

MANKIND'S NEED FOR RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Humans inherently tend to accept religion and shape their lives according to religious doctrines. On this basis, we can say that religion is born with the human being. Having this in mind and looking at man's history, we can infer that humans bring the essence of religion with themselves, without the help of any messenger. This essence is a bunch of their beliefs which is manifested as a series of customs and ceremonies. Man is conscious that no creature, even himself, is independent and standing on his own.

In other words, man's understanding reached a point at which he could feel a Supreme Power and then accept it, and this power is God Almighty. Man understood God and pondered over His nature, and through this he found himself an inseparable part of Him and this is the way in which an effective instrument seems to be necessary to interact with God.

Some people believe that this medium is the heart and spirit; some others claim this is wisdom and intellect. Another group considers rituals being sufficient. They believe that it is enough to perform religious customs and prayers. But it is obvious that anywhere this belief comes from, it has its roots in religion.

Therefore the history of religions is an important and meaningful part of man's history, because mankind, after passing the primitive stage of its history and attaining the best levels of civilization, has been in search of a truth beyond himself and the universe around him. He does this with the help of prophets and his own understanding and inquisitive nature.

With the advent of prophets in various ages and their heavenly mission, the human being, the wonder of creation, gradually became able to adopt a specific approach towards the facts of creation and the things around him, and ultimately surrendered to religion, a strong and extensive chain which was inspired by the prophets, from Adam to the Seal of Divine Messengers, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Man found it irresistible to praise and revere the everlasting truth.

While the human being got to know himself through the help of the prophets, and could establish a wider relationship with his environment, he had no other recourse than pondering on the Creator's work. Although some beliefs, in their primitive stages, were a trial of man and enabled him to pave the way for knowing the truth, they could not satisfy the curious human soul.

Thus the inborn longing for the advent of a messenger forms that everlasting source of truth, compensates the human ignorance, comprising a part of the history of human development all through the history.

In each age and according to the specifications of time and place, the grounds became suitable for the advent of a prophet. Worshipping the idols and the tendency toward praising the nature, cruelty and lack of justice, poverty and discontentment, ethical corruption, disobedience, and a lot of other factors have proved the need for the coming of a Divine prophet in each era.

History shows that the advent of successive prophets was due to need for justice, and also pursued other greater goals: wiping out the custom of worshipping several gods or idols and inviting mankind to serve the Only Lord.

Prophets came to remind man of his promise to God, to awaken the dormant intellects, and to tear out the shrouds of ignorance and superstitions, and the chains of slavery. And that is the mystery of the human mind's enlightenment and wisdom which became fertile by the help and teachings of prophets.

Modern man, with all his ability and success in material achievement, has not been able to replace spirituality with any mundane or material concept. That is why human inclination towards religion and spirituality is exceedingly increasing.

The man, who thought if he can accomplish all his material needs and have a total license to do anything he wishes, will be happy and prosperous thereafter, has now come to the conclusion that only God and religion can quench his thirst. Marxism and materialism, with all their atheist slogans and utter ignorance, were unsuccessful for both this world and the world to come. Their attempt to protect the flimsy materialistic structure has been unsuccessful. They tried for 70 years, but now their theory which was weaker than a cobweb, has been destroyed.

Imam Khomeini, in his famous letter to President Mikhail Gorbachev, before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, states this situation in the best way:

"Mr. Gorbachev, you should turn to reality. The main problem of your country is not economics, ownership, or liberty. Your problem is lack of faith in God; the same problem which led the West to corruption and destruction. Your major drawback is the war you have waged against God - the Source of life and creation.

"Mr. Gorbachev, everybody knows that from now on we should look for communism in the museums of political history; since Marxism can satisfy none of the human genuine needs; since it is a materialistic school and materialism cannot save humanity from lack of spirituality, which is the most essential human affliction in the East and the West."

As the late Imam states in this part of his letter, the most crucial problem of the modern man is atheism and lack of faith in spirituality. This lack of faith has brought about a discomfort and inconvenience to human soul, in spite of all the welfare which technology has brought man. Humans still feel that something is missing:

Psychological ailments, family disintegration, murder, and thousands of other problems human beings face in the present age. Shrouds of ignorance have veiled the heart of the modern man, so that he is quite alienated from himself, and cannot reflect on himself, which is the macro universe. That is why surveying the major world has not been able to remind him of God, Who is not to be limited to this world.

It seems however that this disillusionment has caused humanity to turn to spirituality at the onset of the 21st century. For this reason many western intellectuals believe that religious beliefs will become desirable in this century. They consider the 21st century the era in

which religion penetrates all aspects of human existence. They present some figures and statistics to show that the new century is a period of religious enthusiasm, and the expectations of people will drastically increase in this respect.

Many western critics believe that the religious tendency will be stronger than what is imagined. They announce that at present, there is no social power stronger than religion in the world. Emphasizing the fact that people are increasingly turning to God, religion, and spirituality (in the East and the West), experts have demonstrated that the view of returning to secularism has come to an end. The hallucination that materialism is exterminating religion and nothing can prevent it, is a groundless one. Despite all promises, ambitions, and attempts of modern civilization for the well-being of human race and despite its success in the way of procuring all the means for the welfare and comfort of man (which nobody can deny), the civilized and seemingly modern view is being severely challenged.

In fact the new civilization has contradictory results, that is, negative and positive consequences are abundant in it. Among the negative outputs of this crisis are: emotional gaps, mental disorders, family break-ups, social disintegrations, dangerous ecological crises, political crises, exploitation of the third world countries, genocides and world wars, class distinctions, and the like. Intellectuals and religious critics in the East and the West believe that problems and crises of the modern world are due to humanistic doctrines and the alienation of man from Divine teachings. Modern humanistic civilization looks for material success in the world, but ignores ethics and the soul on the whole. As a result people cannot establish a good relationship with their self, other people, or the environment.

For these critics, such "self-negligence" and crises, and complications resulting from it, are ultimately related to forgetting the root of mankind, and also related to man's disregard of his responsibilities to God.

The ethical crisis of the contemporary man is to the extent that men are coming to this conclusion: The only hope for the survival of the world is that faith in religious criteria and values becomes dominant in the world. The universal ethics can only rely on the main tenets which are common among Divine religions, since only religion can offer values which are absolute and based on truth, and practical.

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