

A Criterion of Human Values

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Personality is that which makes every individual different from others and by means of which we determine the real worth and station of a human being. Despite the fact that all persons possess common characteristics as well as common reactions particular to the human species and are similar in regard to the social instincts, nevertheless, every one of them possesses certain congenital and acquired qualities and certain particular gifts that distinguish him from the rest of his kind.

Personality does not consist of certain abstract characteristics of a person; rather, it constitutes the totality of an individual on which his identity is based, making him distinct from other individuals. It is a unity comprised of a group of qualities and inner motives. Moreover, only those qualities of a person are considered to be part of his personality which have some degree of permanence.

Although the principles that govern the growth and development of personality apply equally to all, but when these principles are applied to two individuals the results obtained are not the same; when the personalities of the two are compared, the difference and dissimilarity between the two is clearly noticeable.

To be sure, certain observable aspects of personality are susceptible to measurement, but it is not so simple to measure the deeper and inner aspects of personality and the hidden motives and urges of a person.

Some of the qualities play a more important role in the structure of personality than others. These qualities which are of a moral and ethical character are more significant from the viewpoint of personality. In fact, the 'character' of a person is his personality when viewed from the moral angle.

The impact of personality, its character and strength, as well as the acquisition of those qualities which go into the making of a person, play a more profound and fundamental role in the welfare and woes of individuals.

This is so because human felicity and misfortune is dependent, more than any external factor, on the level of thinking, intellect, spiritual merits and the inner causes at work within an individual. The differences of social and financial status have no definite and decisive impact on anyone's felicity.

An individual's spiritual foundations and the development of his personality are directly related

to his attachment to and evaluation of things. By nature he tries to establish a harmony between his personality and the objects to which he is attached, in order to become attuned to them. His behaviour and conduct are tuned to and in harmony with what he considers to be of greatest worth and value in life.

The different hierarchies of values represent different ways of thinking and differences of ethos. Here we have a way of judging the intrinsic worth of every person and a criterion for measuring his personality.

Those who base their success and happiness on materialistic values-both in respect of quality and quantity-directing their endeavours throughout life to the attainment of materialistic objectives, and totally neglect and reject the real values basic to the achievement of true happiness, they in fact shatter their human personality. There are many people who spend all their lives in unceasing pursuit of materialistic values, but are not ready to devote a moment of

their time to discovering the invaluable treasure represented by spiritual merits and virtues.

Scholars have different views about the extent to which the problems of personality are related to social psychology. Some of them regard personality to be a product of hereditary and physiological factors. Some others consider personality to be totally a product of social factors. The truth lies somewhere between these two extreme positions.

Family, school and social environment constitute the three most potent factors in laying the foundations of personality and determining the character of a person. Modern psychology gives much importance to the little-understood phenomenon of personality-something that did not receive much attention in the old psychology.

Without doubt, social factors play an important direct role in the constitution of personality and many of a man's qualities are those which have been formed by external environment. Few are those who can resist the power and influence of their environment and swim against the current.

Munn, in his work on psychology, says:

We would possess a very different personality if we had been brought up by the Eskimos, the Sioux, the Balinese, or by some other cultural group. Not only would we dress differently, live in a different kind of dwelling, eat different food, use different implements and weapons, speak a different language, and have different social customs, but we would also have a very different conception of the world and of our own place within it. Our egos and our superegos would differ greatly from what they are.

Cultural anthropologists have rightly placed much emphasis upon the "socio-cultural matrix" in which personalities develop. Children reared in the United States, acquire a way of life, and with

it, a personality, which an outside observer might well characterise as "typically American." But, even within this cultural matrix, aspects of personality may differ depending upon whether we are reared in the North or the South, the East or the West, whether we are reared in the country, in a city or a town, whether we have grown up in the slums or in the best residential section, whether our early life is spent in a house or an apartment; whether our parents are rich or poor, together or separated, cultured or uncultured, religious or irreligious; whether we go to a standard, substandard or superior school; whether we have, or do not have, close friends; whether they conform, or fail to conform, to the mores of our culture; and so on.

Such socio-cultural influences are focussed upon a child from the moment of birth and they continue to influence him all the days of his life.^[1] There are many instinctive activities which can generally be shaped and moulded by environmental conditions. Thus for the development of the creative aspect of these activities, it is necessary to alter and improve before anything else those conditions which can reinforce or weaken these essential activities. Also, from an educational angle and from the viewpoint of influence on habits, the effects of every human action must be properly analysed in order to understand how a certain inclination may be reinforced or checked.

From the viewpoint of laying the foundations of emotional growth and moulding a proper social environment, the years of childhood are the most important formative years. The early training is imparted through parents and other close relatives within the family. Right conduct and speech on the part of the teachers have a decisive impact on determining the pattern of the child's life and in contributing to the development of his personality and the blossoming of his inner capabilities. On the contrary, improper and unprincipled methods of training harm the development of the child's personality and repress his inner capacities. The young seedling that has recently come out of the ground can easily be bent and made to grow in any direction that one wishes. The beauty and grace of the future tree depends on the attention paid to its development during the period when it is still a young plant.

Similarly, the direction of development of personality can be determined in the early years of life and the future personality of the child formed by providing proper conditions and means. Hence it is possible to picture the future personality of a child and the type of his psychological reactions to adverse conditions that he may encounter by studying the conditions of his family and his situation in it.

The cause of the backwardness and stunted growth of an individual or society in life should be

sought in the shortcomings of their personality. Today, specialists doing research on personality, in some respects, also pay attention to deeper factors. The extent of a man's intelligence and problem-solving ability is revealed during critical situations. Those who also pay attention to their inner reactions in their decisions and activities attain a greater sense of self-assurance and independence and acquire a greater confidence in their own personality. As a result they are more efficient and effective than others who pay greater attention to external factors. Exclusive attention to external factors leads one not to pay the due attention to his own self. Thought and carefulness play an effective role in the development of the mind and intelligence and the edification of personality and give additional worth and dignity to one's social visage.

