

The School of Humanity

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?>

The subject of our discourse is 'the school of humanity'. The human being who is the only inquisitive being in the world that we know, has always been subjected to investigation and discussion. The word 'humanity' has always been connected with a sense of loftiness and sanctity as a being superior to animals from various points of view, such as knowledge justice, freedom, moral conscience, etc.

Although many of humanity's sacred objects have been subjected to doubt and even denial, apparently no school of thought has yet gone so far as to scorn the special dignity of humanity and its superiority over other Creatures. This fact has been elegantly expressed in the poems of Rumi and Sa'adi and by other poets of ours. This topic is also the theme of most of the world's literature, both religious and non-religious, in which the question of humanity and its glorification has been described.

In Islamic literature, too, both in Persian and Arabic, we come across many such statements. In the last two centuries, with the great advance of science, humanity has suddenly fallen from that pedestal of sanctity it had always been given. It fell with a real crash since the more one is elevated, the greater is the damage Caused by the fall. In the past, mankind has been exalted to the rank of a demi-god as witnessed in the poems of Hafiz and other poets.

The first discovery of humanity was the form of the universe which revolutionized its ideas. Before that, the earth was believed to be the center of the universe round which all the plants and stars revolved. Science proved that the earth was a small planet which revolved around the sun and the solar System was only an insignificant part of the universe. It was then that the position of humanity as the center of all possibilities and as the goal of creation was subjected to doubt and denial, and no one dared any longer to make claims about its exalted position.

Then, another severe blow dealt, was the idea that the human being was no longer a divine creature and vice gerent of God upon the earth was given up. Biological research on the question of evolution and the origin of species at once showed the relationship of people with those same animals which they Scorned and despised. It proved them to be an evolved form of a monkey or some other animal and thus they lost their divine origin.

Another strong blow as against humanity's apparently brilliant record of activities, namely, that it could act in such a way that showed only goodness and benevolence, whose motive was only the love of Cod, and lacking all animal aspects. The new thesis was that the claim of humanity

to all that sanctity and virtue was false and all the activities to which it had given the name of the love of knowledge, art, beauty, morality and conscience, prayer and devotion and everything supernatural, are similar to those which can be found in animals, too, except in a more complex form and mechanism.

It was said that the stomach is the source and cause of all activities. Some went so far as to say that the stomach was also the basis of its thoughts and feelings. There were still others who considered this position too high and claimed that the human being was even lower than he is. Eventually it was concluded that this being who had formerly claimed divine origin and exaltation must be subjected to a careful study to discover its true nature.

Another theory was offered that there is no difference between humans, plants and even inanimate objects. There is, of course, a difference in the texture and form, but not in the substance of which they were all made. It was stated that spirit and divine breath were nonexistent because the human being is a machine which is only more complicated than other machines such as cars, planes, and satellites; that is, only a mechanical creature.

This was a great blow to humanity and yet human values were not wholly condemned except in some schools of thought where ideas like peace, freedom, spirituality, justice and compassion were considered as jokes. But since the middle of the 19th century, humanity has won fresh attention in philosophical schools. Such as schools of humanity and even worship of human beings. In the past the human being was only a sign of spirituality and the Quran speaks of the human being as being the worthiest creature through whom God could be understood.

Now the human being is trying to recover its former honor and sanctity and become a goal in itself but without the adoption of the former criteria and without a regard for its divine or non-divine aspect, or the points stated in the Quran that everything that is created on earth is for it and that God has breathed some of this spirit into it to making it a manifestation of Himself.

Part II There is no longer any talk of the above matters, nor even a discussion of internal human motives, but only a belief in the sanctity of humanity and its intelligence.

Now we see all schools of thought and even the declaration of human rights beginning their claims with respect for the inherent dignity of human beings. They say this in order to base their education on its foundation and though each individual is able to violate the rights of others, this respect for the dignity and sanctity of humanity will serve as a check to such violations. Most of those who follow the philosophy of humanitarianism, have criteria different from those of the past.

