

# Why Do We Lack Character?

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## **Widespread Impression.**

“Our people have no character” is acknowledged universally, at home and abroad, in business and government circles, and in every sphere of administrative activity. Lack of character produces social imbalance and leads ultimately to national decline and disintegration. The malady has been eating up the vitals of our social life too fast to withstand an unexpected shock.

## **Meaning of Character.**

The outward signs of a weak character are commonly believed to be bribery, corruption and exploitation but they do not bring out the true significance of the word. It belongs to the realm of ethics, which defines character in terms not easily intelligible to the common man. Here are a few definitions given by Western writers on ethics.

“Morality is character. Character is that which is engraved. Character is really inwardness. Immorality as energy is also character, but to be neither moral nor immoral is merely ambiguous”.

(Soren Kierkegaard in “The Present Age”, page 15).

“Character is the manifestation of Truth, and Truth is the conformation of Appearance to Reality”.

(Professor Whitehead in “Adventures of Ideas”, page 309).

“Character is adopting ‘Good’ and good is the movement in the direction of home, ‘evil’ is the aimless whirl of human potentialities without which nothing can be achieved and by which, if they take no direction but remain trapped in themselves, everything goes away”.

(Martin Bubar in “Between Man and Man”, page 78).

“Character is the possession of power over oneself; it is the victory over slavery to oneself”.

(Berdyayev in "Slavery and Freedom", page 47).

"Each person should in his acts, and behind them in his thoughts and his emotions, exercise that control which is necessary in order to assure not only harmony in his own personality but also social harmony".

(Alexander Loveday in "The Only Way").

"Character in the most general sense is a man's attitude towards his human surroundings which is expressed in his actions". (Kerschensteiner's essay on "The Concept and Education of Character" quoted by

(Martin Bubar in "Between Man and Man", page 108).

Let us attempt a definition on a layman's level.

### **An Illustrative Proverb.**

The proverb says "Sacrifice wealth to save life and sacrifice life to save honour". The first half of the proverb is clear. Wealth and life have their respective values and if only one of them can be saved then wealth should be sacrificed to save life. One who sacrifices wealth for life or *vice versa* is, however, neither credited with character nor condemned. A miser once fell ill and his son called in an eminent doctor, not for helping the patient, but for saving his face against the charge of indifference towards his ailing father. The doctor examined the patient, diagnosed the disease and wrote out a prescription. As the son was leaving for buying the medicines, the father told him to do so only after first ascertaining from the undertaker the cost of his funeral, that is, he should adopt the less costly course. The advice will excite laughter, not because it exhibits lack of character but on account of its absurdity. Preservation of self is an urge which every living being follows instinctively. How hard does a tiny little ant struggle against obstacles endangering its life! Man is no exception. If he sacrifices wealth for life, he follows a natural instinct and not any moral value. Doing the opposite would be devoid of sense. Harming oneself is lunacy.

The second half of the proverb suggests that life and honour have both a value but that if there is a tie between them and only one can be saved, then it is honour which should be preferred. He who sacrifices life for safeguarding honour is universally applauded as a man of character; he who sacrifices honour to save life is unreservedly condemned.

### **Character Defined.**

Preservation of life is an animal instinct; not so is the preservation of honour. The concept of honour is unknown to the animal world. In fact it forms the line of demarcation between the Animal and the Man. Honour is a specific human value. Preservation of human values elevates the level of life, from the animal to the human.

Character may, therefore, be defined as *who so preserves human values against animal instincts is a man of character.*

