

ART ISLAM AND RELIGION



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Paraphrased rendering of
“Art and Islam” by Allama G. A. Parwez

A rose flower in medicinal sciences is digestive in character. Temperamentally it brings dryness in a person. Its other characteristics generate strength and embellish the heart in a smoothing bliss. The nectar of a rose or it's sweetly sautéed petals are considered very salubrious. Rose is always considered a flower of many attributes. (These attractive qualities of beauty can only be admired who has outgrown his animal childhood and is living and eating healthy meals daily with awareness. Animals do not know anything of beauty. Writer's note)

Yet when the same flower catches the attention of an individual, who has an eye for beauty due to his aesthetic sense gifted by nature, he becomes enveloped in its luscious magnificence. The eyes are captivated in a world that frolics and romps in its delicately invigorating petals. The charming fuchsias, in their pleasant fragrance are scattered in all directions of the person's mind. The scenario invites the enshrined eye of every artistic mind. This condition of absorbing attraction in the play of nature is not only found in flowers. From other perspectives as well, every nook and niche in the Eden of this universe is exploding with radiance in kaleidoscope colors. Every view of it reflects an artistic aspect besides utilitarian traits.

In the dazzling luster of the sun; in the lunacy of moonlight; in the ornamental details of the dark starry dome of the night or in the color enriched spectrum of nature. In the

mornings of delightful aubades. In the gushing enterprise of ocean waves, not forgetting the ballet of clouds. In the tranquility of brooks. The silence of tall and slender ensemble of trees standing in queue, is broken by the frisky chirps of playful birds now and then. Wherever we may venture to glance in the décor of this universe, one cannot escape the charming beauty smoothly blending with the functional aspects, like an innocent smile on the lips of any child, lost in the dream world of its own.

The truth is when Providence took responsibility of nurturing humankind to incarnate or give it some form; it became incumbent in order to be flawless, to make provisions for the transitional phases in its development. Besides its physical requirements mankind is profusely steeped in passions. Hence function and formality are interlocked to compensate for this impetuous character and became its indispensable ingredients. Animals have only physical demands. By instinct human kind is being refined in aesthetics. A cow will never differentiate between fragrant flowers and grass. When any human has transcended his animal desires he becomes capable of knowing the difference.

Limitation of Laws

For the proper functioning of its physical form the necessity of laws is inherent and cannot be ignored. In the same breath laws are required for the proper functioning of emotions and desires. It is in gifting these standards of life by Allah almighty that requirements for developing the 'body' and 'soul' are fulfilled. Instead of building castles in the air, codes of life provide the means to live this life in reality and serenity. These values of life also provide measures for a safe journey in our next phase of life. We shall proceed later into the details of this ideology in the following paragraphs.

The Messengers (peace upon them) brought for us from

time to time standards and codes of life as were revealed upon them by the Creator. Since human beings have the option to choose, after the Messengers (peace upon them) passed away from this world, these values of life were compromised with and amalgamated by their followers. Now this compromised version of the original principles of life is what we term as '**Religion.**' In the following pages we shall examine how *religion* exploits the mind and matter.

Concepts in Religion

For heavenly purposes the basic ecclesiastical laws define life as despicable and repugnant. Religion considers everything in this world as evil. In religion this world has to be looked upon with hatred. Any person who desires to worship God must avoid the pleasures of this life. The more a person stays away from worldly pleasures, the closer he is to God. This hatred of the world culminates when the mind has no desire left for any kind of pleasures; in religion these kinds of people are considered pristine and pure.

As long as the individual is alive, obviously there is need for food and water; this thirst and hunger can never be escaped. A person can reduce his appetite, yet he cannot live without it. Whether he lives in any jungle, desert or a cave, or he could be doing his *mantra* on the mountain top. It is impossible to negate his appetite. Those who compromised and became accustomed to the rituals of religion were unable to eliminate human thirst and hunger for food. Religion so far has been quite successful in manipulating those facets of human desires that concern with human pleasures and aesthetic tastes. These aesthetic pleasures are pontificated and dogmatically decreed taboo in the nomenclature of religions.

Followers of Religion

Life which dehumanizes and justifies hatred of this world

was given 'spiritual' status by the followers of religion. Life that is disgusting and repugnant to any admirer of beauty was hailed as 'spiritual' and closer to divinity. If anyone is curious and wants to go through and read the lives of these spiritual leaders, one shall notice the horrendous and dreadful environs in which they spent all their lives. Regardless whether they are Buddhist bhikshoos, Hindu pundits, Christian saints or Muslim Allahwalas from the shrines. All these exorcised religious people glorify this Icarian trait in them.

