible for a person to move forward and attain the goal without taking a step. Then in the next verse, the Qur'a-n says: "Each We assist out of the bounty of your Lord, both this group and that one; and the bounty of your Lord has not been withheld from any."[5] That is, Our bounty is limitless; whoever sows a seed, We bring it to fruition; whoever moves towards a goal, We deliver him or her to that goal. The Divine sages say that the Being who is necessarily existent by essence is necessarily existent from all aspects and dimensions.

Thus, He is necessarily Bountiful (Fayya-dh). As a result, whoever wishes something, God assists him or her. It is not the case that if someone seeks the world, God says to him or her, "You are misguided and have acted contrary to Our guidance and direction, so We will not assist you." That is not the case; the seeker of the world is also supported and assisted by God in seeking this world and benefits from His unhesitant bounty within the limits permitted by this world of causes, mutual exclusivity, and conflicting outcomes.

In other words, this world is a place appropriate for and given to planting, growing, increasing, and harvesting. It all depends on what seed a person chooses to grow and develop and what harvest he or she wishes to reap. Whatever seed he or she chooses is exactly what will grow and develop in the rich and fertile land of this world.

True, there is an exclusive assistance particular to the people of Truth, which is called the rahi-miyyah (exclusive) mercy; the seekers of this world are deprived of this mercy, since they do not seek it. But the rahma-niyyah (general) mercy of God applies equally to all people and all paths. In the words of Sa`di-:

The earth's surface is His all-encompassing table,From this table all partake, whether friend or foe.

From what has been said in this discussion, a portion of the issues under examination have been resolved.

We made clear that action-related goodness is not sufficient for reward in the hereafter; actor-related goodness is also necessary. Action-related goodness is similar to a body, and actor-related goodness is similar to its spirit and life. And we explained that belief in God and the Day of Judgement is a fundamental condition of actor-related goodness. This conditionality is not based on convention, but is instead an essential and actual conditionality, just like the conditionality of a particular path with respect to reaching a particular destination.

Here, it is necessary to clarify one point, which is that some will perhaps say that actor-related

goodness does not necessarily require the intention of seeking nearness to God; if a person does a good deed because of one's conscience or out of a feeling of compassion or mercy, that is sufficient for his or her action to possess actor-related goodness. In other words, a humanitarian motive is sufficient for actor-related goodness; as long as a person's motive is other than the "self", actor-related goodness is present, whether the motive be "God" or "humanism."

This point is worthy of consideration. While we don't affirm the view that it makes no difference whether one's motive be God or humanism, and we can't enter this discussion in depth right now, we do truly believe that whenever an action is performed with the motive of doing good, serving others, and for the sake of humanity, it is not the same as an action that is performed solely with selfish motives. Without doubt, God will not leave such people without any reward. Several traditions indicate that on account of their good deeds, polytheists like H^a-tam al-T(a-`i-i- will not be punished or the punishment of such people will be reduced, even though they were polytheists.

We can understand this point from many traditions which we have before us.

1. `Alla-mah Majlisi-quotes from the book Thawa-bul A`ma-l of Shaykh Sadu-q that `Ali- Ibn Yaqti-n narrated from Ima-m Mu-sa- Ibn Ja`far al-Ka-dhim (as) that he said, "Amongst the Bani- Isra-'i-l (Children of Isra-'il) there was a believer whose neighbour was an unbeliever. That unbeliever would always show kindness and good conduct towards his believing neighbour. When this unbeliever died, God made for him a house out of a type of mud which shielded him from the heat of the fire, and his sustenance would be given to him from outside his own environment, which was of fire. He was told, 'This is because of your kindness and good conduct towards your believing neighbour.'"[6]

Alla-mah Majlisi- , after quoting this tradition, says: "This tradition and others like it are evidence that the punishment of some unbelievers in Hell will be lifted, and the verses of Qur'a-n that say the punishment of the unbelievers shall not be lightened are with regard to those who have not performed such good deeds."

2. He also narrates from Ima-m Muhammad Ibn `Ali- al-Ba-qir (as) that he said, "There was a believer who lived in the land of an oppressive king. That oppressor threatened the believer, and thus, the believer fled to a non-Isla-mic land, arriving at the place of a polytheist man. The polytheist sat him beside himself and hosted him well. As soon as the polytheist man died, God addressed him, 'I swear by My Honour and Glory that if there were a place in Heaven for a polytheist, I would put you in that place; but O' fire, make him fear, but don't harm him.'"