### **Assessment of Human Values.**

Human values might have different meanings. Take the word honour. “God has saved my honour,” means that I have not been disgraced before my friends. “She gave her life to save her honour”—here honour signifies chastity. But the meaning of chastity itself might differ from people to people. In the East if some one casts an evil glance at a veiled lady, her father or brother would not hesitate to shoot him. In the West, however, if a girl flirts publicly, her father or brother, instead of having any qualms, would feel proud of her as a popular society girl! Again one society might attach the greatest importance to a particular value which in the estimation of another society might not be a value at all. We respect and honour our parents, but there have been tribes with whom eating them up constituted a sacred duty. The Puritans saw nothing wrong in stealing Negro children and shooting the Irishmen. The Jews thought it bad, even criminal, to levy interest among themselves but permitted it in the case of non-Jews. In an island of the Pacific there is a tribe with whom dishonesty is the best moral conduct and among whom the cleverest cheat is held in the highest esteem. Thugs felt proud of killing poor wayfarers. Nationalism is recognized the world over as a political and social creed and one who helps the well being of his nation by exploiting the other nations, is regarded a patriot worthy of being immortalized in metal and marble.

In the words of Rumelin.

“Self regard is its (State’s) appointed duty; the maintenance and development of its own power and well-being is the supreme principle of all politics. The State can only have regard to the interest of any other State so far as this can be identified with its own interest. The maintenance of the State justified every sacrifice and is superior to every moral rule”

(Quoted by Robert H. Murray in his,

“The Individual and the State”, page 216)

### **Universal Standard of Character.**

Since human values vary with different societies should character mean harmonizing oneself to the values which a society might stress for the time being? In days gone by Spartans viewed theft a virtue and held the smartest thief in the high-test esteem; today theft is a crime and a thief a criminal. With us conception of a virgin is a disgrace for the family, in the West sexual intercourse between a willing couple is neither an evil nor a criminal offense: even homosexuality between willing parties is condoned there. Is there then no universal standard of character?

### **Quranic Concept of Character.**

People inhabiting different countries might follow different ways of life but, according to the Holy Quran, human values are the same anywhere and unchangeable too. It is not given, however, to human intellect to determine such values. Human intellect is essentially individualistic in character. It can seek preservation of the particular self to which it belongs individually or collectively, but not that of the other selves. For the well-being and preservation of mankind as a whole, however, what is needed is not an individualistic intellect, which cannot see beyond its nose, but a comprehensive and all pervading intellect, namely God and Revelation. It is Revelation alone which gives abiding universal values. The revealed values are preserved in the Holy Quran, the code of life for mankind in all climes and ages. Quranic values are Permanent Values of life and provide a universal standard of character or, to use Quranic terminology, *Taqwa*.

Rational thought fully endorses Quranic concept of character. The famous writer Hastings Rashdall says:

“That there is one absolute standard of values, which is the same for all rational beings, is just what Morality means.”

(The Theory of Good and Evil, Vol. II, page 286)

On page 211 of the book he agrees that these values cannot be devised by human intellect but have been revealed to man and says:

“Certainly it (moral law) is to be found, wholly and completely, in no individual human consciousness. Men actually think differently about moral questions, and there is no empirical reason for supposing that they will ever do otherwise”.

### **Human Level of Life.**

Permanent values pertain to human as distinct from animal level of life. The Quranic term for the animal level of life is “*Hayat-ud-dunya*”, or a level of life in which man’s vision is restricted to immediate gains. (The word *dunya* means nearer). Satisfaction of physical urges is accompanied by pleasure which the Holy Quran would not discard. Great discretion has to be exercised, however, when there is a tie between a physical urge promising pleasure and a human value. One who sacrifices the latter for the former is not a man of character; if he does the opposite, his behaviour would be acclaimed as laudable character.

### **A Quranic Illustration.**

The Holy Quran expects witnesses to be men of character. Says it

“O believers, be you securers of justice. If you are summoned as a witness, be a witness for God regardless of your relationship with the parties, whether your evidence culminates yourself or goes against your parents and kinsmen and

whether the party affected is rich or poor. God's Law is the best protector for the rich and the poor. God stands closest to either and claims that you be true to Him in preference to every one else. Let not caprice, personal gain, demands of relationship or regard for riches swerve you from the path of justice. Also in tendering evidence, neither twist your statement nor avoid any, remembering always that God is aware of the things you do", (4/135).

Evidence might often involve an acute struggle between material gains and justice. Victory of the former is a sign of "low" character. The Holy Quran calls it "following *hawa*" and the word "*hawa*", in its basic meaning, has the idea of carrying towards a low level. Victory of the latter (Justice) is evidence of true character. Struggle between material gains and human values appears at all cross-roads in life and the test of character is the choice one makes.