At a time when shallow and superficial people are after the satisfaction of their vain desires and aims, endeavouring to fulfil them by resorting to various kinds of means, the person with higher goals becomes keener in his pursuit of spiritual delights by relying on the power of his intellect. Therefore, those who possess the power of thought and an active intellect and benefit from every opportunity to pursue their worthy and sublime thoughts, are nearer to true happiness in this world.

Schopenhauer says:

A calm temperament, optimism, energy and vigour are the most important factors responsible for man's happiness.

A wise man even in a state of isolation can enjoy the sweetest of moments with the means of his thoughts and fancies, whereas the ignorant man, no matter how much he should vary his diversions and undertake enormous expenditures, cannot free himself from the malaise that tortures his body and soul. The optimistic and patient man can in times of penury conduct his life with contentment and forbearance, whereas the greedy man, even if he should possess all the riches in the world, is always downcast and dissatisfied.

The man of vigorous thought and sound intellect refrains from superficial and transitory pleasures, to attain which the people of the world kill themselves.

Socrates that intellectual, once on observing the ornamental stuff that was put on exhibition remarked: "How many numberless things exist in this world of which man has no need." Hence the most important factor effective in the happiness of men is personality.[2]

Personality should not be considered as possessing a single dimension or measured with a single criterion and standard. Such a wrong approach is hazardous and leads us away from facts. Many people when confronted with a certain inadequacy or defect neglect the wonderful compensating power of the other dimensions of their personality and equate the inadequacy of

one of its dimensions as the defect of the total personality. Such a baseless notion drives them into a debilitating anguish, a condition that may further result in irremediable harms and irreparable dangers.

Many historical crises and much ruthless bloodshed in history have been the outcome of harmful prejudices based on a wrong conception of personality in which a single dimension is made the sole criterion. An unfounded pride inspired by such prejudice has led to many regrettable events in the course of history.

Many people, while possessing certain remarkable abilities, suffer from a deficiency in certain matters. This inadequacy becomes a hindrance in their activity and progress. At times they ascribe their psychological inadequacies to a bad luck, thus holding other factors responsible for their own weakness. As a consequence, they carry the burden of this weakness throughout their lives, whereas with a measure of will and effort they could overcome that inadequacy and strengthen their spiritual values.

As long as you continue to rationalise your own inadequacies and allow ruinous thoughts to occupy your mind, you shall be reinforcing them. Any success in this matter depends directly on the extent one is able to take a serious decision, for the possibilities of developing oneself are unlimited and promise extraordinary results.

On the level of ideation, the important point is what kind of person one aspires to become. This reality is revealed with transparent clarity in times of life when one has to make a critical decision, selecting a single course from among the various alternatives that occur to the mind. There is always an intense conflict going on among the human urges and instincts. each trying to pull us in a direction different from that of another- Thought and reflection resolve this conflict and replace these divergent goals with one integrated objective.

It should be remembered that there does not exist a finished and final personality behind the character, conduct and activities of a person. Rather, it is constituted of non-permanent and complicated habits and behavioural modes that gradually fall into mutual harmony with one another. Whenever there arises a new conflict between the urges, the mind endeavours to establish a kind of balance and equilibrium between them and to bring about a state of truce.

For this purpose, it sometimes brings about a compromise between the various urges and thereby obtains at least a temporary state of peace and satisfaction. Just like the physiological mechanisms that automatically come into action for establishing an equilibrium in the body whenever there occurs the smallest amount of disturbance, the mind, too, acts to resolve the complicated inner problems and avert obvious dangers by resorting to the means at its command.

For the purpose of achievement of mental balance and peace in a disturbed and baffled mind, there exist certain ways some of which are reasonable and satisfactory and some others that are irrational as well as harmful.

The psychologists offer the following analysis in this regard: An effective way of averting danger is to encounter and face mental conflicts and their consequences with utmost candidness and courage and reduce the intensity of this conflict and the pressure of some of the urges, thus bringing about such a reconciliation among them that they can enter the arena of consciousness without causing any trouble. But often we cannot find an ideal solution for the resolution of these mental conflicts and are forced to take resort in such means as repression, introversion, extroversion, and self-deception.

Sometimes the mental conflicts remain unknown and indistinct, or they do not come to one's attention. In this case, they give rise to a particular kind of behaviour that does not harmonise at all with one's personality and the person concerned has no knowledge of this disharmony. As a result, his consciousness and self-perception get divided into two different streams, none of which is in harmony with the other, making the person appear double-faced and odd to others.

Thoughts, plans and urges are always in a state of conflict and instability in the human mind. Those who have a divided personality privately act in an incredible manner. The politicians who always scream and pretend to defend the working class belong to this group. "We should alleviate the hardships of the toiling class", they proclaim, but as soon as they succeed, they take measures which make the life of workers a thousand times gloomier and more difficult. To this group belong all those who have two different ways of thinking and have two conflicting

[personalities.]³

The Basic Role of Spirituality in Education

The vital role of education as the supreme factor responsible for the strength and vigour of societies has been admitted by all schools of thought. It is not possible to ignore its fundamental role in the welfare of individual men. However, what is crucial is the real meaning of 'education' as well as the educational principles and criteria that are acknowledged as standards for evaluating the individual's intellectual and spiritual personality and applied to guide human beings to a free and happy life.

Since man is made of the two constituents of spirit and body, we require an educational principle that may harmonise his bodily urges with the spirit. This principle can either be one

based on religion or one that is a product of the human mind. When we compare the two, we clearly observe the primary and authentic character of the educational principle based on religion. That is because the religious motive is innate in man's nature and is evident in him

before he becomes the victim of various kinds of blindness.