Then the Ima-m said, "Every morning and evening his sustenance is brought for him from

outside that environment." The Ima-m was asked, "From Heaven?" He answered, "From where God wills."[7]

3. The Noble Messenger (S) said about `Abdulla-h Ibn Jud`a-n who was one of the well-known unbelievers in the Age of Ignorance and one of the chiefs of Quraysh, "The one who has the lightest punishment in Hell is Ibn Jud`a-n." He was asked why, to which he replied:

إِنَّهُ كٰانَ يُطْعِمُ الطَّعٰامَ

He used to give people to eat.""

4. In addition, the Prophet Muhammad (S) said with regard to several people who lived in the Age of Ignorance: "I saw in Hell the possessor of the tunic and the possessor of the cane who would drive the pilgrims, and also the woman who had a cat which she had tied up and which she would neither feed nor set free so it could find its own food. And I entered Heaven and I saw there the man who saved a dog from thirst and gave it water."[8] Such people, who are found in more or less every age, will at least have their punishment lightened or their punishment lifted altogether.

In my view, if there are individuals who do good to other people or even to another living being – whether a human being or animal – without any expectation, not even because they see themselves mirrored in the existence of the deprived (i.e., fear that one day they may be in similar straits is not the moving factor in what they do),

and instead the motive of doing good and serving others is strong enough in them that even if they know that no benefit will accrue to them and not even a single person will come to know of what they did or say so much as "God bless you" to them, yet they still do good deeds, and they are not under the influence of habit and such like,

one must say that in the depths of their conscience there exists the light of recognition of God. And supposing they deny it with their tongues, they confess it in the depths of their conscience; their denial is in reality a denial of an imagined being which they have conceived in place of God, or a denial of another imagined thing which they have conceived in place of the return to God and the Day of Judgement, not a denial of the reality of God and the Resurrection.

Love of good and justice and doing good because it is good and just and worthy, without any other factor, is a sign of love of the Essence possessed of Absolute Beauty; therefore, it is not farfetched that such people actually will not be resurrected among the unbelievers, though by their tongues they are considered deniers. And God knows best.

Belief in the Prophethood and Imamate

Now we will discuss another aspect of the issue, which is the position of those non-Muslims who are monotheists and believe in the Resurrection and perform their actions for God.

Among the People of the Book, people can be found who neither believe the Messiah (Jesus the son of Mary) nor Ezra to be the son of God; they are neither dualists nor fire-worshippers. They do not say, “The Messiah is the son of God,” or “`Uzayr is the son of God,” nor that Ahra-man is the god of evil; they also believe in the Day of Judgement. What is the outcome of the actions of such people?

Right now our discussion is not about those inventors, innovators, and servants of humanity who are materialists and deny God’s existence, and whose practical motives naturally do not transcend the material realm. From the preceding discussions, our view regarding them from the perspective of Isla-m was made clear. Our discussion in this section pertains to those good-doers who believe in Creation and in the Resurrection, and thus are able to have a higher motive in their actions and work towards a goal that goes beyond the material realm.

It is said that Edison and Pasteur were such people, that they were religious people and had religious motives. That is, in their actions they, just like religious Muslims, worked for God’s pleasure and with a Divine motive. In reality, these Christians (Edison and Pasteur) are not Christians [they may be called dispositional Muslims], because if they were Christians and believed in the creeds of the existing Christianity, they would regard the Messiah as God, and naturally it would not be possible for them to be true monotheists; perhaps few of today’s Christian intellectuals believe in the superstitions of the Trinity.

In order to answer this question, one must determine in what way faith in the Prophethood and Ima-mate (Divinely appointed leadership) are necessary, and why such faith is a condition for the acceptance of actions.

It appears that faith in the Prophets and friends of God is involved in the acceptance of actions for two reasons:

First, recognition of them goes back to recognition of God. In reality, recognition of God and His affairs is incomplete without recognition of His friends. In other words, recognition of God in a complete form is to recognize the manifestations of His guidance.

Second, recognition of the station of Prophethood and Ima-mate is necessary because without it, it is not possible to obtain the complete and correct program of action to achieve guidance.

The big difference between a Muslim good-doer and an unbelieving good-doer is that the unbeliever who does good deeds does not possess the proper program to achieve guidance and thus has only a negligible chance of success. In contrast, since the Muslim has submitted

to a religion that has a comprehensive and proper program for guidance, he or she is assured of success if he or she implements that program correctly. Good deeds do not consist only of doing good to others; all obligatory, forbidden, recommended, and disliked actions also form part of the program of good deeds.

