

Man's God-Seeking Nature

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Muhammad ibn Ya'qub (al-Kulayni), from Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad, from Ibn Mahbub, from 'Ali ibn Ri'ab, from Zurarah, who said, I asked Abu 'Abd Allah (Imam al-Sadiq) (A) regarding the words of God: God's creation (fitrah) upon which He originated mankind. (30:30). The Imam(A) answered: "He originated mankind upon tawhid

Exposition

According to lexicographers and exegetes, fatr means creation. According to al-Sihah (Arabic dictionary compiled by al-Jawhari), the word al-fitrah means al-khilqah, i.e. creation. Also, possibly, the word may have been derived from fatr in the sense of splitting and tearing; for creation, in a sense, tears the curtains of non-being and the veils of the hidden.

The phrase iftar al sa'im, used for the breaking of the fast, also has a similar meaning, for iftar severs the continuity of the fast. This much is sufficient here, for lexical consideration is not our purpose here.

The tradition refers to the following verse of the Quran: So set thy face to the Din, as a man of pure Faith-God's fitrah upon which He originated mankind. There is no changing God's creation. That is the right Din, but most men know it not. (30:30)

God willing, we shall discuss this fitrah, its characteristics, and the manner in which human nature is based on the principle of tawhid, dividing our discourse in a number of sections

The Meaning Of Fitrah .1

It should be known that fitrat Allah, as the condition and state in which God fashioned mankind, refers to the essential condition of their existence. It is something which is present in the very essence of their creation and is inextricably kneaded into the very substance of their nature. God's fitrah is one of His favors with which He has endowed the human species out of all creatures.

Other creatures are either altogether without these attributes, or have been endowed with a weaker degree of them. It should be remembered that though in this tradition, as in some other ahadith, the word fitrah is interpreted as a natural inclination towards tawhid, but this amounts to mentioning one from among a host of correlatives, or to describing the most significant

component of something.

This is characteristic of the expositions and interpretations handed down from the Imams(A). Often they cite one of the several meanings that apply to a verse in accordance with the propriety of a context and occasion, leading ignorant persons to imagine that there is a contradiction (between the different interpretations). A proof of that is the present case.

In the above-mentioned verse, Din, which is equated to fitrah Allah, is inclusive of the doctrine of tawhid and other religious teachings as well. In the sahih tradition of ‘Abd Allah ibn Sinan, “fitrah” here has been interpreted as al-Islam; in the hasan hadith narrated by Zurarah from Abu Ja’far –Imam al-Baqir (A)– it is defined as ma’ri fah (knowledge of God); and in the well-known hadith: Every child is born on the fitrah.

Fitrah is placed in opposition to tahawwud (being a Jew), tanassur (being a Christian), and tamajjus (being a Zoroastrian). From this it becomes obvious that fitrah does not exclusively mean tawhid; rather it includes all the true teachings which God Almighty has ingrained in the nature of His slaves.

Laws Of Human Nature

We know that there is not a single soul outside the laws of nature, for they are the essential conditions of human existence and the elemental forms which are innate to human nature and creation. No one escapes them; the ignorant and the learned, the barbarian and the civilized, the dwellers of cities and the inhabitants of deserts-all share it equally. None of the factors, such as diversity of customs, religious traditions and ways, can affect them or interfere with their working.

The differences of geographical region, climate, association, opinion, which affect everything—even rational verities – and create disparity and diversity of all sorts, have no effect whatsoever on the essentials of nature. The disparity of intelligence and the strength and weakness of understanding do not affect it. Anything that is not such, is not a law of nature and it should be He originated— (فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا), excluded from the realm of nature. Hence the ayah states man kind in accordance with it— that is, no specific group or race is meant. The verse further says: There is no changing God’s creation.

It is not changed by anything, like other factors which change according to habit and custom and other such things.

But what is astonishing is that in spite of being uniform regarding their natural instincts, from the beginning of the world until the present, people have been generally ignorant of the uniformity of their nature. They imagine that it varies, unless they are made aware of its

uniform and unchangeable quality. It is only then that they can understand that there has been unity despite apparent disparity. God willing, we will clarify this point further at a later stage.

However the verse refers to this point when it says: But most men know it not. From what has been said till now, it may be inferred that the laws of nature are the most self-evident of all self-evident truths. Because amongst all rational principles there does not exist such a law which is not contradicted even by a single individual, and such a thing is the most evident of logical necessities and the most self-evident of all self-evident realities. And all those things that are its necessary corollaries should also be among the most evident of logical necessities.

