Islam and the Social Problem

In order to reach the first circle in analyzing the social problem, we have to question that materialistic individualistic interest established by the capitalist system as a criterion, a pretext, a goal and an objective and ask: "What is the idea which made such a criterion seem to be correct according to the democratic capitalist mentality which inspired it?" This very idea is the real basis of the social tribulation and the failure of democratic capitalism in bringing about man's happiness and safeguarding his dignity. If we can abolish such an idea, we will put a definite end to all conspiracies against social welfare and intrigues against the society's rights and accurate freedom and be successful in utilizing the private ownership for humanity's good, upliftment and advancement in the industrial spheres and production fields.

So, what is this idea?

This idea is summarized according to the limited materialistic interpretation of life on which the West has erected the colossal monument of capitalism. If every member of the society believes that his only field in this great universe is his personal materialistic life, believing also in his freedom in using and utilizing this life, and that he can gain nothing from this life except the pleasure made available to him through materialism, adding these materialistic creeds to his egoism, which is essentially inherent within him..., then he will choose the path of materialists and execute all of their methods, unless a mighty power deprives him of his freedom and stops him.

Egoism is the instinct more general or ancient than any other we have come to know. All other instincts are its own branches and divisions, including the instinct of survival. Man's love for his own self, which means his love for pleasure and happiness for his own person, and his hatred of pain and suffering, is the motive which pushes him to make a living and provide himself with his nutritious and materialistic needs. Therefore, he may put an end to his own life by committing suicide if he finds out that the pain of dying is easier than tolerating the pains of which his life is full.

The natural reality, that is, that which hides behind every human life, directing it with its fingers, is egoism which we call "loving pleasure and hating pain". Man cannot be required to willingly tolerate the bitterness of pain without enjoying some pleasure simply in order that others may get their own pleasure and felicity except when he is robbed of his humanity and is given a new nature which neither loves pleasure nor hates pain.

Even the marvellous norms of self-denial, which we see in mankind and about which we hear

throughout history, are, in fact, subject to the same principal motivating power: egoism. Man may be influenced by his son or friend, and he may sacrifice himself for the sake of some ideals and principles, but he would never perform such heroism unless he derives a particular pleasure from it and a benefit which exceeds the loss he suffers by preferring his son's or friend's benefit to that of his own, or by sacrificing himself for the sake of a principle in which he believes.

Thus can we interpret the general behaviour of man, in the spheres of egoism and sacrifice alike. Man has an inherent readiness to enjoy different things: materialistic, like enjoying eating, drinking, sexual pleasures, etc., or non-materialistic, like behavioural and emotional pleasures, that is, enjoying ethical principles and a spiritual companion, or a particular faith, when man finds such principles or that companion or this faith to be part of his own entity.

This readiness which prepares man to enjoy such different sorts of pleasures differs in degrees among individuals and varies in effectiveness according to the variations in man's circumstances, natural elements and the upbringing which influences him. When we find out that such readiness matures naturally in man, such as his readiness to enjoy sex, for example, we find out that the other kinds of readiness may not appear during one's lifetime, and that they remain waiting for the natural elements to help them mature and blossom.

Behind all such readiness is the egoistic instinct which outlines man's behaviour according to the degree of maturity of such readiness; it pushes a person to prefer one kind of food to another when he is hungry, and it pushes some other person to even give his own food to others. This is so because the first person's readiness to enjoy the ethical and emotional principles which pushes him to self-denial is hidden: The auxiliary elements of upbringing have neither centralized nor matured such readiness. The other person has won such sort of upbringing; therefore, he enjoys ethical and emotional principles, sacrificing his own self for their achievement.

When we want to make a change in someone's behaviour, we have to change his concept of pleasure and benefit, including the suggested behaviour in the general framework of the egoistic instinct.