If there be no external factor to obstruct the course of his innate religious inclination, early in life its radiance illuminates man's heart and conscience. As a result, he makes himself conform to this inner urge, and with the increasing awareness of this hidden power he becomes ever

more compliant to its dictates.

On the other hand, the philosophers, with their divergent perceptions of facts cannot attain a unanimity of opinion regarding education and man's spiritual refinement. And even if supposedly such a unanimity were attainable, that cannot, as a matter of principle, serve as a means of educating the masses who are incapable of understanding philosophical discourses.

That is because the force of moral restraint should emerge from the depths of the human spirit in order to meet the demand of man's innate urges; otherwise the prescriptions of ethical philosophy, being a man-made product, are incapable of penetrating to the hidden reality that lies at the core of man's being and are thus inadequate for educating individuals and leading

them to a life of felicity.

Even for individuals who accept to abide by them, these man-made rules would be a tiresome burden to be carried about. Hence, on this basis, we must admit the superiority of the religious principle—which is rooted in the depths of man's inner being and conscience and is an eternal reality that lies at the centre of his innate nature—over all other methods that have been suggested in the field of education, and adopt it in order that human endeavour may attain its

desired goals.

It was through the admission of the pre-eminence of this principle that man found a convinced faith in his genuine duties before humanity fell into the captivity of materialism. As a consequence he became intensely committed to it, and all the sublimest of human souls in the course of history have discovered the delight resulting from compliance to its commands and

obeyed it with dedication.

Briefly, this is the same path as has been shown by the prophets and revealed scriptures, which allows human nature to flow in its true channel and satisfies all the aspects of man's being. Its objective is no other than to guide human nature to its goal of eternal felicity. Hence, if this primary principle be made the basis of education, all individuals would be able to advance on the path of development and perfection in its light and remain secure from every kind of

deviation.

A glance at the people who lead a mechanistic existence-a phenomenon of this perverse era-reveals the fact that despite the remarkable advancements made by man in the field of science and the many breakthroughs made in the knowledge of physical nature and in unravelling its mysteries, he has, unfortunately, undergone a retrograde and decadent course in regard to the knowledge of himself.

Not only this, he has failed to rescue his world-which is his only nursery and place of development- from devastation and wretchedness; rather, his multifarious sciences themselves have become a means of its destruction and chaos. Moreover, the human spirit itself has fallen captive to profound nescience in the valley of an illusory civilisation.

The Western world has made man a means of its goals of industrialisation, and it takes what is means for an end in itself. As a consequence it has created a society based either on the principle of conflict on the plane of the individual or that of conflict among social classes. None of these two kinds of societies are worthy of man. Man cannot attain his true humanity without resolving the contradiction between his own being and civilisation.

Eric Fromm writes:

Modern man's feeling of isolation and powerlessness is increased still further by the character which all his human relationship have assumed. The concrete relationship of one individual to another has lost its direct and human character and has assumed a spirit of manipulation and instrumentality. In all social and personal relations the laws of the market are the rule. It is obvious that the relationship between competitors has to be based on mutual human indifference...

Not only the economic but also the personal relations between men have this character of alienation; instead of relations between human beings, they assume the character of relations between things. But perhaps the most important and the most devastating instance of this spirit of instrumentality and alienation is the individual's relationship to his own self. Man does not only sell commodities, he sells himself and feels himself to be a commodity. The manual labourer sells his physical energy; the businessman, the physician, the clerical employee, sell their "personality."

They have to have a "personality" if they are to sell their products or services. This personality should be pleasing, but besides that its possessor should meet a number of other requirements: he should have energy, initiative, this, that, or the other, as his particular position may require. As with any other commodity it is the market which decides the value of these human qualities, yes, even their very existence.

If there is no use for the qualities a person offers, he has none, just as an unsaleable

commodity is valueless though it might have its use value. Thus, then self confidence, the "feeling of self", is merely an indication of what others think of the person, It is not he who is [convinced of his value regardless of popularity and his success on the market.^[4]

The Development of Personality in Islamic Thought

Every existent has an individuality special to itself, and nothing can possibly be conceived without taking into regard its individuality. Hence judgements and conditions apply only to an existent that possesses its own particular individuality. Moreover, the perfection of a being is realised in its outward and inward aspects only when it has a sensible as well as a spiritual personality. The sensible and outward personality of human individuals is evident, but their spiritual personality depends on certain human qualities and spiritual merits so that their being is not confined to their sensible personality.

This is true of individuals as well as nations and societies, which with their specific characteristics are scattered around different parts of the world. The spiritual personality of any society relates to the extent of its knowledge of realities and its approach to life.

It is essential for the development of personality to take into consideration all the human dimensions and potentialities, so that an overall balance and equilibrium, necessary for a balanced growth, is achieved and a balanced personality is formed. The Islamic approach in

this regard consists of taking into consideration all the innate characteristics of man. It takes into view all his urges and instincts, and with a perfect knowledge of the capacities that man has been endowed with, it guides and develops them in a balanced manner. Neither it suppresses any capacity by diminishing its due role, nor gives any of them an undue predominance. It determines the extent of each capacity's role by keeping in view the overall

welfare of the human being, so that the human personality develops in an optimum manner. The human soul, like everything else in life, in its own orbit and within the totality that is man, is always in a state of growth and development in accordance with the laws of its nature. It grows and develops with every movement that it makes. During childhood years, the field of imagination is expansive, but the intellect is weak and closer to the world of the senses than to the world of the spirit. However, gradually there is a movement from the simple to the complex as he undertakes bigger tasks. Imagination then mingles with facts and draws closer to thought and intellection. As a result of this movement, his maturity and constructive abilities constantly increase.

If this perpetual development does not follow the course of Divine guidance and is not nourished properly, it inclines towards weakness and disease, requiring remedial measures.