Thus, if the doctrine of tawhid, or other related doctrines, are from among the laws of nature and one of its prerequisites, it should be the most manifest of all self-evident truths and the !most evident of manifest necessities, but strangely enough: Most men know not

Innateness Of Religious Truths

Every exegete of the Quran, Sunni or Shi'i, has written about the innateness of Din or tawhid in his own specific way. Here we shall not base our discussion on their opinions. Rather, we shall describe the original ideas of the accomplished 'arif, Shaykh Shahabadi (D) who was unique in this field, although some of the ideas can be found in the form of allusions in the writings of researchers in the field of 'irfan, and some of them have occurred to this incapable writer.

Let it be known that among God-given instincts one is the belief in the existence of the Sacred and Sublime Source of everything; the second is the belief in It's Unity, i.e. tawhid; the third is the innate belief that that Sacred Being encompasses all perfection; the fourth is the instinctive belief in the Day of Resurrection; and the fifth is the innate faith in nubuwwah (prophethood); the sixth is the instinctive belief in the existence of angels, of holy spirits, in the revelation of scriptures and the path of Divine guidance.

Some of the above-mentioned are laws of nature and some others are their necessary corollaries. The faith in God, the belief in angels, the belief in the revelation of Scriptures, in God-sent Apostles, in the Day of Resurrection, and in the Din-which is firm, stable and straight-is a truth which underlines the entire life of the human species. We shall discuss here some of them which are relevant to the hadith under consideration, and beseech the Almighty's .assistance in this regard

To understand that the belief in the existence of the Sublime and Supreme Source is innate in human nature, one needs to understand certain preliminaries. One of the qualities innate in human nature is the love and yearning for perfection. It is something which pervades the entire chain of humanity's generations and not a single individual in the entire human species can be found without it. No custom or tradition, religious or legal institution can transform or obstruct this tendency.

The natural inclination to seek perfection is so universal that if all the eras of human existence are probed and each of human individuals, no matter to what group or nation he may belong, is questioned, a love of perfection will be found to be part of his nature and his heart will be found to be pulled towards it.

In all the pauses and activities, in all the efforts, endeavors and earnest toils which engage the energies of the individuals of this species in various fields of life, it is the love of perfection which drives them onwards.

Although people vary regarding their identification and understanding of perfection, and although there is the greatest conceivable variance in what they regard as perfect and whom they regard as the beloved, yet each of them, having perceived his beloved in something and deeming it his ideal; turns his attention towards it. He serves it with all his heart and with the utmost love of which he is capable.

Whatever the field to which he belongs and whatever the object of his love, since he identifies perfection with it, he concentrates his attention upon it. In the same manner, the men of science and crafts, each of them seeks what he considers as perfection and loves what appears to him as the beloved. The same is true of the other-worldly and of those who give themselves up to reflection and meditation.

In brief, all of them are turned towards perfection, and since they see it in a real or imaginary object, they love it earnestly. But it should be remembered that in spite of it all, their infatuation and obsession is really not for those ideals or objects which they imagine to be their beloved. The object of their love and the ka'bah of their hopes is not that which they have fancied. For, if he were to ponder over his nature, he will realize that to whatever object his heart is devoted, if he attains something superior to it his heart turns away from the original ideal and towards another, a higher one. And when he attains that higher one, he turns towards one which is higher and more perfect, and the fire of eagerness grows more intense day by day and his heart does not settle down at any one of the stages.

For example, if you are in love with physical beauty and see it in some beauty, your heart drives you towards her abode and alley. But if you happen to see a face more beautiful, and you find it

to be so, you will inevitably turn your attention towards it, or, at least, both of them will now hold your attention, and the fire of your passion will not cool down. Your condition is that of the man who said, "I haven't a penny but would buy the entire estate," and you would desire to possess every beauty.

Not only this, even a probability may excite your eagerness. If you have an inkling that there is someone prettier in a certain place, your heart may take you on a journey to that place and your state of mind will be like him who said, "Though in the midst of the crowd, my heart is somewhere else." Mere wish will add to your eagerness. If you listen to the descriptions of Paradise and about the enticing beauties therein, even though, God forbid, you should be a disbeliever in it, nevertheless, your natural instinct will make you say, "O that such a heaven did exist and such lovely dames would fall to my share."

In the same manner, a man who seeks perfection in domination, power and expansion of territories and develops eagerness for such things, if he is given the possession of one country, he will turn towards another; when that too comes under his domination, he will desire for some more territory. If he is given a quarter of the earth, he will try to own the remaining ones also. Rather, the intensity of his desire grows more and more, and if the whole planet is brought under his domination, he will contemplate about the possibility of expanding it to other spheres of the cosmos as well.