The practicing Christian, who is outside the fold of Isla-m and who lacks the correct program is deprived of its great gifts since he or she commits actions which are prohibited. For example, alcohol is forbidden, but he or she drinks it. We know that alcohol was prohibited because of its personal, societal, and spiritual harms and naturally one who drinks alcohol will face its harms, similar to how a person who is deprived of the guidance of a doctor may do something which makes his or her heart, liver, or nerves prematurely sick and shortens his or her life.

In the program of Isla-m, there are some commands which are conditional to act upon for spiritual perfection and development. It is obvious that a non-Muslim, no matter how unprejudiced and free of obstinacy, by virtue of being deprived of the complete program of human perfection, will also remain deprived of its features.

Such a person will naturally be deprived of the great acts of worship, such as the five daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadha-n, and pilgrimage to the House of God #292;ajj). He or she is like someone who plants seeds without a systematic method of farming; in no way will the product such a person obtains be like that obtained by a person who sows the earth according to a comprehensive and proper program, plants at an appropriate time and weeds at the proper time, and in short performs all the necessary technical steps.

The difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim good-doer can be explained like this: the Muslim good-doer is like a sick person who is under the care and direction of an expert doctor; his or her food and medicine are all under the direction of the doctor. With regard to the type of medicine and food and its timing and amount, he or she acts completely as directed. However, the non-Muslim good doer is like a sick person who has no such program and acts as he or she pleases; he or she eats whatever food or medicine that comes into his or her hand. Such a sick person may occasionally consume a beneficial medicine and get a positive result, but it is just as likely that he or she will make use of a medicine that is harmful or even fatal. Similarly, it is possible he or she may eat a beneficial food, but by subsequent negligence or by eating the wrong food, may cancel the beneficial effect of the first food.

With this explanation, it becomes clear that the difference between a Muslim and a non-Muslim who believes in God is that the Muslim is a theist who possesses a proper program, while the non-Muslim theist performs his or her actions without a correct program. In other

words, the Muslim has been guided, and the non-Muslim, though he or she believes in God, is misguided. In this very regard the Qur'a-n says:

"So if they submit, they will have achieved guidance."[9]

From all that we have said in the last two sections, it has become clear that all non-Muslims are not equal in terms of being rewarded for good deeds; there is a great difference between a non-Muslim who doesn't believe in God and the Resurrection and one who believes in God and in the Day of Judgement but is deprived of the gift of faith in the Prophethood. For the first group, it is not possible to perform an action acceptable to God, whereas for the second it is possible. It is possible for this group to go to Heaven under certain conditions, but for the first group it is not possible.

Apparently, the reason that Isla-m differentiates between polytheists and the People of the Book in its laws of interaction – in that it doesn't tolerate the polytheist but tolerates the People of the Book, it forces the polytheist to abandon his or her belief but doesn't force the People of the Book – is that the polytheist or atheist, by virtue of his or her polytheism or denial, forever closes the gate of salvation for him or herself and is in a condition of having deprived him or herself of crossing the material world and ascending to the higher world and eternal Paradise.

However, the People of the Book are in a condition in which they can perform good deeds, even if in a deficient manner, and with certain conditions can attain the results of those actions.

The Qur'a-n says, addressing the People of the Book:

"Come to a common word between us and yourselves, that we worship none but God and associate none with Him, and that we take not each other as lords in place of God."[10]

The Noble Qur'a-n has given the People of the Book such a call, but has absolutely not given and does not give such a call to polytheists and atheists.

Notes:

[1] Al-Qur'a-n, Su-ratul Fa-t(ir (35), Verse 10

[2] Al-Qur'a-n, Su-ratul Tat(fi-f (83), Verse 18

[3] Ibid., Verse 7

[4] Al-Qur'a-n, Su-rat Bani- Isra-'i-l (17), Verses 18-19

[5] Ibid., Verse 20

[6] Biha-rul Anwa-r, Volume 3, Page 377 (Kumpa-ni- print)

[7] Biha-rul Anwa-r, Volume 3, Page 382, (Kumpa-ni- print), from Al-Ka-fi-

[8] Both this and the previous tradition are in Biha-rul Anwa-r, Volume 3, Page 382, (Kumpa-

ni- print), as recorded from Al-Ka-fi-.

[9] Al-Qur'a-n, Su-rat A-li Imra-n (3), Verse 20

[10] Ibid., Verse 64