Because in the same way as the capacity to develop is innate in man, so also there is the vulnerability to degenerate and decay. Both of them are innate and none of them is imposed by anything outside the soul, and nature too, despite the apparent change associated with each of these two opposite directions, is itself unchangeable.

The guidance provided by Islam is the sublimest and the most valuable of approaches aimed at the development of personality and sublimation of nature, as well as mobilisation of the ontic constituents of man's being in conformity with their natural configuration.

In the view of Islam, real development lies in movement towards truth and in uniting with the Divine glory and beauty. One who has been brought up and nourished by Islamic principles rejects all misleading temptations, whether they relate to the servitude to men, or submission to his own base lusts and desires, or to other power in the world of creation.

Human beings should develop their personality within the framework of this objective and elevate their consciousness, because this path of development and progress has been proposed by someone who is the Creator of man, Who is well aware of his nature and needs. It is vital for every person to know the situation of man and the ultimate end of his existence so that he may discover through this knowledge the role of man, his relationship to the world, and the frontiers of his responsibilities.

However, such an awareness must be followed by action and movement and this knowledge must be transformed into a dynamic force, so that the inner self is mobilised toward the realisation of the ultimate purpose assigned to human existence in this celestial plan. It is then

that man can attain to an enduring sublime life commensurate with his divine destiny.

Islam came to build a unique community that establishes God's law on earth, a community that should lead humanity and deliver it from deviate paths and misleading schools of thought that lead it into suffering, a community with a correct world view, which is the greatest means of man's progress. It offers a world view which is in tune and harmony with all the essential constituents of the human personality-i.e. intellect, thought, emotion, and all other elements of man's being and his faculties of perception-and is capable of bringing up intellectually and spiritually as well as from the viewpoint of conduct and action, unique and magnificent examples of humanity.

It reminds man that the pursuit of lusts leads the soul into a darkness where his light-the principle that draws him naturally towards human merit and excellence-is concealed by the enveloping gloom.

Accordingly, it is necessary that man should get rid of this obstructing darkness if he is to discover his genuine functions and identify the true and beneficial values, so that he may get a

positive view of life and fulfil his urge for perfection by adopting a sound educational policy. Finally, Islam intends to bring up an integrated human personality which, on the physical plane, utilises all the possibilities offered by the world of physical nature and on the spiritual plane benefits from the unlimited opportunities offered by the world of spirit and immortality. It does not cease reminding the individual that within this corporeal, earthly frame there is a celestial light, a sacred fire, and a Divine breath that can raise him to the exalted station of being God's vicegerent

The Constructive Role of the Intellect and Faith

Islam considers the faculty of the intellect to have a fundamental role in the development of human beings and emphasises its employment for free thought and action throughout life, so that every person may put to use his powers of cognition in order to realise his genuine humanity.

Nevertheless, it does not place an excessive reliance on this fundamental element and does not consider it sufficient to extinguish the flames of desires. The intellect should not play an ineffectual role in the transitions of life and it must be capable of raising man from the animal plane to a plane above the rule of instincts and lusts.

From the viewpoint of Islam that which distinguishes man from other animals is not limited to his perceptual and rational faculties. Rather it is faith and a special mode of cognition that makes man superior to all other animals. Here he has been burdened with responsibility by the system of creation and so, in a way fitting his human functions, he must employ his faith and cognitive faculties throughout the ups and downs of life and in the conduct of his individual and social affairs.

For his salvation and happiness man stands in need of a spiritual means that may give him a clear vision of life. That illuminating agent is insight in relation to the sacred Essence of God, which is the sole means that can remove the scales of ignorance and every kind of deviance from the eyes of the soul and bring about spiritual resurrection.

The faith in God produces many results of a positive character in human life. It is the source of the individual's freedom and a change that plays a crucial role in the growth of the human personality- When the effects of faith in God appear in all the vital functions, there is a decisive reduction in the pressure of animal urges that helps liberate the individual from the terrible grip of the carnal self.

That is because faith in the Sustainer makes the individual steadfast in his resistance to passing corporeal pleasures and expands the soul's capacities; whereas turning one's back to

God and spirituality and inclining towards such pleasures produces emotional stagnation and the degeneration of one's spiritual personality, bringing man down from the sublime station of humanity and moral excellence to the decadent level of savageness and nescience.

None of the systems of education that are products of the human mind has the power and ability to bring under control man's unbridled greed and psychic deviations, because these new systems of education rely solely on reason and science.

Max Planck, the well-known German physicist, says;

Mankind in its daily life stands in need of a principle, a principle the need for which is more pressing than the thirst for scientific knowledge. It is necessary that man should possess a source of guidance other than that of pure reason. The law of causality is the guide of science.

It is here that reason should give way to morality, and scientific knowledge to religious faith.[\[5\]](#)

Accordingly, as long as the light of guidance does not illuminate the world's horizons and human hearts are not revived through the growth of the religious motive, human principles and doctrines cannot bring about the vigour and sublimity in society necessary for it to shoulder the burden of civilisation and its crucial responsibilities.

It should be noted that Islam never demands abstinence from the legitimate pleasures that have been created by God for the benefit of His creatures. On the one hand the Noble Qur'an declares that it does not befit the exalted station of humanity that man should get drowned in the fierce waves of lust, sink into neglect and ignorance of the realities of life, and curtail the scope of his thought:

Tempting and pleasing to (short-sighted) people is the love of carnal lusts-women, children, heaped-up piles of gold and silver, horses of mark, cattle and tillage. All that is the enjoyment of the present life, but God-with Him is the fairest resort. (3:14)

On the other hand, it not only acknowledges the role of material things in the life of man, but even condemns the negative kind of asceticism and abstinence from lawful pleasures: Say (O Prophet): 'Who has forbidden the ornament of God which He brought forth for His servants and the good things of His providing?' Say: 'These in this world are for those who have faith and on the Day of Resurrection they shall have purer and better than these.' So do

We expound Our sing for a people who have a clean perception and knowledge. (7:32)

Submission to transitory materialistic pleasures amounts to degrading the faculty of thought and granting them a fundamental role in life. The glamour of mundane enjoyments draws a veil over the hearts of hollow and misguided persons lacking will that stops the Diving light from shining upon it. As a result, they are deprived of thought and constructive ideas without realising it themselves.

