

Pessimism, the Bright and Dark Points of Life

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Man's life is a mixture of pain and comfort. Each one of these two states absorbs a portion of life in this world. Every individual faces his own share of experiences and becomes a victim of pain and comfort from the problems and disasters of life. It is according to this bitter fact that

man's life fluctuates between pain and ease.

We, as humans, cannot change this eternal law which rules our lives so as to subject it to our own desires. Yet, after we come to realize the deep meaning of this life, we can direct our vision towards the beautiful side of existence and cast away the ugly entities which tarnish the fact of life in this vast universe; this universe that is filled with the amazement of creation and precision of wisdom; which it tells us that every creature exists with an aim for which has been created. On the other hand, we can ignore or forget the bright points in the universe and

concentrate on the gloomy spots.

Finally it is up to every individual to choose the direction of his thinking. Hence, choosing the

color and view of life he wishes to experience.

It is incumbent on us to prepare ourselves to face and choose that which is appropriate for us in order to avoid disadvantageous factors, so that we do not lose the ability of self-control.

Otherwise, we may face irreplaceable losses, or even fall victim to the typhoons of misfortune. Many of us imagine that had the sequence of events in our lives been different, we might have been happy people. In fact, these people's problems are not related to the events of their lives, but to the methods in which they deal with them. It is possible for us to change the influence of

such events, or even transform some of their effects into useful ones.

A famous thinker wrote: Our thoughts always operate in the domain of hate and dissatisfaction, so we always complain and cry. The reason behind this crying is in our consciences. We are built in such a manner that our existence feeds on that which is not appropriate for our souls or spirits. Every day we wish and hope for new things, or perhaps we

do not really know what we want.

Yet, we believe that others have acquired happiness so we envy them while we suffer. We are like misbehaving children who invent new excuses and start weeping. Our souls suffer from their weeping and we do not relax until we make them understand the facts and abandon what

they falsely imagine and their unruly wants.

These children, as a result of their numerous desires, become blind to everything but miseries.

It is our obligation to open their eyes towards the good side of life. We must make them understand that none but those who open their eyes to the garden of life, can cultivate its flowers and roses.

Those blind ones will obtain nothing but thorns. If we are able to pass the borders of depression and pessimism and examine the facts, we find that even in these times, which have fallen in a deep horrifying pit, there are exits everywhere with roses and flowers in the garden of life that call the sights of onlookers to themselves at all times.

Thought has a deep affect on man's happiness. In fact, the only effective factor on man's happiness is his ability to think and reason. An unprecedented incident is unbearable and destructive in the eyes of the pessimist, while in the viewpoint of the optimist, who sees things in a positive way, such incidents do not lead to submission nor do they cause a person to lose his sense of resistance under any condition. Optimists never abandon the borders of modesty, restraint and patience.

Those who condition themselves to think that the axis of evil surrounds them will only live a painful, gloomy and uncomfortable life. They will, in effect, loose many of their powers and abilities as a result of their exaggerated sensitivity and drown themselves in fatal ignorance of the blessings and good things of the world.

According to one scholar: "The world reacts to man exactly as man deals with the world. Thus, if you laugh at the world, it will laugh with you. If you look at the world gloomily, it will appear gloomy. If you meditate on the world, it will count you among the mediators, and if you are merciful and truthful, you will find people around you who will love you and open the treasures of love and respect of their hearts to you."

Despite the bitter appearance of pain, it produces special fruit for the mind and soul. Man's spiritual abilities become more clearly manifested in the darkness of pain. Reason and human spirit evolve in the folds of continuous sacrifices and un-submissive struggle...to the peak of .human perfection

The Negative Effects of Pessimism

Pessimism is a dangerous spiritual illness. It is the cause of many losses, defects and disappointments. Pessimism is a painful misfortune that tortures the human soul and leaves un-amendable defects on man's personality which cannot be erased.

When experiencing pain and/or inflictions people tend to become sensitive, at this point it is possible for pessimism to appear as a result of a strong revolt in the emotions and feelings of an individual. Pessimism which enters the mind in this way leaves its influence on man's

thinking process.

The beauty of creation is not manifested in the eyes of one whose spiritual mirror has become darkened by the shadow of pessimism. Moreover, even happiness appears to him in the garment of boredom and disaster, and his ill thinking cannot comprehend conduct of innocent individuals clear of evil aims. Those whose thought become so negative will lose all of their advantageous abilities, because with their incorrect imagination they create many problems for themselves; hence, wasting their talents by worrying about incidents which they have not and probably will be not faced with.