We hear so and so did not take a bath all his life, or so and so spent his life in hideously loathsome conditions. A spiritual leader did not have his hair cut or manicure all his life. Another spent all his life under the open sky. While yet another spent his entire life dangling in a well. So on and so forth. Even nowadays we sometimes come across these 'God lovers,' or someone who claims to be further ahead in his admiration of the divine. Their condition is so repulsive and pathetic that any admirer of beauty would abhor going near them while their followers smell incense of heavens in the presence of their spiritual leaders.

Escapism

It is the very nature of religion to further inhibit minds that are unable to emancipate. Thereby causing the aesthetic tastes to remain retarded. Astonishingly enough in the same religious crowd there seem to emerge those who are able to carve for themselves escape routes. The grandeur of awesome architecture of Roman Cathedrals conceals rare specimens of mosaics and sculpture works. We descry beautiful nuns which adorn the atmosphere of their monasteries only to restore beauty. Besides the mellow requiem of church orchestra, one finds the same kind of aura in Hindu temples and ashrams. Bas-reliefs and statues portray the romances of Radha and Krishna, vividly involved in their rapturous odyssey accompanied by music, in the

rituals of Hindu religion. In the mystic school of Islam we hear music of highly elevated order, the precipitated form of which is felt in the concussions and agitations of *qawali* and folklore songs which are suppose to ease the path towards God. The strict followers who are more restrained and bonded with religion delight in music without musical instruments. The sound that is produced from the vocal chords of human larynx is legitimate whereas the same sound when it is played on an instrument is illegitimate.....Strange!

Ironically these *halal* and *haram*, partitions are ascribed to that Supreme Entity whose sublime beauty is ideally in proportion. The recitals of Qur'an move the dullest and most flat people; even the most insipid person becomes motivated and excited for the main reason they are in musical rhythms. The most popular recitals of Qur'an are of two types; one is known as '*Hijazi*,' while the other is called '*Misree*.' One is recited in "*Bhair'oon*" and the other in "*Bharveen*" raga. These orchestral arrangements are escape routes to satisfy the aesthetic demands of those who have transcended their animal instincts and now feel the need to live on human standards. When these human desires and urges are not fulfilled they find underground escape routes. These 'escape routes' in modern day psychological terminology is called 'perversion.' Consequently the end result of perverted satisfaction stifles the creative mind and nurturing of human individuality. And so our natural desires become perverted in the world of religion. Religions never endorse fresh ideas or stimulate a person to face the real world. Religion is a slur on the process of natural development.

We observe everyday people religiously engaged in rhubarbs against passions. All these conversations are just plain ranting. The heated disputes in which these folks involve themselves are an excuse to somehow stimulate and gratify those very passions against which these people impugn. This type of crowd transmits a strange ludicrous

1. Halal are those eatables that are allowed while Haram is that which is prohibited in Islam.

attitude. They prostrate and worship the one and only Divine Being; yet in the same ticket they want to destroy and rout the décor and beauty of the same God. They believe this act of destruction in passions is actually height of worship. They admire and pay respects to the Divine Creator and in the same breath passionately want to annihilate His beautiful creations. This paradoxical mind can only be expected in the atrium of religions. On the contrary the system of life called 'Din' in Islam neither disparages this world as ugly nor belittles human feelings. As in religions, Islam does not put labels of 'good' or 'evil' on human feelings. As a matter of fact how we make use of our feelings is what makes them 'good' or 'evil.'

World of Islam

In the east the terms *glory* and *grandeur*₂ are very conventional. In *glory* is expected productivity and utilitarian benefits. It is the appropriate use of anything which makes it functional and productive. Hence this term is concerned with the physical features. On the other side the term *grandeur* connotes praise, honor and elation. The appreciation of something that is associated with human feelings and emotions. As I mentioned earlier, in world religions the productive and utilitarian aspect of Divine glory is taken for granted as 'good,' yet magnificence, praise and grandeur of worldly things is condemned as 'evil.'