Islam gives to man a wholesome personality, the power of thoughts and a valuable stability, so that the individual may properly fulfil his basic role in the making of himself and society and liberate himself from the bondage of lust without being deprived of bodily pleasures.

The person presented by Islam as a finished product of its education is a thoughtful human being, positive, active and disciplined, a human being whose cognition, thoughts and conduct, and, ultimately, all the aspects of whose life are informed with a peculiar moderation and harmony. His free and well-developed psyche brings about an inner balance that not only gives him the capacity not to get submerged in earthly pleasures and the world of matter but to rise to the sublimest peaks in its ascent towards its sacred ideal by elevating itself to a sphere above the gravity of the mundane.

In Islamic teaching, self-purification is the first stage in man's ascent towards human merit and excellence. The Noble Qur'an mentions it as the preparatory stage for instruction in knowledge and science-

It is He Who raised up from among the unlettered Arabs a Messenger from among them, to recite His signs to them and to purify them (from the filth of vices and corrupt morals), and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom, though before that they were all in manifest error. (62:2)
This basic principle is a criterion and measure for gauging man's reality. Knowledge and material power are not worthy criteria for measuring man's reality, because they are not comprehensive and take into consideration only a single aspect of that reality.

Obviously the results of any measurement are erroneous to the extent of the error in the measuring standard. Of course, knowledge is man's distinctive characteristic, a genuine human product and achievement, and the foundations of his life rest upon knowledge. But if man should be rich in respect of the genuine human aspect that lifts him over the world of the corporeal to a higher realm, he is easily capable of compensating what he lacks from the viewpoint of knowledge and learning, whereas knowledge alone cannot compensate for a lack of humanity.

Whenever man has been able to make an ascent through self-purification and in respect of the human criterion while also benefiting from the results of science, he has been truly capable of making an all-round progress on an extensive level.

'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, may peace be upon him, says concerning the value of self-purification and acquisition of moral virtues: If, supposedly, we did not have to hope for paradise and fear from hell and had there been no promise of reward or any threat of punishment, it would still behove us to seek moral virtues and excellences, because the acquisition of desirable qualities and the practice of virtue leads to happiness and felicity in life

and is one of the important means of salvation.[\[6\]](#)

He also says:

Dominate your desires before they become violent and defiant, because if rebellious urges are allowed to grow in their aggressiveness and obstinacy, they will come to dominate you and pull you in whatever direction they like. In that case you will lose the power to resist them. [\[7\]](#) One

who is a slave of his lust is many times more abject than an actual slave.[\[8\]](#)

One who dominates his desires preserves his human dignity and worth.[\[9\]](#)

Will Durant says:

Our urges and motives are like the wind that drives a sailing ship. However, the ship's sails should not be left to themselves, in which case they will carry us like slaves wherever they wish. Everyone in his lifetime has come across one of those who are caught in the bondage of greed, lust, or bellicosity.

Unrestrained freedom of each qualities is self-destructive. You have heard the story of the sons of Cyrus left free by their nurses to do anything they wished and who as a result grew up to be base and corrupt persons. Hence the domination of reason over desires and urges is the real essence of wisdom and the instrument of self-restraint. Self-control is the most significant thing necessary for self-development.[\[10\]](#)

The locus and criterion of responsibility throughout the Islamic system is free will. Man has been given the freedom of thought and the freedom to translate it into action, which is his distinctive characteristic¹ so that he may direct his effort, which is the real driving force behind progress, in the way of attaining true humanity.

Although man is not free in respect of the urges and drives that motivate him, he is completely free in regard to the manner in which they are satisfied. By the means of the will, which governs his acts and faculties of perception, he can turn to the higher plane of psychological and intellectual activity and develop an outstanding and worthy personality for himself, and with a constancy of effort, advance further each day towards human felicity and a respectable station in society. Or, on the contrary, he can corrupt and destroy his personality by nurturing his personal qualities on the basis of conformity to destructive urges.

Imam al-Sadiq, may peace be upon him, said:

If two days of someone's life are equal in respect of the development of higher human qualities, he is a loser in the bargain of his life. The person whose today is better spent than his yesterday is one who is worthy of being envied by others. But the one whose every day passes in the condition of perpetual retrogression is one who is deprived of God's mercy and favour. And the one who does not find a progress within himself in respect of spirituality and moral

virtues and merits. such a person is prone to loss and retrogression, and death is better than
[life for a person who treads the path of retrogression].[11]

Paul Clement Jagot writes

In order to avoid mental dispersion and the division of personality, which easily put out the idea of self-control, one must resort to a scrupulous division of one's time. On the other hand, the ordering of life according to a premeditated programme diminishes impressionability and prepares the unconscious mind for balanced thought.

For this purpose, it is sufficient to let one's imagination delve for some moments upon the foreseeable tasks of the next day. This can be done just before going to bed or at some other appropriate time. This action leads to the formation of an invaluable habit, which is orderliness. Those who lack this order but do not imagine that they would achieve it the very first day in a miraculous manner, when they make some kind of plans to achieve it, observe from the beginning that their habitual disorderliness vanishes in certain respects in the course of the very first sessions. As progress follows, it alternately follows a rising and falling curve. However, this should not be a cause for surprise, for the leading thoughts, after alternate variations, lead to realisation of the purpose and create a background of order, which leads to an increase in the level of daily activity. This increase, together with greater means of action, broaden one's possibilities with greater fruitfulness, continuous acquisition of knowledge and more profitable opportunities.[12]

The struggle against one's destructive urges and the carnal self is without doubt a very difficult task. Victory over such inner inclinations has been considered in the Islamic school of thought as the most salient sign of an individual's superiority and capability. It is a matter of great pride for man to be able to begin the programme of his self-development by subjugating his inner urges in order to raise his personality to the highest levels of sublimity.