But the difficulty lies in this same contradiction in the life, thought and logic of mankind today, a logic which lacks foundation . I do not think that there are any scholars in the world who

would interpret humanitarianism to mean universal peace. There are, of course, ordinary people who think all human beings in the world are the same and of equal worth. But this is not true. One is learned, another is ignorant; one is virtuous, another is impure; one is tyrannical, another is oppressed; one is benevolent, another is malevolent. Should we consider them all the same from a humanitarian point of view, irrespective of their knowledge, faith, chastity and benevolence or vice versa?

If we say so, we are betraying humanity. Let me give an example. Both A and B are human beings who are biologically similar. If you dislike one of them, it has nothing to do with his blood group. But if you are humanitarian, you cannot be indifferent to both of them and claim that they are equally human; for then both should be equally liked, or both equally disliked. But this is not so since the human being's basic difference with animals is that the human being has more potentiality than animals and less actuality.

What does that mean? A horse on its birth possesses all the peculiarities that a horse should have and if it has less than that, it can gain it by practice. But a human being has potential only at birth. It is not known what he or she will be in the future. The shape is human but that person may, in reality, become a wolf or a sheep or a human being.

Mulla Sadra, the great Iranian Islamic philosopher, in pointing out the error of people in thinking human beings equal in everything, says that there are as many kinds of individuals as there are individuals. He is, of course, regarding the human being philosophically, not biologically. A biologist pays attention to human organs and limbs, while a philosopher concentrates on the human being's qualities and thus he cannot believe that human beings are all of the same kind. That is why human values are potential. Some attain the height of humanity while others fail to do so. As Hadrat Ali says, "The shape is humans but the mind may be a beast." Not all individuals have an interior proportionate to their exterior. As I said before, to a great extent, the world is returning, once again to the school of humanity, meaning that philosophies of humanity have appeared; and the strangest of them all is the creed of humanity which Auguste Comte originated in the middle of the 19th century.

This man wavered between his intelligence and mind on the one hand and his heart and conscience on the other and came to the conclusion that the human being needed a creed, the absence of which results in all kinds of social corruption. According to him, past religion (Catholicism) is not adequate enough for modern mankind. He describes three stages of religion; The divine supernatural stage, the philosophical reasoning stage and the scientific positive stage.

He said that Catholicism belonged to the human being's supernatural thinking and this is not

acceptable to the person of the scientific age. His invented religion however, lacked an occult root, but he accepted all the traditions and rites which existed before, and even proposed having priests in this new creed, presenting himself as its prophet, but a prophet without a god. They say about him that he got his rites from Catholicism and he was criticized for this since

he disbelieved that religion but imitated and adopted its ceremonies and traditions. He was right in one thing, that the human being needs worship and devotion as well as the performance of a number of rites. He seems to have found a large number of followers in Europe and America and his house has become a center of pilgrimage for them. According to some Arabic books, he had fallen in love with a lady whose husband had been condemned to life imprisonment, but she died before he could win her and consequently he turned away from the world of the intellect to the world of sentiments and eventually started his creed of humanity.

This lady-love is considered by his followers as holy as Mary, the mother of Christ. But this school of humanity underwent a number of changes which gave it its present form. One of the questions concerning the human being is freedom and responsibility. Is the human being really

free and independent or does it have a responsibility and a mission to perform? According to the Quran, the human being is faced with no compulsion before God. On the contrary, the human being is created a free being with a fixed responsibility and mission. The Holy Quran refers to the human being as the vice-gerent of God, while no other Holy book has given such sanctity to the human being. Part III God says in the Quran, "And when your Lord said to the angels, I am setting on the earth a vice-gerent, they said, What will You set therein one who will do corruption there and shed blood ... But God answered, Assuredly I know what you know not." All that, is evidence of the human being's talents and potentialities.