This dualistic character of thought originated from Zoroastrian religion. Zoroastrians have two gods Ahriman and Ahura Mazda, the former is the god of evil while the latter is the god of goodness symbolized by light and fire. The advent of Qur'an *defacto* proved this dualism as defunct and evil. The original source of grandeur and glory or the functional and appreciative aspects, Qur'an explains, is one and the same. The source of production and praise is the

2. In this article and henceforth the real meanings have not been used exactly. These two words, glory and grandeur have been coined as terms to substitute the Arabic words Hamd and Rabbubiyat in Qur'an.

same one and only Divine Being. In the Qur'an it says, **لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ** (64:1) Upon observing an awe inspiring work of art when our feelings converge on our lips, the spontaneous sounds of praise and respect in the words of Qur'an, are known as "*Hamd*." It is in this context Qur'an has repeatedly ascribed the word '*Hameed*' to God. The actual meanings of the Arabic word *Hameed* means the décor of this universe is not sporadic or dilletantish. This décor is perpetually being expressed and this unfolding of universal beauty is the inherent characteristic of its Creator. In the words of poet Ghalib,

Gradually unveiling the grandeur and glory,
Curtain slowly unwinds the vistas of universe

When we carefully scrutinize the overtures of Qur'an's literature opening with the words, **الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ** (1:1) The first adjective '*Hamd*' shows the aesthetic attributes of God, whereas the other word '*Rub*' reveals the nurturing character of God. It is by virtue of these two attributes the straight path towards God is mentioned as **صِرَاطَ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ** (Qur'an 14:1) Meaning the straight path when followed, besides its being venerable shows us along its way the splendor and magnificence that are collocated. In explaining the creative process, God reveals in the Qur'an,

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ (32:7)

It is He who has created everything most perfectly
beautiful.

Creativity of God

In Arabic language the word *Hoos'un* (beauty) means anything that is in perfect ratio and proportion. Even if slightest distortion occurs in the balance, it will diminish the beauty. Pascal aptly said that if Cleopatra's nose had been slightly flat, the history of the world would have been different today. God has emphatically proclaimed that we will not be able to find any disequilibrium in its creative process. Nothing in this universe is out of proportion. Even His manner of

explaining is eloquently enchanting. In the chapter of Al Mulk, the words are, مَا تَرَىٰ فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِن تَفَوُّتٍ (67:3) In the gracious creativity of God, we shall see no twist, crease, kink or lack of balance. Nothing in it shall be found imperfect. Qur'an further says, فَأَرْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَىٰ مِن فُطُورٍ (67:4) In the vastness above, broaden the horizons of your mind first and then observe, if anything in it is out of order. Any split, dehiscence or disgrace? ثُمَّ ارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيْنِ (67:4) Not just once, take your vision again, again and again on the whole scenario; scrutinize and search carefully with all curiosity. يَتَقَلَّبُ إِلَيْكَ الْبَصَرُ حَاسِبًا وَهُوَ حَسِيرٌ (67:4) Your vision will return dejected and defeated. In the decorum of nature it is not possible to find even the slightest imperfection. (What most admirers of beauty consider ugly or imperfect is in fact raw material for humankind, So they may create in this world)

Transient Ornamentation

Let us see what is for us down on earth now. The physical needs of all living creatures are provided by the fertile soil. For these reasons it seems it is only functional in its value. And yet, God proclaims, إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَّهَا (18:7). We have embellished all that is over the land. Take a view of how the various shades of hues ornament and adorn the carpet of the earth. Why is the atrium of nature decorated with so much splendor and magnificence? لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ الْآيَاتِ هَاتِيكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ يَتَّقُونَ So it may inspire mankind towards balance and equilibrium, thereby man may become capable of handsome deeds. Beautiful deeds motivate us towards a flourishing culture. It must be observed Quran has used the word *hasnaat* for good deeds. Only those deeds are acceptable in the kingdom of God that are inspired by beauty.

Ornamentation of the Skies

We understand now why the Qur'an puts emphasis on the manner of how the colorful carpet is laid on the earth. It stimulates our curiosity to lift its head and take a glimpse on the sort of ornamentation that has been done in the skies. Qur'an is witness to the astronomical sizes of huge planets;

besides the sun, moon and other stars that are closer to us which are floating in their orbits (88:18). At the same time Qur'an also says, **وَلَقَدْ زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحٍ** (67:5). There is attraction in the planets that are closer in the atmosphere. We knew, every evening before going to sleep you might look towards the skies; by making the stars appear in their actual size we did not want to scare you or disturb your sleep, besides frightening the children. We made arrangements in such a pleasing manner so that these huge stars may appear to you like candles flickering in darkness. **وَلَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا لِلنَّاظِرِينَ** (15:16). In the vastness of skies we transformed these humungous stars and made them appear attractive for those who can see.