As we have said before, the effects of optimism spread to its surroundings and enliven the spirit with hope; likewise, pessimism dictates anxiety and pain to its surroundings, and eventually deprives them of the light of hope, which clears the path of life for mankind. The disadvantageous effects of pessimism are not limited only to the soul: they adversely affect the body too. Studies show that pessimistic patients have a lower rate of cure. According to a medical doctor, it is more difficult to treat those who are suspicious of everything and everyone, than to rescue a person who jumps in the sea attempting to commit suicide. Giving medicine to an individual who lives in constant anxiety is like placing water into boiling oil. In order for any medicine to be helpful it is essential for the patient to preserve his sense of comfort and belief."

Those who suffer from pessimism clearly experience a sense of loneliness and suspicion when dealing with others. As a result of such unsatisfactory situations these people destroy their abilities to develop and advance; hence, destining themselves to an unwanted life. In light of these facts, pessimism is found to be a main factor in suicide. If we examine any sector of human society, we will find that backbiting and gossip stem from suspicion that is paired with a lack of examination and reflection.

Despite their weaknesses in judging and their vast imaginations, people often judge others without verifying the subject matter involved. These people imagine without confirming their suspicion, in some circumstances their personal aims can easily be depicted. This great shortcoming causes the ties of unity and sincere relationships to break and deprives people of trust in each other, which leads to the corruption of manners and souls as well. Most incidents of enmity, hate and envy which are harmful to both the individual and society, result from suspicion which contradicts reality. Suspicion spreads in the society to point that it may even occupy the minds of philosophers and scholars.

We can pinpoint many instances in history when scholars have committed grave mistakes by viewing their societies from the pessimistic angle; thus building their ideas on the basis of

criticism and search for the shortcomings in the social system. So instead of serving the causes of happiness, these confused scholars poison the spirit of their societies with their harmful thinking. They also subject the fundamentals of belief to criticism and disgust. Abu al-'Ala al-Mauri was among the pessimistic scholars. This famous philosopher thought so negatively of life that he called for the prevention of intercourse in order to wipe out mankind; consequently riding itself of the sufferings of life

Islam Verses On Pessimism

The Holy Qur'an clearly counts pessimism and ill thinking among the sins and evil deeds and warns

Muslims about thinking negatively of each other.

"O you who believe! Avoid most suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin." (Qur'an 49:12)

The Islamic religion prohibits suspicion if decisive evidence doesn't exist. The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "A Muslim is sacred to another Muslim: his blood, his property and (it is prohibited) for one to think negatively of another."^[1]

Therefore, just as it is prohibited to transfer the property of one person to another without sufficient evidence, it is forbidden to suspect people and accuse them of evil doings before proving them guilty with undoubted evidence. The Prince of the Faithful (a.s.) said: "It is not right to judge the trustworthy only on speculation."^[2]

He then clarified the disadvantages and painful points of suspicion when he said: "Be careful of suspicion, for suspicion ruins worship and makes sins greater."^[3]

He even describes suspecting the kind as being oppressive. "Suspecting the kind (doer of good) is the worst sin and the ugliest type of oppression."^[4]

He also says that suspecting the ones you love causes relations to worsen and finally to be cut off. Imam 'Ali (a.s.) states: "He who is overwhelmed with suspicion does not leave any peace between him and his beloved one."^[5]

Suspicion has adverse effects on the spirits and conduct of others as well as the suspicious individuals. Sometimes suspicion diverts the suspected persons from the straight path and leads into corruption and lowliness. Imam 'Ali (a.s.) said: "Suspicion corrupts affairs and instigates evilness."^[6]

Dr. Mardin writes: "Some business owners suspect their employees of stealing which, in turn, forces the suspects to become what they are suspected of. Although suspicion does not appear in words or actions, it influences the spirit of the suspect and leads him to perform that

which he is suspected of.”[7]

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) also stated regarding suspicion: “Avoid suspicion when not appropriate, for this calls the healthy to sickness, and the innocent to doubt.”[8]

He also declared that those who suffer from suspicion are deprived of healthy bodies and spirits: “A suspicious person can never be found healthy.”[9]

Dr. Carl wrote about this subject: “Some habits, such as complaining and suspecting people, reduce the individual’s ability to live. These negative behavioral habits adversely influence the sympathetic order and the body’s glands. They can also cause practical damage to the body.”[10]