You see, then, that Islam, which is a school of humanity, believes in the exalted position of the human being from a philosophical point of view. The Quran says again that God taught the human being the names of all things. Then it showed itself superior to the angels in this knowledge and God reproached the angels for what they did not know about humanity and while they supposed the human being to be a creature of wrath and lust, they had ignored the other side of its character. The angels confessed their ignorance and begged for His forgiveness.

Then God told the angels to prostrate themselves before His creature. The greatest interpretation that can be given to this command in order to show the human being's mission freedom and option is that God makes it the vice-gerent of and the successor to himself. God is the Creator and here He confers some of His creative power on the human being to benefit

from. Another question about the human being is its happiness and pleasure. I say briefly that the human being seeks pleasure. Where should it be found? Is it from within the self or from without, or from both within and without and in what proportion? Those who focus their attention on things outside themselves, wrongly supposing that the whole joy of life is this, have not been able to know themselves as human beings. They cannot consider the life within themselves as a source of joy and pleasure. Their exhilaration lies in a wine-cup, a cabaret. How well does Rumi describe a person addicted to drinking and direct that person to righteousness and away from evil saying, You are the symbol of existence, wherefore do you seek annihilation? You who are an ocean, what do you intend to become? Why do you make yourself indebted to wine? He continues to say that the human being is the essence and the world is the form. It is equally wrong to reject all external things and go to the other extreme of thinking that all joys must be sought internally. In some poems of Rumi we come across such an exaggeration when he says, Consider that the way of pleasure is all from within, not without And think it foolish to abandon customs and traditions. Someone is happy and intoxicated in the corner of prison, And another is full of grief in his garden. He does not mean that all external things should be put aside but, at the same time, it should not be supposed that all joys are found in material things. The self is the center of joy and there should be an equilibrium between the internal and external. There are many things to say about the human being. The school of thought which considers itself human should be able to answer certain questions in order to be accepted as a true human school. The human being was considered as the door of spirituality, that is, one could discover the spiritual work through one's own essence. Spirituality and humanism or religion and humanism are two inseparable matters. We cannot accept one of them and abandon the other. The contradiction which we claim to exist in various genuine humanistic schools lies in this point that when humanity suffered a downfall, however wrongly, namely through a change in the Ptolemaic astronomy, it should not make us doubt the exalted position of the human being as a goal in the course of creation. The human being is the goal of the universe whether the earth is the center of the universe or not. What does the phrase 'goal of the universe' mean? It means that nature moves in a certain direction in its evolutionary course whether we consider the human being a spontaneously created being or a continuation of other animal species. It makes no difference to this process whether we think it to possess a divine spirit or not. God has said, "We have breathed some of Our spirit into him." He has not said that the human being is the race of God. If He had said that the substance of which the human being is made

was brought from another world, then the human being would be a lofty and sacred being.

Another Part

To those of you whose philosophy is humanitarian, we say, is there a sentiment in the human being either called benevolence, goodness or service, or not? If you say there is not, then to attribute Such a quality to the human being would be as meaningless as calling him a stone or an animal. But the human being has the sentiment.

What is it? Some one may say the feeling of service in us is a kind of sub- stitution. What does that mean? When we witness some- thing and our humanitarian feeling is supposedly roused to go and instruct, serve and save the oppressed, we are told that if we ponder about it, we as human beings are putting ourselves in their place, thinking of them first as belonging to our group or our group related to them and then we substitute ourselves for them.

Then, the feeling of self- ishness which makes us defend ourselves is roused to defend the oppressed; otherwise there is no genuine sentiment in the human being to defend an oppressed person directly. The school of humanity must firstly answer whether such a sentiment exists in the human being or not? We answer that it does on the basis of its being appointed the vice-gerent of God and as the manifestation of divine generosity and benevolence.