### **Why should Material Gains be sacrificed for Human Values?**

This is an important question. Riches, a life of comfort, a good name, high office and status, the charm of authority are all full of attraction. Should one give them up for the sake of preserving human values? Self-interest is ingrained in man. He cannot be weaned from it. He would not sacrifice self-interest unless and until he is convinced that in doing so he stands to gain more. He will preserve human values only if there is a reasonable prospect of greater gain.

### **Example of Hungry Man.**

Think of a person who has had no food for several days, and, due to hunger, is unable to sit up. If a dish full of steaming *pulao*\* is brought, won't he sit up, advance impatiently towards the dish, pick up a morsel and carry it towards his mouth? While in the process if he hears some one say that although the dish is a dainty, arsenic instead of salt has been added to it by mistake, would he put the morsel into his mouth or would he throw it back into the dish and bang the dish on the ground? He would undoubtedly do the latter since eating the stuff means certain death. He would prefer pangs of hunger rather than risk life. Now suppose the report said that the dish, instead of having arsenic, has been prepared from ill-gotten money. How will the hungry person react to the modified report? Ten to one he would snatch the dish and begin swallowing the contents. There will be available to him a thousand excuses against the plea of ill-gotten money, because he sees the gain in eating the dish, but none in rejecting it. Were he convinced that the dish was as deadly as the one with arsenic, he would most certainly throw it away. The truth is that in case of a tie between a physical urge or a material gain and a human value if a person is convinced that he stands to gain more by safeguarding the value he will without doubt sacrifice the physical urge. How is the conviction to come? The question is a challenge to ethics, "religion" and rationalism.

### **"Religious" View.**

A group amongst the believers in human values is the "religious" or the God fearing group. (Islam is a social order and not a "religion" and hence it is excluded from

this group). The group views human values as so many divine injunctions. Their observance pleases God and their violation incurs His wrath leading the recalcitrant into Hades after death. Man should therefore fear God's displeasure and chastisement and never disobey His commandments. The "religious" view might be acceptable to the primitive mind but it cannot satisfy the advanced twentieth century mind. One can threaten a child into obedience, but not a grown up person. He may obey under duress, but his inner self will revolt all the time and watch for an opportunity to break away. Moreover, there is no nobility of character in actions performed under duress. "Religious" view, therefore provides neither an explanation for safeguarding human values nor a guiding force for human actions.

### **View of Western Thinkers.**

Many Western thinkers can be cited, but for brevity's sake one or two quotations should suffice. According to Kant, who enjoys a unique position amongst Western thinkers, the whole edifice of ethics is founded on Man's goodwill. Says he

"It is impossible to conceive anything in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without limitation, save only a *good will*."

(Quoted by H.J. Patton in his

"The Categorical Imperative", page 34).

Kant defines "good will" as "a will which acts for the sake of duty." (Ibid, page 45). That is, doing duty for the sake of duty is "good will" provided it is free from gainful expectation. Good action, however good it may be, ceases to be good the moment it is associated with expectation of return or reward. The return for a good action is the principle which prompts it. Kant divides principles into two categories. Those which prompt a person to action for gaining some purpose (material maxims) and those which urge him to action without any purpose (*a priori* maxims). These latter, *a priori* maxims, give rise in man to a sense of duty. An *a priori* maxim is, in Kant's words, "categorical imperative". Says he

"The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as necessary of itself without reference to another end, i.e. as objectively necessary."

(Critique of Practical Reason, page 31).

The position of Kant stated simply is that human values are duties which man should perform for the sake of duty and not for achieving some purpose. They are duties *a priori* needing neither any argument for their proof nor any expectation for return or reward.

