Summing up Islamic Monotheism

What is the viewpoint of Islam concerning human perfection? When a school of thought wishes to build up a following, it must provide guidance and strengthen the resolution of its following, it presents its goal to them, and asks them to follow it,

The goal of Islam is the same as the true objective of a Muslim, The conceptualization of a perfect human being is in fact a discussion of the fundamental Islamic ideal and its ideology.

Various views concerning human perfection and a perfect being have already been discussed, and here a summary of them will be given.

According to the gnostics, truth is the basis of everything. By truth, they mean the Essence of God, and His manifestation is the shape of created things and beings. Man, too, as a more wholesome creature gains perfection through his return to Him, Thus everything but truth which is God, is His shadow, while in itself it is a reality. God means absolute God, and nothing is equal to and comparable with Him, They believe also that man can attain unity with God, or, as they say, can be annihilated in His essence.

Man is a being, separated from his Originator, Man's perfection and happiness consist of his return to his origin in God's Essence. They also offer ways and means to attain this goal, and this lies through the whole of man's essence, that is, his heart and its changes and transformations which remove the obstacles to perfect unity. Their means consist of love, worship and self-purification.

Divine philosophers, however, think differently, They consider man's essence to be his intellect, and other things are secondary matters, The perfection of the intellectual power has two aspects: speculative and practical.

The speculative or theoretical aspect is wisdom which means the recognition of things as they are, and its practical aspect is justice, by which they mean that man's whole essence must be ruled over by intellect and not by instinct or other forces, According to Plato, his Theory of Republic points to a Utopia in which philosophers become rulers and rulers philosophers,

This theory is also applied to individuals, and it is said that a man is happy when his essence is ruled over by philosophy, For them, attaining truth is not under consideration; they emphasize thought and reflection, not heart and spirit, The way to attain the goal is intellect, logic and reasoning.

Another group consider love to be human perfection, and that means forgetting self and loving others, so that there would be no boundary between self and others; and when there is a

question of choice, others have priority over self. A being whose noble human sentiments have developed to their limit, may be considered a perfect being.

Yet another school of thought considers beauty to be the essence of human perfection, not only physical beauty, which is not significant, but spiritual beauty and high morality. This is the basic belief of the Socratic school They say truthfulness is good because it is beautiful. The word 'good' is applied to the senses as well as intellect.

Knowledge is for them a perfection because it is beautiful, and opposite, i.e. ignorance is ugly. Power and weakness, too, come under the same category. In Socratic ethics everything is based on either intellectual beauty or ugliness. Poetry, art and originality mean creation of beauty, and a creator of beauty must be beautiful himself to be able to create beauty. Only a beautiful spirit can compose a beautiful poem or paint a beautiful picture.

There is a story about one of the Qajar kings who composed one line of a couplet, and was unable to compose the second line. He sought the aid of various poets, until one of them supplied the second line, which was found to be the best, The first line was this :

"No one has ever seen beauty like Yusuf's,"

and the second line was the following :

"But He who created Yusuf (Joseph) has the true beauty."

And this is very true, for, only the Creator with utmost beauty can create beauty in His creatures.

Now let us see what Islam thinks about these views . Does Islam agree with the question of 'truth' as being perfection? We cannot wholly accept the gnostic view. For Islam God is not a Creator in the sense of a father - like being capable of procreating other beings. If so, what is He after accomplishing the task of creation? Is He like a father who has children, or a mere provider of livelihood to creatures, or according to Aristotle, the first motive power?

Islam's logic about God is much higher than that There is nothing that can be compared with Him. If he is 'Reality', then other things are a "mirage", or a 'shadow'. The Qur'an says (24; 35): "God is the light of heaven and the earth," It means, He is what He is, and other things, too, are attributable to Him. Other references to God in the Qur'an show that He is 'absolute truth. ' Again the Qur'an says (41: 53): "We will soon show them our signs in the world and in their minds to assure them that the Qur'an is true."

In fact, when someone has faith in God, everything else is reduced to nothing for him, for, he has found something compared with which other things are worthless, Sa'di has expressed this idea beautifully in his poetic work 'Boostan' :

"The way of intellect is a maze; but, for the wise there is nothing but God ." And to explain the

matter of nothingness, he says: "This can be told to a discerner of truth, but men of conjecture will cavil at it, Saying, what, then, are heaven and earth? Who are human beings, beasts and demons?"