If the egoistic instinct occupies such a position in man's world, and the "self" means nothing but a limited materialistic energy, and pleasure is nothing but whatever fun and felicity materialism brings, it would be natural for man then to feel that his sphere of gaining is limited, his scope is short, and his objective in it is to get an amount of materialistic pleasure. The way to get that is, of course, confined to life's vein: wealth, which opens the door to man to achieve all of his purposes and desires. This is the natural sequence of materialistic reasoning which

leads to a complete capitalist mentality.

Can you see if the problem can be totally solved if we refuse the principle of private ownership, while maintaining such materialistic concepts of life as those thinkers have tried? Can society be saved from the tragedy of such principles by only abolishing private ownership so that it would gain a guarantee for its happiness and stability? The only guarantee for man's happiness and stability depends to a large extent on ensuring that those charged with responsibility will not deviate from their scopes and reform plans in the field of action and execution.

Such responsible persons are supposed to embrace the same purely materialistic concepts of life on which capitalism stands. The only difference is that they have shaped such concepts in new philosophical structures. Reason would suppose that the personal interest quite often stands in the face of the common interest, and that the individual has to choose between either a loss and a pain which he endures for the sake of others, or a gain and pleasure which he enjoys at their own expense. So, what guarantees the nation and its rights, the doctrine and its objectives, will have during such critical moments through which the rulers go?

The individual interest is not represented in private ownership only, so that we would rule out our supposition to abolish the principle of private ownership; rather, it is represented in many different manners and forms. A proof for that is the treason of many past rulers discovered today by the advocates of communism who have revealed how those rulers deviated from the same principles which they had professed to adopt.

The wealth controlled by the capitalist group, under the shade of absolute economic and individual liberties, dealing with it according to its materialistic mentality, is given, when the state nationalizes all sorts of wealth and abolishes private ownership, to the state apparatus itself which is composed of a group controlled by the same materialistic concepts of life which oblige them to give priority to their own individualistic interests, according to the egoistic instinct, refusing that man should give up his pleasure and interest without a compensation. So long as the materialistic interest is the dominating power, according to the materialistic concepts of life, new fields for struggle and competition will be reserved, and the society will be exposed to different dangers and exploitation.

Danger to humanity is all hidden within such materialistic concepts and whatever goals and deeds stem from them. Unifying capitalist norms of wealth, the small or the big, into one huge wealth to be taken care of by the state, without any new development of the human intellect, does not curb such a danger; rather, it turns the entire nation into labourers working for one company, tying their life and prestige to the promoters and owners of that company.

Yes, this “company” differs from the capitalist company: The owners of the capitalist company

are the ones who own its profits, spending them according to their own inclinations, while the owners of the other company do not possess any of that, as the system assumes. But the fields of individualistic interest are still open, and the materialistic concept of life, the one that makes such an interest a goal and a justification, still remains

How to Solve the Problem

The world has two ways to avoid the danger and establish the pillars of a stable society: One is this: Mankind has to be changed, or a new nature be created within him that would make him sacrifice his personal interests and limited materialistic achievements for the sake of the society and its interests, in spite of his own belief that there are no principles except those materialistic ones, and no gains except those of this limited life.

This could be accomplished if egoism were uprooted from his nature's essence and substituted with love for the group; therefore, man will be born not loving his own self except as being part of the society, feeling no pleasure for his own happiness and benefits except as they represent part of the general happiness and common interest. The "instinct" of loving the group will then guarantee its running after its own interests and the achievement of its own objectives in a mechanical manner and mode.

The other, the one the advocates of communism dream of bringing into man's future, promising the world that they would create it anew, a creation which would make it move mechanically to serve the group and its interests, is this: So that such a great feat is accomplished, we have to trust the world leadership to them, just as the patient is entrusted to the surgeon for surgery in order to chop off his bad parts and adjust the crooked ones. Nobody knows how long such a surgical operation, which puts man at the mercy of the surgeon, will last.