Imam al-Sadiq, may peace be upon him, said:

Before death approaches you and brings about a separation between your soul and body, restrain your soul from such desires as are harmful for it. Strive to liberate your soul in the same way as you toil for your livelihood, for without doubt your soul is entirely depended for its welfare on your conduct and character.[13]

Dr. Alexis Carrel says:

Spontaneous mental growth is always inadequate. Man does not attain complete mental growth without the intervention of the will. Everyone knows that the development of muscles and bodily members depends on conscious effort and one cannot become a champion without

regular exercises. Similarly, one must make efforts to develop his mental faculties. If the pupil has no will to learn, the most capable of teachers cannot teach him anything. The study of a set of morals does not make anyone righteous, nor does our spirit yield to compulsion. Like one's character, the formation of personality, as Bergson says, depends upon one's own efforts. To this end, one must draw upon all one's physical and spiritual capacities and order one's inner life in an ideal manner, developing a powerful spirit within himself. This marvel occurs everyday in the course of human history, and it is mostly from humble families that great men arise, but everyone, learned or illiterate, poor or rich, young or old, can, if he will, draw upon the spiritual energy that lies in the depths of his being.[14]

'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

The worst kind of poverty and inadequacy is the deficiency of one's psyche and personality.[15] That is because spiritual inadequacies lead man more often to wretchedness and misery than material shortcomings. When the soul becomes sick and darkness is cast upon it, a wrong mode of thinking and an unhealthy state of feelings and emotions lead the person into wrong conduct and behaviour. When that happens, he loses his sense of reality as well as his inner spiritual vision and abuses his inner creative powers as well as the available material means. The development of personality is subject to the criteria of values in life. The development of personal qualities and merits is also based on values. Should man pursue purity and moral excellence in a resolute and steadfast manner, his mind is prepared to accept the qualities of spiritual purity, and should he be after impurities and moral defilement, he will advance towards the precipice of destruction. It is inconceivable that someone who is in pursuit of vice should

turn out to be clean and pure in the end.

If man does not confine his freedom within certain reasonable limits and keep the arena of his rebellious urges confined within certain bounds, he will yield to their slavery and they will carry him off in every direction. Obviously, that means self-abasement and debasing one's human dignity. This indignity and humiliation keeps him from attaining the perfection worthy of him, and his spirit and thought will never be able to make their ascent towards wider and more expansive horizons.

He will, then, lose even the inclination to rise over the plane of corporeal matters although he may have the sufficient power to make such an ascent.

The only way to bring about a balance and equilibrium between the ascent of the soul and the pressure and heaviness that pulls the soul down towards decadence and fall is establishment of a steady and enduring bond between God and man, for the greater the degree of one's separation from God, the stronger is the inclination towards deviance in his being.

Islam sows the seeds of godfearing and piety in the heart of every person. At the same time it does not permit within its realm any separation between faith and conduct so that he may always keep God in view, in his thought, perception and conduct-a God aware of all the secrets of his heart. Moreover, it stirs up the love of God within his being and the desire to seek His good pleasure.

As long as human virtues lack a firm and stable basis, they can have no firm foothold. Faith is the natural companion of virtue, into which it breaths life and gives it sincerity and steadiness. In this way everyone is made to feel that purity and rectitude are things that must be established within his inner self, not some abstract ideals relating to human merit and a positive personality that exists only in the imagination while one's conduct continues in some other course without realising any spiritual benefits in actual life.

In order to keep the waves of desires in check, Islam always makes use of the power of self-restraint. This orderly, aware and purposive restraint involves the soul's accounting of itself on the basis of acknowledged principles based on wisdom and design. By this means it brings about a state of harmony among the divergent urges of the individual, as an independent personality as well as a member of society, and imposes such limits upon them as to stabilise the individual's position vis-à-vis society and the society's in relation to the individual, whereas man himself has always given precedence to one of these over the other, sacrificing the individual for social ends or neglecting society for the sake of individual benefit.

When such a harmony comes to exist in the human being, both the individual and society are set in order and all people become balanced in their thoughts and conduct and everyone will carry out his duties in accordance with his God-given nature.

But when the vision is obstructed and thought stagnates, man is kept from perceiving realities. Then he can no longer realise the defects of his personality and his inadequacies, to the extent that if he were to come to know them he would be struck with amazement or even recoil in disdain.

'Ali, may peace be upon him, said: If one were to realise the defects and shortcomings of his personality, he would regard them with disdain and aversion.[16]

Schopenhauer says: In the same way as man does not feel the weight of his own body, he does not notice his own ugly habits, unseemly acts, and unworthy conduct. On the contrary he is always attentive to the defects and shortcomings of others. Others, like a mirror, reflect our defects and shortcomings,

but we don't notice them and imagine that the image we observe in the mirror belongs to someone else.^[17]

Hence one must awaken one's soul from its slumber so that it may open its eyes and see facts. This awakening makes a most wonderful impact on the being of man and in this state he feels as if he has found a new life and his being has undergone a renewal. That is because the opening of the soul's eyes affects one's entire life with all its great expanse and sets a decadent personality back on the course of development.