### **Urge for Human Action.**

Kant's theory might be viewed an achievement in the realm of thought, but there is nothing in it which could sparkle man's urge to sacrifice material gains and pleasures in favour of human values. The sacrifice needs a powerful stimulus, too strong for demands of self-interest. As a rational and conscious being he will attempt nothing which does not assure self-interest. Neither the high sounding theories of philosophers nor the forceful sermons of the mystics have succeeded in persuading man to forego self-interest for the preservation of human values. Their success, if any, has been restricted to a few devotees only. Their expositions lack the capacity of becoming universal life-principles.

### **Material Concept of Life.**

According to the Holy Quran there are two concepts of life. One concept is that man is only an animal of a some-what improved order, who lives subject to physical laws and when under their operation his bodily machine stops, he dies and with death comes his final end. This concept views man as an embodiment of physical urges at the animal level to the complete exclusion of human values. Man is a social being and since collective living leads to clashes of interest, society frames laws and regulations to keep the clashes at the minimum. One who observes the social laws is a peaceful citizen; their violation leads to punishment by courts or brings on social stigma. Under this concept of life--

- (i) Society needs no permanent principles or values but frames laws and regulations at will and modifies, annuls or adds to them as expedient;
- (ii) The urge for respecting social laws arises from fear of legal punishment or social stigma;
- (iii) The need for respecting the laws disappears the moment one can manage to escape the grip of law or to avoid social stigma; and
- (iv) The sole criterion of character is that a person does not place self-interest over national interest. Anti-national activities are not only a penal crime but a social stigma also. But if the legal machinery of a court weakens and self-interest becomes the order of the day, as is common in all poor third world countries including Pakistan, there is no check which would stop unrestricted grabbing nor is there any inner urge which could awaken a sense of character in the people.

This concept, the material concept, of life has made this earth of ours a veritable hell. Countries alive to national interest have become a terror for the other nations; those who have ceased to be mindful of national interest, are a curse for themselves and an object of hate for the rest of the world. There is in this concept no room for character as defined above. It is self-interest only which the concept breeds in individuals as well as groups. Placing of national over personal interest is practical wisdom and not character.

### **Quranic Concept of Life.**

The other concept of life, according to the Holy Quran, is that man is not his *body* only, but that he has also a Self or Personality or to use Quranic terminology, Divine Energy, whose development is the real purpose of life. Development of Personality requires the frame-work of body and, therefore, along with the development of Personality, the development of body is also necessary. Development of body is, however, only a means for the development of Personality and not an end in itself.

### **Man Wishes to Live on.**

A desire lurking in the deepest recesses of man's heart is to live on and never die. Self-preservation is man's instinct and his intellect helps provide all the means required for the purpose. Self-preservation is the basic theme of the story of Adam narrated allegorically in the Holy Quran. *Iblis* took note of this human feeling, advanced towards Adam and offered affectionately a suggestion that would secure him immortality coupled with power which knows no waning. The offer touched Adam's tender most feelings and he beseeched *Iblis* impatiently to tell him the secret. Said *Iblis* "you can live after death through progeny which will perpetuate your name generation after generation." The effect was magical, intense and abiding. There is no limit to the anxiety of an issueless individual advancing in age for having a son. Bemoaning and bewailing he can never reconcile himself to dying sonless because then his abode would become dark, his name would be forgotten, his lineage would come to a dead end and his family would cease to be for all time to come. But *Iblis's* suggestion, said God to man, was a deception and a delusion born of the material concept of life. A father has a separate and independent existence from the son. If the son lives on it cannot make the father immortal. The way to achieve immortality lies elsewhere, namely through adequate development of Personality. A developed Personality is unaffected by physical death; it continues to live after death and live forever. That is the way to achieve immortality, the deepest and the strongest yearning of man. God told man further that in the present state of his existence development of Personality is possible through his body and that therefore protection of body and satisfaction of bodily urges is an unavoidable necessity. Consider an egg, the hidden life germ in which can, with due care and attention become a chicken provided the eggshell remains firm and is adequately protected. The shell is, however, a means for developing the inner potential chicken and not an end in itself. Similarly man's body is a means for developing his Personality, not an end in itself. God also said to man that as there are laws for the development of his body, so there are laws for the development of his Personality. The latter laws cannot be discovered but have been revealed and are preserved in the **Holy Quran**. They are Human or Permanent Values of life and in their application they are as universal as the physical laws governing man's body.