Man's submission to that is but the greatest proof of the extent of injustice which he has suffered in the democratic capitalist system which has deceived him with the alleged "freedoms", robbing him finally of even his own dignity, sucking his blood in order to present him as an easy drink to the pampered group represented by the rulers. The idea of such an opinion which advocates treating the problem by "modernizing" man and creating him anew, hinges on the Marxist interpretation of egoism.

Marxism believes that self-love (egoism) is neither a natural inclination nor an instinctive phenomenon within man's entity but a result of the social condition which is based on private ownership, for the social status of private ownership is what formulates the spiritual and innate composition of man, creating in the individual his own love for his personal interests and

individual benefits.

If a revolution occurs in the bases on which the social structure stands, and general ownership and socialism substitute private ownership, then the revolution will be reflected in all corners of the society and in the inner context of man; so much so that his personal feelings will change to common feelings, and his love for his own interests and individualistic benefits will change to loving the common interest and benefit, according to the equilibrium law between the status of Islamic ownership and the totality of the overall phenomenon according to which they condition themselves.

In fact, this Marxist interpretation of egoism judges the relationship between the self's reality (the egoistic instinct) and the social circumstances in an upside-down manner. Otherwise, how can we believe that the personal motive is the outcome of private ownership and all the class contradictions resulting from it?

If man did not have, before hand, the personal motive, he would not have caused such contradictions, nor could he have thought of private ownership and personal monopoly. Why should man monopolize the system's achievements, placing it in such a way that protects his own interests at the expense of others, if he does not feel the personal motive within the depths of his own self?

The fact is that the social appearances of egoism in the economic and political field are but the result of the personal motive, of the egoistic instinct. This motive is deeper than it is in man's entity; therefore, it cannot vanish, nor can its roots be pulled out by simply removing such effects, for an operation like this is not more than substituting effects for others different than the first in shape or appearance yet similar to them in essence and reality.

Add to this, if we interpret the personal motive (the egoistic instinct) subjectively, as a reflection of the phenomenon of individualism within the social system, such as the phenomenon of private ownership, as Marxism has done, would this not mean that the personal motive will lose its subjective and causing factor from the social system by abolishing private ownership because, although it is a phenomenon of an individualistic nature, it still is not unique in kind, as there is, for example, the phenomenon of private management which is kept even by the socialist system?

Although it abolishes private ownership of the means of production, the socialist system does not abolish the private management by the ruling apparatus which practices proletariat dictatorship and monopolizes the supervision over all means of production and their management. It is not logical to manage the means of production at the moment of their nationalization by a social common management of all the individuals of the society.

The socialist system, then, maintains distinguished individualistic phenomena, and it is natural that such phenomena maintain the personal motive, continuously reflecting it in the inner context of man, just as the phenomenon of private ownership used to do.

Thus do we come to know the value of the first way to solve the problem: the communist way which regards abolishing the legislation of private ownership, wiping it out of the law, as the only guarantee to solve the problem and "modernize" man. As regarding the other way, which is stated above, it is the one followed by Islam because of its belief that the only solution to the problem is to develop man's materialistic concept of life.

It has not started with abolishing the concept of private ownership; rather, it assaulted the materialistic concept of life and put for life a new concept, basing on it a system in which the individual is not treated as a machine in the social apparatus, nor is the society a group ready to serve the individual.

Rather, it has given each his rights, and has guaranteed the individual his dignity, spiritual and materialistic. Islam has placed its hand on the real cause of sickness in the democratic social system, and whatever systems branch from it, wiping them out in a manner which harmonizes with the human nature.

The basic hinging point to what the human life has suffered different sorts of miseries and calamities is the materialistic outlook of life which may be summed up thus: the supposition that only man's life on earth is worthy of all consideration. It establishes the individualistic interest as the criterion to each action and activity.

According to Islam, democratic capitalism is a system doomed to collapse and will certainly fail not because of the allegations of the advocates of communist economy, the self-contradictions of capitalism and the elements of destruction carried inherently by private ownership, for Islam differs in its logical approach, political economy and social philosophy from the concepts of such allegations and their argumentative manner, as I have clarified in my works Falsafatuna (Our Philosophy) and Iqtisaduna (Our Economy), and it guarantees the position of private ownership within a social framework, one free of such alleged contradictions.