World of Animals

In the chapter of Al-Nahl (The Bee), the aspects of grandeur and glory have been narrated in a very characteristic way, a trademark of Qur'an which is found in no other book. **وَالْأَنْعَامَ خَلَقَهَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا دِفْءٌ وَمَنَافِعُ وَمِنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ** (16:5). Among them are those that lumber under the strains of your bulky cargo and take them to far away cities. If you had to carry this encumbersome burden by yourselves would it not have hindered in your daily activities and created difficulties for you? Then observe the horses, mules and donkeys. You all ride on them, **وَزِينَهُ** (16:8) and some are feast for sight to soothe your aesthetic faculties.

We read until now how Qur'an recounts the functional values. What we have understood so far, there remains no more that can be said on this subject. Indeed it is Qur'an and no ordinary book gentle hearts, it shall always have more in it than our expectations.

Mutual Dialogues

For painters and poets landscapes are dear most and of priceless value. As far as poetry is concerned, if we have the

ability to perceive with insight only then shall we be able to experience the serenity and peace in the following words of Dr. Allama Iqbal,

Tipsy stroll of a careless dear on the sand stones of time.

Or,

Tinkling in the eternal silence of nature;
Voices of quietly departing caravans.

And still another,

Smouldering ashes hither, a piece of rope thither;
Who knows? How many caravans went wither.

At another time he says,

Fuschia among the clouds and mountain tops;
Heaps of red and carmen; leftovers of sunset.

In the above verses each scenario describes a moving world of beauty. Let us retrace our steps where the advantages of animals are mentioned in the Qur'an. After mentioning all the benefits it is written, there is more to it than our expectations. To understand this 'more to it' we need to elevate our minds to appreciate its aesthetics. وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا جَمَالٌ حِينَ تُرِيحُونَ وَحِينَ تَسْرَحُونَ (16:6). Just visualize the serenity of the morning dawn when few stars are still flickering in the dewy fresh air. In this balmy and soothing silence of nature when you take your domestic herd out for grazing; this enchanting landscape is abundant in beauty. In the evening when the tired sun goes away for a siesta, shades of rust iron and hot reds overcome the surrounding air. On the quiet paths of now grieving fields when you are bringing back your herd slowly and steadily, indeed this aura carries a charisma of its own. Your vision was arrested only in the advantages you thought you could gain from these animals. If you have a beating heart in your chest instead of a block of ice you will indeed realize,

there in it are priceless aesthetic pleasures. And they are in abundance.

You might have observed these, departing and home coming scenarios of herds, in rare collections of art, which the brief words of Qur'an have magnificently precipitated all the clauses of endearment. Let us again cast a sincere and honest glance on these landscapes. Will your eyes not bow before them spontaneously in appreciation?

Beauty in Obedience

Let us move ahead, as mentioned in the beginning it is in traditional beliefs, the more intensely any person indulges in worship, meditation and speculations in the field of religion the more farther away he moves from earthly pleasures and worldly beauty. In religion, so to say, Divine affinity and worldly décor are contrary to each other. It is the inborn characteristic of '*zahid*' to remain insipid, no matter to which religion *zahid* belongs. The original meanings of the Arabic word '*zohud*' is to be non-inclined, indifferent and desire less. Please read carefully, gentle hearts, what Qur'an has to say on this subject. It says,

..... يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِي هَذِهِ مَثَلًا لِّمَا كُنْتُمْ مَكْرَهُونَ (7:31)

O Mankind! It is false to believe that in order to follow God's path, one must stay away from worldly comforts, beauty and pleasures. Worldly beauty and décor does not hinder from following the correct path. Eventually our obedience to God resorts to settle for an enchanting world here as well as in life of hereafter. Take advantage of these things. Eat, drink and be merry; but thou shall not indulge or cross the limits set by His laws. For He likes not those who transgress.

In the very next verse after the above mentioned, what Qur'an has written, shakes and breaks the very foundations of the religious world. This verse ought to be reckoned as the last word on this topic. Qur'an officially announces,

(7;32) قُلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ

More reference (17:18-20)

O Messenger! Ask thou from these worshippers of religion as to who has the audacity to downgrade and demean the attractive beauty and reject the edible things, those which Allah hath created for His people? In accordance with the physical laws of this world, the décor and beauty is for one and all, regardless whether any person is a believer or a non-believer.