Dr. Mardin adds: “Suspicion eradicates health and weakens the behavioral powers. Balanced souls never expect harm, rather they anticipate goodness at all times because they know that goodness is an eternal reality, and that evil is not but the work of the weakness of the powers of goodness, just as darkness is the result of the lack of light. Thus, seek the path of light for it erases darkness from the hearts.”[11]

Suspicious individuals fear people, as Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said: “He who is suspicious fears everyone.”[12]

Dr. Farmer is quoted as saying: “Those who fear to speak out their ideas and viewpoints in public, where everyone clearly states their opinions, and Who seeks refuge on side streets and back alleys to avoid meeting their relatives on wide streets or in public gardens, are ruled by fear, suspicion and pessimism.”[13]

One of the factors which cause suspicion is bad memories which are concealed in man’s spirit.

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said: “Hearts have evil notions and hearts resent them.”[14]

Dr. Haleem Shakhter said: “Those who lack self-confidence are overly sensitive, so They suffer from minor inflictions. The memories of such inflictions remain in their minds subconsciously and affect their actions, words, and thoughts. Soon they fall victim to depression and suspicion and do not realize the reason behind their sufferings.

Painful memories conceal themselves beyond our feelings and do not easily manifest themselves to us. In other words, it is natural for man to avoid painful memories and eradicate them from his mind. This concealed enemy never stops inflicting evil and hatred on our souls, manners, and conduct. We sometimes even hear or encounter words or actions from ourselves or others for which we realize no justifiable explanation. Yet if we carefully examine them we find they have been caused by evil memories.”[15]

People with lowly natures elect themselves to be judges over other’s actions, thus the misdeeds of others are reflected onto them. Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) pointed out this fact when he said:

“Evil doers never think good of anyone because they see others with their own nature.”[16]
Dr. Mann is quoted as saying: “Some people place the blame on others by complaining about their deeds while they, themselves, do the exact same thing; they do this to make up for their own shortcomings and as a type of self-defense. This behavior is described as a method of avoiding anxiety; comparing others with one’s self is a resentful action. When this condition intensifies and the individual’s self-defense increases, he reaches the category of being ‘mentally ill’. This defense can be caused by doing something socially unacceptable which in turn creates the sense of wanting to relate it to others.”[17]

When the Messenger of Allah (S) entered Medina after migrating from Mecca, a man came to him and said: “O Messenger of Allah, the people of this town are men of goodness, they are kind; you have done the right thing in coming here.” The Messenger (S) said to the man: “You speak the truth.” Another man then came to the Prophet and said: “Messenger of Allah, the people of this town are evil, it would have been better if you did not migrate to them!” The Messenger of Allah then said: “You speak the truth.” When the people heard the Prophet’s reply to both the men, they questioned him. The Prophet answered them: “Each of them spoke that which was in his mind, therefore both of them are truthful”. The Prophet (S) meant that each of the men was truthful about himself.

The forbidden type of suspicion is clearly understood as misguided thinking and the inclination of the soul towards ill thinking and insisting of it. More prohibited than this type of suspicion is acting on it. Because the thoughts and notions which pass through the mind without any actual effects on the individual’s conduct cannot be considered subject to jurisprudential legislation. These thoughts are involuntary, avoiding them is also involuntary; but it is the individual’s option to manifest or not to manifest them in his actions.

The miseries of the pessimists stem from this terrifying disorder. Therefore, it is incumbent on those who can pinpoint the reason which caused them to be overly suspicious to treat their cases and rid themselves of such misfortunes

Notes:

[1] Tirmidhi. Chap. 18, Ibn Majah, Chap. 2. Muslim, Chap. 32, Ahmad, v.2, p. 277 and v. 3, p. 491.

[2] Nahj al-Balaghah p. 174.

[3] Ghurar al- Hikam p. 154.

[4] Ghurar al- Hikam p. 434.

[5] Ghurar al- Hikam p. 698.

[6] Ghurar al- Hikam p. 433.

[7] Pirozi Fikr.

[8] Ghurar al-Hikam p. 152

[9] Ghurar al-Hikam p. 835

[10] Rah Wa Rasm Zindagi

[11] Pirozi Fikr

[12] Ghurar al-Hikam p.712

[13] Raz Khushbakhti

[14] Ghurar al-Hikam p. 29

[15] Rushde Shakhsiyyat

[16] Ghurar al-Hikam p. 80

[17] Usule Rivanshinasi