The reason for the failure and aggravating situation with which democratic capitalism is afflicted, according to Islam, is rendered to the purely materialistic concepts of democratic capitalism which cannot make people happy in a system that learns its essence from it, deriving its general outlines from its essence and direction.

There has to be, thereupon, some other source, other than the materialistic ideas about the universe, from which the social system quenches its thirst, and there has to be an accurate

political awareness stemming out of true concepts of life, adopting the greatest of man's issues, attempting to achieve it on the basis of such concepts and studying the world affairs from that angle. When such political awareness matures in the world, wiping away any other political awareness, the world will then be able to enter a new life shining with light, full of happiness. This deep political awareness is the true message of Islam in the world, and such a delivering message is, indeed, the eternal message of Islam which has derived its social system, which differs from all the systems we have so far explicated, from a new intellectual base for life and the universe.

Through such an intellectual base, Islam has defined the proper outlook of man at his life. It has made him believe that his life stems from the principle of absolute perfection, that it is but a preparation for a world free of toil and suffering, hence providing him with a new ethical criterion in his steps and stages. This criterion is: the pleasure of Allah Almighty. Not everything the individual interest imposes is permissible, yet everything causing an individual loss is prohibited and undesirable.

Rather, the goal which Islam has drawn for mankind in his life is Divine Pleasure, and the ethical criterion through which all deeds are weighed is the amount one is able to obtain of such a sacred goal. The straight man is that who achieves such a goal. The complete Islamic character is the one which has made all of its various paces along the guidance of such goal and the light of such criterion and within its general framework.

This change in the ethical concepts, criteria and objectives does not mean changing the human nature and creating it anew, as the communist idea meant. Egoism, that is, man's love for his own self and for the achievement of his personal desires, is natural in mankind, and we do not know of any research in any experimental field which is more clear than that of humanity in its long history which proves the "self" of egoism.

If egoism had not been natural and inherent within man, early man would not have rushed, before forming his social entity, to achieve his needs and defend himself against the dangers and try in his primitive ways through which he protected his life and maintained his existence to get what he desired and in the end enter the social life and assimilate in relations with others for the purpose of achieving such needs and avoiding such dangers. Since egoism occupies such a position in the human nature, any definite solution to the great human problem must be based on belief in such a reality. If it is based on the idea of developing or overcoming it, then it will be an idealistic solution which does not have a place in the reality of the practical life man has been leading.

Here, religion performs its great message the burdens of which no one else can bear, nor its constructive goals and wise objectives can be achieved, except on its bases and principles. It combines the ethical criteria put by man with the egoistic instinct centred within his nature. In other words, religion unites the instinctive criteria of working and living; that is, egoism, and the criterion which ought to be the basis for working and living, in order to guarantee (for mankind) happiness, prosperity and justice.

The instinctive criterion demands that man must give preference to his own personal interests over those of the society and the factors which maintain its unity; and the criterion which must preside and prevail is that in the estimation of which all interests equate, and according to the concepts of which all individual and social principles strike a balance. How is it possible, then, to coordinate both criteria and unite both balances so that the human nature might return in the individual to be a factor of goodness and happiness for everyone, after it had been for a long time a factor that caused tragedies which developed selfishness, as it pleases?

The coordination and unification occur in a manner guaranteed by religion for the strayed humanity, and this has two styles: The first style is to concentrate on the realistic interpretation of life, propagating its comprehension in its accurate hue, as introductory prelude to an everlasting life in which man achieves an amount of happiness which depends on his endeavour during this limited life in the hope to achieve the Pleasure of Allah.