He, then, answers his questions and says they are not mutually incompatible: "You, my wise friend, have asked well, and I will answer to your intellect's approval; That the sun, sea, mountain and firmaments, human beings, demons, jinn, and angels, Whatever they may be, they are too inferior to speak of existence, before His Essence."

If He is, other things are nothing. It is impossible to turn to another pole once a man knows God, or to assume anything as a goal. Thus, faith in Islam is higher than any possibility of comparison with any other maker but God, a truth and reality before which nothing may be considered true and real.

But is wisdom, which is claimed by a sage, of importance in Islam? The principle of wisdom, that is, recognition of facts as they are, is acceptable in Islam. The Qur'an says (2: 269): "He will grant the blessing of wisdom to anyone He wishes, and he who found it, received much goodness." How can we interpret this verse? Wisdom is called a human blessing, and is almost the equivalent of perfection, and not only something useful.

Justice, too, is similar, that is, social justice, Of course social justice is related to the perfection of individuals concerning moral justice. Islam believes in moderation with respect to powers and instincts, and rejects extravagance. It does not consider the rule of intellect alone adequate, should also be faith, Islam regards human power to philosophize as too weak to be a ruler of man, philosophy combined with faith can act as a governor,

But concerning 'love' in Islam, what more can be said than the following In a chapter of traditions entitled "Kindnesses and Mutual Affections", the Prophet (s) asks his companions: "What handle of faith is stronger?" Each of them gives a different answer, One says 'prayer', another says 'fasting' or 'pilgrimage', etc. He says: "What you said is true, but none of them is the strongest," They ask: "What is it then?" He answers: "Loving others for the sake of God."

Which of the above beliefs are of first importance, and which are secondary? There is also the question of 'worship The Qur'an says (51: 56): "I did not create angels and human beings except to worship me," So, worship is presented as an objective There may, of course, be some who do not believe in this. We have already discussed the view that upholds material benefits, involving the negation of human perfection and existence of perfect beings. They consider everything, including knowledge, useful to the extent of benefiting mankind.

This has been the course of human thought since Bacon. Today that the claim is made that society has advanced and evolved, which society is more perfect? Is it the one which is nearer

reality or faith? Or the one which has attained more wisdom and justice or love? They say: "No, it is a society that can secure more benefits, more techniques, and more science, all of which have provided mankind with better living and greater material benefits."

This greater benefit, as they see it, is no more than what is enjoyed by animals and plants to the extent of safeguarding bodily health and growth, and catering to lusts and appetites. Thus according to them, there is no human perfection beyond animal and vegetable perfection. Science, too, is for man like a horn for an animal, that is, a weapon for survival.

Now let us consider worship. What is worship for? There are two ways of looking at it. For ordinary people worship is for obtaining a better reward from God in the next world. The rewards of this world are limited, so, worship gives the hope for deeper and greater compensation in after life, including houris, heavenly palaces, honey, delicious fruits and drinks!

But this is no more than animal perfection, even though it implies a lasting life hereafter. But worship may have another meaning, It is not the worship of a slave, but of the free and noble. In the latter kind of worship securing benefits is never the objective, nor is it deliverance from physical and material sufferings. It is far above animal appetites, It is worship for the sake of love, affection and gratitude. It is then that worship finds a meaning equivalent to the love of truth, and God is then not considered as a means of life in this or the next world. God will, then, be truth itself and the true objective.

This type of worship assumes a lofty position, since it is not a means, but an end in itself. Thus, there are different stages of worship: worship for satisfying animal desires in the next world is a kind of perfection in comparison with absence of worship and a positive attachment to material things. For, it means seeking from God something permanent, as against the transient selfishness and sensuality in this world.

But this worship is much inferior to the exalted and pure worship which is done for its own sake. So worship depends on faith and faith depends on truth. Islam has invited people to wisdom, justice, love and beauty.

But which of them is the main goal? Are they equally significant? Or is one of them the principal objective and the others subordinate to it?

We think that the goal is truth, that is, God. Islamic monotheism can only have this meaning. If Islam offers other goals such as heaven, or escape from hell, they are of secondary importance. Wisdom by itself is not a goal, but as a means of attaining truth. Justice, too, is good in checking the animality of human spirit and removing artificial barriers in the way of truth. Love, too, in its effect helps to attain truth. There remains faith, which may be claimed as a goal in Islam.

But is faith important because of its effects in removing anxiety, checking aggression, and creating mutual trust? Faith in God is by itself a goal. The effects of faith which are so numerous make it the link of man with God, and such a link is perfection from the viewpoint of .Islam