'Ali, may peace be upon him, describes the significant role of thought and contemplation in these words:

Accustom yourself to thought and contemplation, because that will deliver you from misguidance and reform your character and conduct.^[18] The contemplation of good actions leads man to perform good acts.^[19]

The people's immersion in thought concerning some thing is the preparatory stage for that thing's coming into existence.^[20]

Dr. Marden, writing about thought and its beneficial results, says: In this world thought is the regulator of everything. This fact did not come to light for a long time and was hidden from common view. When people realised the significance of thought, they regarded it with veneration and acclaim.

However, they imagined it to be a fixed and unchanging power exclusively possessed by exceptional and rare minds. It was only in recent years that the art of thinking has been subjected to study and research and attracted the attention of the populace. These studies have shown that we can modify our moral characteristics with the help of thought, alter the external factors of our life-or at least the influence of these factors on ourselves-and, as a result, attain happiness and success. In any case, the educative possibilities of thought are unlimited and its results are inexhaustible.

Every thought is a stroke of the chisel that carves out the marble of life. Hence we must decide to focus our thinking on nobler ends, utilise it for worthy goals, and muster all our will power to implement this resolution.

With all your conscious faculties you must be convinced that thought has absolute sovereignty over your fortunes, and that every thought has its own share in shaping your destiny. You must believe that if you direct your thoughts in a worthy direction, good fortune will come to you in a very natural and easy manner.

The role played by thought in the material and spiritual flow of life is gradually becoming ever more evident, and those who disagree with one another on various issues are unanimous on

this matter. The results of practical experience have convinced the most sceptical of persons of the truth of this matter and technical experiments have further reinforced the views of [thinkers in this regard].[21]

The Harms of Evil Thoughts

In the same way as positive and sublime thoughts lead man to perform fruitful actions, so also filthy thoughts drive man towards impurity and defilement. For man is a thinking creature; he first thinks and then translates his thoughts into action.

When improper thoughts make way into the depths of man's being and spread like weeds, positive and good thoughts, which are like beautiful plants, are gradually eliminated and their place is taken by evil thoughts. As a result of these satanic thoughts one is prepared to commit ugly acts that blacken the heart and destroy one's life.

Every tree develops and grows gradually and yields its sweet or bitter fruits. An evil thought, too, is like a seed that will not yield any fruit except an evil deed. Man involuntarily entertains and pursues evil thoughts and with the passage of time they gradually run their roots in all corners of his soul and grow into a big and strong tree.

The attainment of happiness and felicity, however, requires a soul at peace and a heart that is pure. If the soul's window is closed on ugly thoughts, room is created in it for the growth of good thoughts.

Some great man was asked, "Where can happiness be found?" He replied, "In the beauty of human thought." Hence one must block the stream at its source and stop improper thoughts from entering one's mind. Further, one must accustom oneself to thinking about fruitful and worthy matters.

'Ali, may peace be upon him, said:

Nurture in yourselves a love of contemplation and accustom yourselves to seeking forgiveness, for that cleanses you of sins and impurities and increases your reward.[22]

Habituate yourself to purity of intention and sincerity of purpose, so that you may succeed in your efforts and endeavours. [23] Although the personal qualities that have already been moulded are not so simple to alter, but if one makes a persisting effort to eradicate undesirable characteristics that lead the personality into decadence and destruction, given the significant capacity of the human being to acquire desirable habits, human merits and virtues gradually take roots in the mind in a natural manner.

In order to attain to noble qualities one must concentrate his attention on commendable traits, for through self-suggestion of such virtues and meritorious qualities and their development

one can obtain brilliant results.

Paul Clement Jagot writes:

Self-suggestion arranges another array of troops in the battle against habit, instead of itself launching an attack, it introduces certain ideas into the unconscious which are opposed to those originated by a particular habit. In this way, it produces a gradual mental sublimation in the vital faculties.

The first point to be kept in view for achieving this goal is to pay close attention to the fact that every habit can be abandoned.

"I can liberate myself totally from its evil, and I shall achieve my goal"; this one should constantly go on repeating to oneself. In accordance with the law of self-suggestion this conviction gradually takes on an absolute aspect as a result of repetition. The unconscious records the above suggestion, and removes the unpleasant feeling of unavoidable compulsion and futility of resistance that is produced as a result of enslavement to habit and whose futility can be proved through sound experience.

If I analyse the apparent satisfaction produced in me when yielding to an (undesirable) habit, I will be convinced that this mental satisfaction is insignificant and it would be better instead to [enjoy avoiding the harms that always accompany this kind of erroneous conduct.]²⁴

The Relation Between Goals and the Development of Personality

That which leads man towards his sublime station and a well-developed personality is the possession of worthy goals in life. The higher these goals are, the more developed his personality will be.

Without doubt, Islam offers goals that are vast and a horizon that is wide and all-inclusive. The Muslims who grew up under the sublime teachings of the Noble Prophet of Islam, may God bless him and his Household, were able to establish a profound relationship with the Source of existence and to purify their souls. Through this means they attained to sublime and distinguished personalities. Basically, it were these worthy and invaluable goals that constantly drove them onwards.

Allport, the well-known American psychologist, writes:

Intentions, as I use the term, are complex proprie characteristics of personality. Intentional characteristics represent above all else the individual's primary modes of addressing himself to the future. As such they select stimuli, guide inhibitions and choices, and have much to do with the process of adult becoming...

Personality is not what one has, but rather the projected outcome of his growth. Similarly,

Spranger views the character of an individual in terms of his approximation to an ideal type (an ultimately self-consistent value system). It is the orientation that is important. From this point of view we may modify slightly our contention that complex levels of structure influence

becoming. More precisely stated, it is the unfinished structure that has this dynamic power.

A finished structure is static, but a growing structure, tending toward a given direction of closure, has the capacity to subsidiate and guide conduct in conformity with its movement....

To summarise: the most comprehensive units in personality are broad intentional dispositions future pointed. These characteristics are unique for each person, and tend to attract, guide,

inhibit the more elementary units to accord with the major intentions themselves...