The ethical criterion, that is, achieving Allah's Pleasure, while winning its great social objectives, simultaneously ensures the achievement of the individual interest. Religion, therefore, leads man to participate in the construction of a happy society and the maintenance of its just issues which, all in all, achieve the Pleasure of Allah Almighty, for that is included in the estimation of his personal gain, so long as every deed and activity in this field will be quite handsomely rewarded.

The society's issue is also the individual's, according to the precepts and concepts of religion regarding life and its comprehension. Such a style of coordination cannot be achieved under the shade of a materialistic comprehension of life, for the materialistic comprehension of life makes man naturally looking at none but his present scope and limited lifespan, contrarily to the realistic interpretation of life presented by Islam. The latter expands man's scope, imposing on him a deeper outlook at his own interests and benefits, turning a quick loss into a real gain within such a deep sight, and the quick gain is turned in the end into a real loss: Whoever does a good deed, it is for his own self, and whoever does wrong, it is against his own self. (Qur'an, 41:46).

And whoever, male or female, does a good deed, while truly believing, shall certainly enter Paradise in which he will be sustained without a limit. (Qur'an, 40:40) .

On that Day (of Judgement) shall people be presented in numerous numbers in order to be shown their deeds; whoever does good even the weight of an atom shall receive its reward, and whoever does wrong even the weight of an atom shall receive its punishment. (Qur'an, 99:6-8).

[This is so] because thirst does not afflict them nor fatigue nor hunger in God's way, nor do they tread a path which enrages the infidels, nor do they receive from the enemy (any injury) but on account of its being reckoned to their credit as a deed of righteousness. Indeed God does not allow the reward of those who do good to go in vain. Nor do they spend anything (in the way of God), be it small or big, nor do they cut across a valley, except that it is recorded to their credit so that God may reward them with better than what they were doing. (Qur'an, 9:120 – 121).

These are but some magnificent portraits our religion presents as an example for the first style, the one it follows for the purpose of coordinating both criteria and the unification of both balances, joining the personal motives with the ways of goodness in life and developing the individual's interest in a manner that would make him believe that his personal interests and the general matter-of-fact interest, as outlined by Islam, are inter-related.

As regarding the other method followed by religion to incorporate the personal motive with the society's principles or interests, it is to guarantee to nourish man spiritually and help the growth of humane feelings and ethical inclinations within him. Within the human nature, as we have pointed out before, there are energies and capabilities of different inclinations. Some of them are materialistic the appetites of which open naturally, such as the appetite for food, drink and sex, while others are intellectual inclinations which blossom and grow through cultivation and care.

Therefore, it is natural for man, if left for himself, to be controlled by the materialistic inclinations, for these blossom naturally, while the intellectual inclinations and their innate readiness remain veiled within the soul. Religion, believing in an infallible leadership supported by God, entrusts the task of cultivating humanity and nurturing the intellectual inclinations therein to this leadership and its branches, creating thereby a group of righteous emotions and feelings, and man starts loving the ethical principles and ideals which religion brings him up to respect and to die for, and it removes from his path all obstacles composed of his own interests and benefits.

This does not mean that egoism is obliterated from the human nature. Rather, it means that the action geared towards the achievement of such principles and ideals is a complete

execution of the will of egoism, for the principles, because of religious upbringing, become loved by man as means of deriving a "special" pleasure from them.

These, then, are the two ways from which results the joining of the ethical issue to the personal matter. One of them may be summarized thus: providing a realistic interpretation of an everlasting life not for the purpose of man turning away from this life, nor is it for his submission to injustice and acceptance of iniquity. Not at all; it is for the sake of checking man through the accurate ethical criterion provided by that interpretation with sufficient assurance.

The other way may be summarized thus: The ethical education resulting in various feelings and emotions within man which guarantee the implementation of the ethical criterion according to the inspiration of the soul. The spiritual comprehension and ethical education of the soul, according to the Message of Islam, are the coordinating factors in treating the deeper cause behind the human tragedy. Let us describe the comprehension of life as a prelude for a perpetual one, according to the spiritual comprehension of life, and let us describe the emotions and feelings, nurtured by the ethical education, as "the ethical feelings of life".