### **Difference Between the Two Concepts:--**

Life lived under the Quranic concept differs vastly from life lived under the materialistic concept. According to the materialistic concept man's physical life and bodily urges are an end in themselves and are not subject to any higher law. But according to the Quranic concept

- (i) Man's body and its physical urges are not an end in themselves but are a means for the achievement of a higher purpose, namely integration of his Personality.
- (ii) It is very necessary that bodily urges shall be satisfied. In our example the hungry man threw away the poisoned dish because the stuff which was a means for saving life had turned into a source of destruction. But when there is a conflict between a physical urge and a permanent value, the former must be sacrificed for the latter with the full cognizance and consent of intellect, the vigilant and uncompromising guardian of self-interest.
- (iii) A believer in the Quranic concept of life takes care of permanent values, not in obedience to some body's order nor as a matter of duty, but after making a deliberate and calculated choice. The satisfaction of the physical urge offers him physical pleasure or temporary gain, and regard for the permanent value promises him honourable and abiding life. He decides solely on the basis of reason that he should give up the lesser gain for the sake of a bigger gain. Allama Iqbal\*\* draws a distinction between two phases of intellect. When it cares only for the satisfaction of physical urges intellect is *Aql-e-Khud Been* (self-seeing intellect) and when it cares for the satisfaction of urges both of body and Personality, intellect is *aql-e-jahan been* (all seeing intellect). The Holy Quran calls gains of body *Hayat-ud-dunya* (nearer or present gains), gains of Personality *Aakherat* (gains of the future) and Momeneen (believers) *olul albab*, that is those possessing intellect of a superior order.
- (iv) Care of permanent values under the Quranic concept, is a rational affair. Intellect works for self-interest and when it is face to face with two gains, it chooses the bigger gain. Human intellect at the animal level is low but rises higher and higher as it attains *Momin's* level of life. A *Momin* is intellectually always a superior being.
- (v) Anything done at the instance of "self-seeing" intellect would, as commonly understood, be an act of wisdom. But what is done in pursuance of "all-seeing" intellect would be wisdom, *cum* character. "All-seeing" intellect of a *Momin* never conflicts with his faith.

### **Basis of Character.**

Character and human dignity are closely connected with a firm belief in the following:--

- (a) that man is not merely his body, but has also a Personality whose integration is life's real purpose;
- (b) that as there are laws for the development of Body, so there are laws for the integration of Personality, called permanent values;

- (c) that permanent values cannot be discovered by human intellect but have been revealed by God; and
- (d) that every action leaves an indelible impression on the doer's Personality.

In regard to permanent values of life Hastings Rashdall, who has been quoted before, holds in his book "The Theory of Good and Evil", pages 200-220, that for a belief in permanent values the following pre-requisites are essential:--

- (1) That the universe has been created with a purpose, the purpose being provision of means for helping human self achieve its destiny.
- (2) That human self is a permanent reality; that the reality is spiritual in so far as it has a permanent life of its own not identical with the changes of the material organism with which it is (in whatever way) connected; and that the acts of the man really proceed from and express the nature or character of the self.
- (3) That man's present actions affect his future, i.e. his tomorrow would be identical with what he does today or, in other words, there is continuity in life. One who sees nothing beyond present life, will be after present gains and will attach no importance to permanent values, because their importance, as means for forming character, can be realized only when one believes life to be permanent and continuous. If he believes that character comes to an end with the last breath of life, why should he worry about formation of character.
- (4) That there must be belief in God because "an absolute Moral Law or moral ideal cannot exist in material things, it can exist only in a Mind from which all Reality is derived".

According to the Holy Quran Faith (*Eaman*) and Character are inseparable; the Holy Book never misses to precede "*amelu as salehat*" (do good deeds) with "*al lazeena amanu*" (those who have faith).