To feel oneself meaningfully linked to the whole of Being is not possible before puberty. This fact helps to explain the one-sided emphasis we encounter in many psychological discussions of religion. Becoming has been much more thoroughly studied for the years preceding puberty

than for adolescent and adult years. It is, therefore, understandable that the factor influencing the religion of childhood should loom large in our present view: familism, dependence,

authority, wishful thinking and magical practice.

Since, however, the process of becoming continues throughout life, we rightly expect to find the fully developed sentiment only in the adult reaches of personality. The adult mind, provided that it is still growing, stretches its rational capacities as far as it can with the logic of

induction,

deduction, and a weighing of probabilities. While the intellect continues to exert itself, the individual finds that he needs to build aspiring defences against the intellect's almost certain failure. He learns that to surmount the difficulties of a truculent world he needs also faith and

love. Thus religion, engaging as it does reason, faith, and love, becomes for him morally true.

Most religious people claim that it is also metaphysically true because they feel that outer revelation and mystical experience have brought them supernatural assurance. Thus the warrant for certitude comes from the total orientation that the person attains in his quest for a comprehensive belief system capable of relating him to existence as a whole.... Every man

whether he is religiously inclined or not, has his own ultimate presuppositions. He finds he cannot live his life without them, and for him they are true. Such suppositions, whether they be

called ideologies,

philosophies, notions, or merely hunches about life, exert creative pressure upon all conduct that is subsidiary to them (which is to say, upon nearly all of a man's conduct).

The error of the psychoanalytic theory of religion-to state the error in its own terminology-lies in locating religious belief exclusively in the defensive functions of the ego rather than in the

core and centre and substance of the developing ego itself. While religion certainly fortifies the individual against the inroads of anxiety, doubt, and despair, it also provides the forward intention that enables him at each state of his becoming to relate himself meaningfully to the [totality of Being].[25]

The Interrelatedness of Psychological and Physiological Activities

Scientific research and experiments have proved that psychological diseases affect the body, which also suffers from the sickness. On the contrary, the psyche is also affected by the body's chemical reactions. This indicates a reciprocal relation between psychic life and the life of the body. Although this scientific theory is ascribed to the last few decades, both the points it contains have been explicitly mentioned in Islamic traditions and have a history of fourteen centuries.

The Commander of the Faithful, may peace be upon him, says about the effects of psychological ailments on the body:

It is surprising to what extent envious persons are negligent of the health of their bodies.[26]

Grief and sadness have a wasting effect on the body.[27]

Whoever submits to his anger and does not control it, advances towards premature death and destruction.[28]

The Noble Messenger, may peace and God's benedictions be upon him and his Progeny, states the relation between the body's physiological processes and one's spiritual and moral character and disposition in these words:

Do not deaden your hearts by the means of excessive eating and drinking, for man's spiritual condition is like a farm, which is destroyed when flooded with excessive water. [29]

One who gets accustomed to excessive eating and drinking becomes hard-hearted and lacking in compassion.[30]

The Commander of the Faithful, may peace be upon him, also says:

The heaviness of food in the stomach has an evil effect on a man's intelligence.[31]

The well-known scholar Dr. Carrel says:

Mental activities evidently depend on physiological activities. Organic modifications are observed to correspond to the succession of the states of consciousness. Inversely, psychological phenomena are determined by certain functional states of the organs. The whole consisting of body and consciousness is modifiable by organic as well as by mental factors. Mind and organism commune in man, like form and marble in a statue. One cannot change the form without breaking the marble.

... Everyone knows how human personality is modified by diseases of the liver, the stomach, and the intestines. Obviously, the cells of the organs discharge into the bodily fluids certain substances that react upon our mental and spiritual functions.

... The dependence of mental activities and physiological functions does not agree with the classical conception that places the soul exclusively in the brain. In fact, the entire body appears to be the substratum of mental and spiritual energies. Thought is the offspring of the endocrine glands as well as of the cerebral cortex.

The integrity of the organism is indispensable to the manifestation of consciousness. Man thinks, invents, loves, suffers, admires, and prays with his brain and all his organs.[32]

Gardner Murphy, a contemporary psychologist, writes:
It is only the last few decades that it has become quite clear to what extent it is possible for emotions and attitudes, or, in other words, loves and antipathies, to be a reflection of the chemical reactions one's body.

Psycho-physiology clearly shows the bilateral and reciprocal relation between mental and physical life; that is, the functional relationship between the body's chemical reactions and mental states on the one hand, and between mental stimuli and physiological states on the other. Today we can no longer speak of the body and its vital chemical system as the fundamental factor governing psychological life. Rather, we should consider psychological factors as regulating the body's chemical system.

Or perhaps it would be better to say, as pointed out by specialists who have closely examined the problem, that throughout we are confronted with a psycho-physiological unit, in which sometimes the psychological aspect and sometimes the psychological and chemical aspect should receive the primary attention.

The dictum 'know thyself' today does not mean as it did in ancient times the unilateral dominance of a non-material principle over a matter devoid of life and consciousness, nor does it consist in a belief similar to that of the nineteenth-century materialists, who would say that the brain secretes thought in the same manner as the liver secretes bile. Today we look forward to an increasing recognition and acceptance of mutual co-operation between the

[psychological and chemical approaches to the study of man.[33]

NOTES

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[7]. Al-Amidi, *Ghurar al-hikam*, p. 498.

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[9]. Al-Nuri, *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il*, vol. 2, p. 287.

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[18]. Al-Amidi, *Ghurar*, p. 481.

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[27]. Al-Amidi, *Ghurar*, p. 654.

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[29]. *Nahj as-fasahah* p. 521.

[30]. Ibid. p. 573.

[31]. Al-Amidi, *Ghurar*, p. 24.

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