His heart views the celestial spheres with the desire of conquest: "O that man could fly towards those worlds, that I could annex them to my empire." Similar is the case of men of science and craft and that of the entire human species. Whatever the activity and field of their concern, their eagerness grows with achievement and is directed towards the higher degrees of perfection. The more they progress and advance, the more their eagerness grows for the higher degrees of perfection; its fire is never extinguished and becomes more intense every day.

Thus, this light of nature guides us to the fact that the hearts of all the members of human species, from the people inhabiting far-flung regions of the world to the dwellers of civilized countries, from believers in materialism to the followers of various religious creeds, all yearn by nature and from the core of their hearts to attain immaculate perfection.

They long for an absolute beauty and perfection which has no defect, for a knowledge that has no trace of ignorance in it, for a power and domination that is not accompanied with impotence and weakness, for a life that has no death, and, ultimately, the Absolute Perfection that is the beloved of everyone. All the existents and the entire human species declare unanimously with one heart and in eloquent and lucid terms: We are lovers of Absolute Perfection; we are enamored to Absolute Beauty and Majesty; we are in search of Absolute

Knowledge and Absolute Power.

Does anyone know of any being in the entire realm of existence, or in the spheres of fancy and imagination, or in the realm of rational abstractions, which possesses the attributes of absolute perfection and absolute beauty, except the Sacred Essence of the Supreme Majestic Source of the cosmos? Does anybody know of any absolute, immaculate beauty, except that of the Absolute Beloved?

O wanderers of the valley of regret! O the lost ones in the wilderness of error! Rather, O lovers of the lamp of Absolute Beauty! O Seekers of the immaculate and the eternal Beloved! Look again into the book of your nature; turn the pages of the book of your being. Look, the pen of Divine creation has written into it: I have turned my face towards Him who created the heavens and the earth.

(It is) God's nature upon which He originated mankind. (6:79; 30:30)

That nature is innate attention to the Absolute Beloved, and it is unchanging: It is a nature which seeks the knowledge (ma'rifah) of God. How long will you lavish this natural God-gifted love and this trust of God on this or that beloved on account of your misconceived ideas? If the object of your love were these imperfect beauties and these finite perfections, then why doesn't the fire of your love subside after reaching them and why does the flame of your love grow fiercer on attaining them? Now wake up from the slumber, receive the glad tiding, and rejoice that you have a beloved who has no decline, no defect, no infirmity. The Light you seek is one whose brilliance illuminates the Universe: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. (24:35)

Your Beloved is such that He encompasses everything.

Thus, this actual love of yours seeks the Actual Beloved. It cannot be an imaginary beloved of your fancy, since every imaginary thing is imperfect, and your nature yearns for perfection. Thus an actual lover and an actual love is not possible without an actual beloved. And there is no other beloved except the Perfect Being, towards whom human nature is directed. Hence the prerequisite for the love of absolute perfection is the existence of the Absolutely Perfect Being. And, as mentioned earlier, the laws of nature and their necessary correlatives are the clearest, the most self-evident and the most obvious of prepositions. Hence it has been said: Can there (be doubt concerning God the Creator of the heavens and the earth?! (14:10

The Innateness Of Divine Attributes .2

That the belief in the unity of the Divine Essence is innate and so is the belief that the Divine Being encompasses all the attributes of perfection became known in the above section; here

we shall prove this in a different manner.

It should be known to you that one of the characteristics of the nature upon which God has fashioned mankind is a loathing for imperfection. Man is by nature averse to everything he perceives as defective and faulty.

Thus imperfection and defectiveness are repulsive to human nature, for it is inclined towards absolute perfection. Now, the pole of attraction of human nature should be one and unique, because everything capable of plurality and everything made up of parts is imperfect and defective. Plurality is always associated with finitude, (which is a defect), and everything that is defective is repelled by human nature, which is not attracted towards it.

The presence of these two natures—that is, the nature of attraction towards perfection and the nature of repulsion towards defectiveness—not only posits the principle of tawhid, it also pits that the Being of God encompasses every perfection and that It is free from every defect.

The blessed Surat al-Tawhid, which is about the Being of God, the Exalted and the Supreme, relates, in the words of our revered Shaykh, may my soul be his ransom, to the Ipseity of the Absolute, which is the pole of attraction of the human nature.