### **Choice Between Gains.**

No one will be prepared to do anything which does not do him any good. Take the example of two persons working in a Government office. They are there in self-interest, working for a pay. If a business-man comes along asking for some concession against the rules in return for a handsome bribe, the official to whom human Personality is a non-entity, will accept the amount provided he is assured of non-apprehension by the police, because the bribe brings him monetary gain. The other official, however, who has faith in human Personality will not accept the bribe, because he values more the gain in being honest. He realizes that acceptance of bribe will bring him physical gain but will harm his Personality and that rejection of bribe will mean a physical loss but a gain for his Personality. He will balance the gains and, since Personality is in any case more valuable, he will welcome Personality's gain and reject what will satisfy only a physical urge. In making the decision he does nothing against self-interest. He only goes in for a greater gain. His choice is not in obedience to any order nor in fulfillment of any duty but

because it brings him substantial benefit. The choice avoids harm to Personality in the same manner in which harm to life made the hungry man reject the poisoned dish. The basis of the Quranic Law of Retribution is that every action is linked inextricably with whatever impression it produces and leaves behind on Personality. Faith in Personality prompts man continuously to do healthy deeds and exhibit nobility of character. A “*momin*” works for the good it brings and measures his reward not according to physical or material standards but according to the standard applicable to Personality. The verse

“I ask you not for any return; I get my return from God” (10/72),

conveys the same meaning. There is no action but has a return, the assessment of return varying according to the measure adopted. Working in consonance with permanent values does not deprive one of physical gains. In a social order constituted on the basis of permanent values an individual has physical gains along with the means of development of Personality *vide* the verse

“our Nourisher give to us in the present good and good in the future” (2/210).

### **Law of Development.**

One of the laws governing development of Personality is that development proceeds in proportion to what one makes available from his earnings for the development of others. One who believes in human Personality works his best for earning a living, utilizes as much of it as would furnish basic needs of life and makes the rest available for the development of fellow beings. Judged by physical standards the process brings nothing but loss. If one knows that what is left after meeting his needs would pass to others, why should he work for the surplus. He should normally work for procuring his needs only and then relax. The reasoning is logical and a satisfactory answer to the argument is not easy to produce. Russia faced the self-made problem and in the absence of an adequate answer had no alternative to hanging an iron curtain along its borders. Quranic concept, however, provides an answer and by doing so establishes the superiority of the Quranic Social Order over the other social orders evolved by man. The establishment of the Quranic Social Order is the work of a group of “*Mom-e-noon*”, that is people who are rationally convinced:

- (i) That the purpose of life is the development of human Personality, and
- (ii) That the development of Personality comes about through working hard and making available for others what is, out of such earnings, surplus to needs.

### **Why Do Momins Do So.**

It is rather difficult to appreciate the keenness with which *momins* work for the purpose. Consider a mother suckling her baby. She must produce the maximum amount of milk for the baby’s proper nourishment. The food she takes is intended primarily for her own nourishment. But she would never wish that it should all be assimilated for her

body's growth and no portion converted into the baby's milk. In fact if the milk shows signs of drying up, she would at once consult her doctor and do everything to restore the supply. She is anxious for the baby's care and nourishment. Identical is the mental attitude of those who believe that by providing nourishment for others they help integration of their own Personality. They work to the maximum of their capacity, utilize only as much of their earnings as would provide them basic needs, and make the rest available for others' nourishment. At times they would go even further and prefer others over themselves even though poverty be their portion (59/9). A loving and caring mother would rather remain hungry herself but must feed her children. She would gladly inconvenience her own sleep so that the child might sleep comfortably. In doing so she has not the slightest expectation of any return or reward. In the same way *Momins* tell those helped

“we desire no recompense from you, no thankfulness” (76/9).

But there is a difference. Whatever the mother does for the child is done under the stress of a natural instinct common to all animals, but what a *Momin* does is the outcome of thoughtful deliberation and free will. The distinction is vital and forms the foundation of the Quranic Social Order. It is a sure guarantee for the sustained elevation of character.