It means that while the human bring in its Selfishness is duty-bound to show activity for its survival, tile whole of its existence is not selfishness. The human being also has benevolence, humanity, world- build ing and moral conscience. Some time ago when I was in Shiraz, an organization called the Happy Organization was introduced to me consisting of individuals with an internal sentiment and personal faith and a gathering of the deaf and dumb. I visited one of their classes.

For us fastidious people it would he exhausting to spend even one hour in such a class and watch them and their strange gesticulations for a remark. Their teacher was a Sayyid who was named after the first son of Imam and he was showing a great deal of interest and sympathy in those children even though his salary was less than an elementary school teacher's, for that organi- zation was short of funds. He taught them how to write and made them understand words with a great expendi- ture of effort.

What is this sentiment in the human being? It is the manifestation of humanity and its genuineness. Generally speaking, what is this sense of praise for the good and dis- like for the sick, even though they belong to the distant past? When we hear the names of Yazid and Shimir and re- member their wickedness and crimes, and on the other hand, when the names of the

martyrs of Karbala are mentioned, we have a feeling of hatred for the first group and a sense of wonder and respect for the latter.

What is the reason for it? Is it a class feeling which makes us think of ourselves as belonging to the group of the martyrs of Karbala and dislike Yazid and Shimr as we dislike our enemies?

Do we project our feelings of sympathy and hatred on to each group respectively, while in truth both are related to ourselves? If this is so then the person you consider your enemy will be no different from you. For in his turn he has the right to praise those you dislike and hate those you praise. On the contrary you may look upon it from a different angle which is not personal and individual but is related to the whole of humanity in which there is no question of personal dislike but the truth.

There your connection with the martyrs in your praise, and your dislike of their enemies, is not personal but general and universal. The school of humanity must supply an answer to what these feelings are and whence they arise and to such problems as the human being's honest love of gratitude, to some one who has done a good deed. When the genuineness of human values are discovered, then the question of the human being crops up. Is the human being who has such genuine qualities the same person spoken of by materialism? Is that person a machine, a satellite?

A machine, however big, is only big, if a machine is made a thousand times bigger than an Apollo, what could we say about it? We could say it is great, amazing and extraordinary but not noble or sacred. Even if it is made a billion times bigger, possessing a billion pieces, again it can only be called amazing and extraordinary but never noble, holy and honorable.

How can the declaration of human rights and communist philosophers who support human genuineness in various forms, speak of the human being's inherent prestige and sacredness without paying attention to God's words saying, "We breathed some of Our spirit into him," When they ascertain the genuineness of these values then they can realize the genuineness of the human being itself.

Now supposing we realize this genuineness of the human being is it only the human being who exists in this universe which is in infinite darkness? As a European says, is the human being only a drop of sweat in an ocean of poison created accidentally? Or is the human being a drop of sweet water in a sweet ocean? Does this small light represent universal light? Here the relation of the genuineness of the human being with God will become clear, for both of them are inseparable.

In the phrase of the Holy Quran, God is the light of the heavens and the earth, the word God is

not what Aristotle calls the first Cause for that is different from the God of Islam. His god is separate from and foreign to the universe. But the God Of Islam, when the phrase, He is the First, He is the Last, He is the Outer and He is the Inner. (57:3) is heard, it at once gives you a different view of the universe. Then you understand the meaning of all the genuine qualities within yourself and realize that there is a goal.

You will see that if you are a beam of light then a whole world of light exists and if you are a drop of sweat water it is because an infinite ocean of sweetness exists there and a ray of His light is within you. Islam is a humanistic school based on human criteria There is nothing in it based on wrong discriminations between human beings.

In Islam there exists no country, race, blood, zone and language. These things are not an evidence and criterion of privilege for human beings. That criterion in Islam is those human values. If it respects those values, it is because it believes in the genuineness of the human being and the universe; that is, it believes in God Almighty. That is why Islam is the only humanistic school that has for its foundation proper logic and there exists no other such .school in the world