At the outset of the surah, it is referred to as huwa (He), followed by the six attributes mentioned in the following verses. Since His sacred Essence has an absolute ipseity (huwiyyah) (an absolute ipseity must be absolutely perfect; otherwise it is a finite ipseity), the Divine Being encompasses all perfections. 'Allah', (which follows the pronoun huwa in the surah), shows that in spite of encompassing all perfections, It is simple (basit); otherwise It would not have an absolute ipseity.

Thus, He is ahad (unique) and His ahadiyyah (uniqueness) necessitates His wahidiyyah (oneness). And since absolute ipseity includes all perfections and is free from all defects—which originate in finite ipseity He is Samad (Eternal, the End, Goal and Refuge of every thing) and is not vacuous. On account of His being absolute ipseity, nothing is begotten or separated from Him, nor is He Himself separated from anything. He is lam yalid wa lam yulad, i.e. He begetteth not, nor was begotten; rather, He is the Source of everything and the End to which all existents return without having separated from Him, for separation necessitates defectiveness. Absolute Ipseity has no equal either, since absolute perfection precludes recurrence. Thus, the blessed Surat al-Tawhid is about the laws of human nature and is concerned with the attributes of the Divine Being.

Innateness Of The Belief In Resurrection: .3

Here we shall discuss the innateness of the belief in Resurrection (al-ma'ad) as something

ingrained in human nature. Like the other beliefs dealt with in the previous sections, it can be proved in a number of ways. Here we shall mention only some of them.

Know that one of the God-given innate tendencies that are ingrained in the nature of the entire human species is the love of comfort. If all the epochs of human existence--from civilized existence to barbarian subsistence, from eras of piety to that of pagan rebellion--are studied and if all the different kinds of individuals--from the learned to the ignorant, from the noble to the mean, and from the savage to the urbanized--are questioned as to the aim of all their various attachments and pursuits and their diverse desires, and if they are asked about the purpose of their hardships and labors, all will unanimously answer in one voice with the unambiguous tongue of nature that whatever we desire is for the sake of our comfort. They will say that the ultimate goal and the purpose underlying all their aspirations and hopes is absolute comfort, untainted with labor, toil and distress. Since such a toilless, painless comfort is the goal of all, everyone imagines that lost comfort to lie in some thing and develops an interest in every such thing which he believes to be associated with that desired goal. This, in spite of the fact that such an absolute comfort is not to be found in any part of this world of ephemeral existence, nor is such an undisturbed peace and rest possible here.

All the bounties and blessings of this world are mixed with tiresome effort and exhausting toil. All the pleasures of the world are surrounded with unnerving pains. Pain and agony, anguish and sorrow, anxiety and grief prevail all over the world. Throughout the entire history of human existence, not a single individual is to be seen whose pains and sufferings are equal to his comforts and whose joys and blessings are equal to his sorrows, distresses and toils, let alone the possession of untainted comfort and undisturbed rest.

Accordingly, the ultimate human goal is not to be found in this world, and no natural, inherent and actual love--and that too a love which pervades the entire species--is possible without the existence of an actual beloved. Hence, there should exist such a world in the realm of existence where comforts will not be adulterated with labor and pain, whose ease and repose be absolute and pure, unmixed by pain, whose joys should be pure, unmarred by grief and suffering. That world is the House of Divine bounty (dar al-na'im), the world of the manifestation of His magnanimity.

That world can also be posited by means of the freedom-loving nature of man and the insistence of the human will, which are ingrained in the nature of every human individual. Since the material forces of this world and the conditions therein, with its impediments and restrictions, are opposed to human freedom and contrary to the human will, there should be a world in the realm of existence where man's will can be influential and whose material forces

are not opposed to the dictates of the human will. Man would be there a free actor, accomplishing the aspirations of his sovereign will, a sovereignty which is demanded by his nature.

Thus the aspects of the innate love of comfort and love of freedom are two natural tendencies that have been embedded by God in the unchanging nature of the human being. They are the two wings with which man flies towards the higher kingdom of heaven and into the Nearness of God.

There are certain other matters which are not of immediate relevance to these pages. There are other natural tendencies in man which posit other Divine teachings, such as the affirmation of prophethood, the raising of Divine apostles and the descent of the scriptures, and so on. Each of the above-mentioned natural tendencies proves all the sacred doctrines, but we have confined our discussion in order not to digress much from the main topic, which is exposition of the glorious tradition at hand. Hitherto our discussion showed that the knowledge of the Source, Its Perfection and Unity, and that of the Hereafter is innate in human nature. And all .praise is God's