### **The Quranic Way.**

The Holy Quran, on the one hand, makes the State responsible to see that every citizen is provided with the basic needs of life and the means for the development of latent capabilities. Weaknesses of character arising directly from want and poverty are thus eliminated. On the other hand, the Holy Book creates in every citizen, on the basis of reason, the conviction that his Personality will get integrated in proportion to what he makes available out of his earnings, after meeting his own needs, for the nourishment of others. There is no regimentation but conviction is brought home rationally by imparting education and training from early childhood. Quranic Social Order is made up in fact of persons with whom the conviction is an article of faith. The conviction eradicates all evils connected with hoarding and inflation since in the Quranic Social Order surplus wealth is not allowed to remain with the individual nor the urge of self-interest is permitted to tarnish human character. Communism also claims that it will not allow surplus wealth to remain with individuals and will thereby put an end to the evils of capitalism. But the communistic social order and the Quranic Social Order are entirely different.

### **Basic Weakness of Communism.**

Communism has for its basis the materialistic concept of life and, therefore, can provide no urge for a worker to work the hardest and to part with willingly what may be, out of his earnings, surplus to needs. The absence of the urge constitutes a basic weakness foreboding its failure as a social order. It can subsist only with the help of external force and an order based on force cannot obviously last long, as the world has already witnessed the disintegration of Socialist Russia and Collapse of Communism in all Eastern European Countries. A social order will endure and advance only if it has the

willing co-operation of the people, and such co-operation is impossible except with the Quranic concept of life. As already explained, the materialistic concept of life on which Communism is based, pertains to the animal level of life in which there is no room for the idea of character, because it can think of nothing higher than physical gain. The most the materialistic concept can do is to arouse the feeling of Nationalism and lead people from individual to collective effort for national good. But according to the Western concept of democracy Nationalism thrives on mutual hatred among nations. Every nation fears that if it becomes weak more powerful nations will swallow it up. Therefore Nationalism is at best the product of the urge of self-preservation and has nothing to do with human values *vis a vis* physical urges. Nationalism makes self-preservation a collective instead of an individual affair. This does not mean decrying Nationalism, that is the urge for protecting one's country. Self-preservation is a must and unless a country is fully protected that 'must' will become impossible. What the foregoing is intended to convey is that work for self-preservation, whether individual or collective, does not signify positive character but reveals sound practical wisdom. Similarly indifference to self-preservation is un-wisdom and not a negation of character. A man sailing in a boat if he begins boring a hole in its bottom, will be called a lunatic and not one lacking character. Similarly if a citizen works for the country's disintegration he will be termed a lunatic. If the national urge makes him sacrifice personal gain for national good he would be credited with sound sense like the man in the boat who uses his valuable handkerchief for stuffing the hole in its bottom. Character comes in where one having faith in permanent values hazards a plunge to save a drowning person. There might be instances of people taking a plunge who have absolutely no idea of permanent values, but their psychological analysis is likely to show that either they were aware unconsciously of the relevant permanent value or they did it with some ulterior motive. Display of true character takes place where one is confronted with two values and he sacrifices deliberately and consciously the lower for the higher value. Faith in Quranic permanent values does it; Communism and all other isms are helpless in the matter.

### **Momin's Patriotism.**

Believers in Quranic values sacrifice self interest for country's sake not because the sacrifice would safeguard their personal interest, but because they wish their country to become a model for the world for enforcing permanent values. Their preference for a permanent value over personal gain is a sign of their elevated character.

The difference between the patriotism of a believer in materialistic concept of life and of a *Momin* is clear. For the former his country is an end in itself because "who dies if England lives", but for the latter his country is not an end in itself but only a means for enforcing permanent values. *Momin's* patriotism protects undoubtedly his personal interest as well as of his family, but this is by way of by-product. In Quranic Social Order there is integration of human Personality along with development of body. The entire activity of a *Momin*, whether for the development of body or Personality, merges into and produces a balanced amalgam of character.