The spiritual comprehension of life and the ethical feeling thereof are the two bases on which the new ethical criterion put by Islam for humanity stands, and this (criterion) is: achieving the Pleasure of Allah. This Pleasure, the one put forth by Islam as a general criterion for life, is the one which leads the boat towards the shores of righteousness, goodness and justice. The basic characteristic in the Islamic system is represented through its erection on a spiritual comprehension of life and an ethical feeling thereof, and the wide line in this system is: the regard for both individual and society, and ensuring the equilibrium between the individual and the social life: The individual is not the central base in the legislation and government, nor is the big social being the only thing the State looks at or for whose sake it legislates.

Every social system which does not stem out of this comprehension and feeling is either a system which follows the individual in his egoistic inclination, thus exposing the social life to the most severe consequences and dire perils, or it is a system which suppresses the individual's instincts and paralyzes in him his own nature for the sake of "protecting" the society and its interests, hence an everlasting bitter struggle starts between the system and its legislations, and the individuals and their inclinations.

Nay! The social existence of the system will always be exposed to failure at the hands of its own promoters, as long as they, too, have their own personal inclinations and instincts, and so long as these instincts find, through suppressing the other "individualistic" instincts and taking charge of strict leadership, a wide scope and a field unmatchable for setting out and utilization.

Both spiritual comprehension of life and the ethical feeling thereof do not only result in a

complete system of life in which there is high regard for each component of the society, each individual will be granted his liberty which has been cultivated by that comprehension and feeling and which the State restricts when there is any deviation from it. I say: Every doctrine which does not produce for mankind this sort of system can never be other than cooling the air off and alleviating woes rather than providing a remedy and a definite eradication of social desires and vices.

The intact social structure is erected on none other than a spiritual comprehension of life and an ethical feeling thereof, one from which both a system is set forth to fill life with the spirit of this feeling and the essence of that comprehension. This is Islam in the most precise and wonderful expression: a spiritual and ethical doctrine from which springs a perfect system for mankind which portrays the clearly marked scope, determining his goal to be even higher than that scope, acquainting him with his achievements there from.

As for its abolishment of the spiritual comprehension of life, stripping man of his ethical feeling thereof, considering the ethical concepts as pure whims created by the materialistic interests, and that only the economic factor is the criterion for all values and ethics, hoping from all of this to achieve man's happiness and social stability..., this, indeed, is but a hope, a desire, which can never be achieved until mankind is turned into a mechanical apparatus organized by few mechanical engineers.

Basing man on the basis of that spiritual comprehension of life and the ethical feeling thereof is not a hard or impossible task, for religions during man's history have performed their great message in this respect, and all what the world today contains of spiritual values, ethical awareness, virtuous feelings and emotions do not have an explanation more clear and logical in their pillars and bases other than the great endeavours undertaken by religions to cultivate humanity and its natural motives and whatever required for living and working.

Islam has carried the torch of bursting light after mankind had reached a certain degree of awareness. It preached the spiritual and ethical base on the widest scales and furthermost scopes, raising thereupon the banner of humanity. It established an intellectual State which ruled the world for a quarter of a century, aiming at the unity of all mankind into one intellectual base which portrays the mode and manner of life. The Islamic State, therefore, has two functions: One is to lift mankind through the intellectual base, stamping his inclination and feelings with its stamp. The other is watching him externally and bringing him back to the base if he practically deviates from it.

Therefore, the political awareness of Islam is not only an awareness of the structural aspect of the social life, but it also is a profound political awareness which stems from an entirely

complete outlook towards life, the cosmos, sociology, politics, economics and ethics. This inclusive outlook is the complete Islamic awareness. Any other sort of political awareness can either be a superficial political awareness which does not look at the world except from a particular angle without basing its concepts except on one particular hinging point. Or it may be a political awareness which studies the world from the purely materialistic angle which provides mankind with feuds and sufferings of all various shapes and hues.