### **Resume:--**

- (1) In a conflict between two values concerning man's physical life if the lesser value is sacrificed for the greater value, it is an act of wisdom.
- (2) In a conflict between a value concerning physical or animal level of life and a value concerning human level of life, if the latter is given preference over the former, character is demonstrated.
- (3) Display of character presupposes faith in human values and human Personality. Character is wisdom too because it sacrifices lesser value for the bigger value. *Momeneen* according to the Holy Quran, are "*olul albab*" or master of intellect and wisdom. They are the true intellectuals although unbelievers in human Personality call them lunatics.
- (4) Intellect by itself cannot discover human values; they are revealed. Faith in Revelation and belief in human values go hand in hand. Faith and healthy deeds are, according to the Holy Quran, inseparable.
- (5) Off-and-on one comes across people who have no faith in revelation but honour human values and are prepared to make the biggest sacrifice for their sake. An analysis of their mind will show one of two things. *Either* they were brought up in an environment where human values were respected and stressed traditionally and were reposed carefully in their sub-conscious mind *or* their sacrifice was prompted by some motive like reputation, popularity, or the like. Sacrifice in their case is not a manifestation of character; character seeks strength of Personality and not satisfaction of physical urges.
- (6) Development of human Personality proceeds from faith in the Quranic values and through safeguarding them in practical life. They have to be honoured *en masse*. Ignoring some and respecting others would not achieve full development.
- (7) Development of human Personality is possible, not in seclusion, but in a society called Islamic State, whose edifice rises on a faith in Quranic permanent values. The duty of Islamic State consists in safeguarding of human values and popularising them throughout mankind. Quranic Social Order guarantees every citizen means for development of Personality and all that is pleasant and dignified in the world.

### **Mysticism and Character.**

Finally a word about the impact of mysticism on character. *Mysticism* claims purification of self or spiritual advancement through various practices performed in seclusion. There is in mysticism no incentive for man to work for a social order or a State. The subject has been discussed at great length in my book "**Saleem ke Nam Khatoot**" (Vol: III). Briefly stated the essential features of mysticism are:--

- (1) It is misleading to say that *Mysticism* aims at the development and integration of human Personality. In fact it holds human Personality or Self to be the root cause of all misery which can be shed only by

effacement of human Self. Mysticism believes that human Self is a part of Divine Self which on detachment therefrom has got stuck in the morass of matter, that the purpose of life is to pull out human Self from matter's marsh and rejoin it to its Principal and that the object is achievable through discarding society, relations and desires. *Mysticism* aims at annihilation and not integration of Self.

- (2) In mysticism society, state, social organization, are matters for the worldly and an essential pre-requisite for self-purification is that they must all be discarded. Man's salvation or salvage of soul from matter's mud is an individual affair and can be achieved through meditation and exercises of a strenuous nature.
- (3) *Mysticism* credits negative virtues, namely humility, modesty, weakness, etc. These virtues are appropriate to a *negative* life which works for annihilation of Self. In consequence mysticism has been described as "an alien growth in the land of Islam", because, contrary to mysticism Islam advocates a *positive* life and expects man to master nature, establish justice, and attain his destiny by integrating human Personality. And it is the many shining facets of a developed Personality which go to make up character.

### **Why Do We Lack Character?**

In the light of the foregoing the straight answer to this question is that we lack character because we do not distinguish the human level of life from the animal level; because we do not appreciate the Divine Energy in us, that is, our Personality, the deciding, determining and dynamic agent in Man; and because we do not care for Permanent values in life as taught by the Holy Quran. The answer also helps to show the way to develop character, namely, that we should, in all seriousness, take up the education of our people, particularly in Quranic fundamentals, and life's permanent Values. Dissemination of Quranic teachings should be at the top of our educational programme. *Lughat-ul-Quran* brought out in four volumes by Tolu-e-Islam Trust (Regd.) Lahore, which explains with the help of authentic Lexicons, the meaning of Quranic words, idioms, phrases, special terms and new concepts, should prove helpful in an intelligent study of the Holy Book, Al-Quran.

**G.A. Parwez**

\* *A delicious rice dish cooked with meat*

\*\* *Dr. Sir, Mohammad Iqbal, Poet, Philosopher of Pakistan (1877-1938)*

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