Gentle hearts, imagine and feel the intensity of this announcement, "who has the audacity to downgrade and reject that which Allah hath created for His people?" These creations of Allah are for His people and these very creations are preached as scornful and repugnant in all religions and that we must refrain ourselves from using them. Would this not be considered standing opposite to God? Its implications are tantamount to competing with Allah!

Enrichments of Paradise

God commands categorically, if the dictates of Qur'an are followed this life shall lead us into paradise. The heavenly society in this world shall continue into heavens of hereafter. Qur'an further elucidates on this heaven. It explains the practical shape and form of heaven in this world and narrates in allegorical terms the Heaven of afterlife.

Gentle hearts, when we read and scrutinize the Qur'an carefully there is not a single feature of beauty which shall escape the heaven of this world. Simply project in your mind this heavenly scenario. It narrates in a unique charismatic manner, جَدَّتْ نَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ On the sides of running streams amidst the growth of flora and fauna. It then says, لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمْهَرِيرًا (76:13). There will always remain spring season, neither too hot nor too cold.

On the other hand there will be, *'Sofas of fine lustrous taste and curtains in silk; soft and delicate garments in floss to wear'* (18:31). There will be kitchenware and cutlery in gold and silver. Sweet beverages in translucent shiny silver tumblers. Bangles in gold and necklaces of pearls (76:15-16). In this admirable way of life, وَفِيهَا مَا تُشْبِهُ الْآلُفُسَ وَتَكُلُّ الْأَغْنَى (43:71), one shall find everything an individual desires for a good life to soothe the senses. To the extent that فَهُمْ فِي رَوْضَةٍ يُحْبَرُونَ (30:15), in the lush green gardens there will be music of fine taste. Truly speaking, the meanings of this Arabic word *al-hub'ra'ta* are very profound; its vastness covers grandeur and glory, radiance and beauty and all aspects of happiness and pleasure. Allah promises this heavenly society in the world of here and now, concerning our future in the hereafter Qur'an elaborates on this scenario allegorically on numerous occasions. For a moment if we can stop and think when grandeur and glory with beauty and taste are gifts and rewards for Muslim society, in response to their good deeds, how is it the same rewards of Allah are being prohibited for use, here and now, in our social fabric?

Status of Mankind

In order to understand the actual status of mankind, it is necessary first of all to know the relationship between Man and God. This relationship is of co-partnership. According to the sayings of the Messenger^{PUH}, Allah is the chief partner and the role of Mankind is that of an assistant partner. However, the relationship between the two remains that of partnership. Whatever the case may be, the culmination of Allah's programme in this world shall be implemented only through humankind.

Procreation is one of the many characteristics of Mankind through which it reproduces its species. This trait of humankind is common with that of animals. God transcends and is above all this continuation of species. Creativity is another trait from which the animal world is exempt and excused. Humankind has the privilege of sharing the quality of creativity with its Creator. God proclaims himself as the ideal of all creators. In the words of Qur'an He is '*Ahsan ul Khaliqeen*,' the ultimate of all creators. He is the supreme most of all creators. Obviously this acknowledgement in Qur'an means there are others besides Allah who can also create. Apart from the Divine Creator, other than Mankind in this world which other species could it be? It is therefore inferred the trait that distinguishes humankind from animals is that of *creativity*. It is this attribute that human beings partake from the Divine Omnipotent. The only important difference being that His creations are ultimate and ideal. Hence any person who is devoid of creativity exists in this life on animal grounds. He is not qualified enough to reach human status.

In this world the more any individual accomplishes and explores the unfolding of beauty in nature, the more he moves a step closer to God. Consequently

these achievements in the process of creativity are purging humankind from contaminated and seemingly incorrigible elements that appear to exist in nature; thereby the process of creativity purifies humankind more and more as times pass. A good deed means that which brings forth, discovers or adds to the beauty in nature, simultaneously unfolding the beauty in one's own self. It is these additions in the beauty of nature, towards which our ideological poet signifies in his poem of dialogues between Man and God, wherein Man says to God:

Thou created night, I created a lamp bright,
 Thou created clay, I cut out a tumbler say;
 Thou created deserts, forests with mountains,
 I created verdures, courtyards and fountains.

The world history of cultures and civilizations is giving a standing ovation to mankind on its discoveries in science and art. As far as art is concerned and particularly music, the contributions of messenger David^{PUH} are very significant. It was him who established Hebrew music, besides modifying Egyptian and Babylonian musical instruments, in which bur'but (a stringed instrument) is very famous. The book of Divine knowledge called Torah was revealed to him. Every chapter of this Divine book has an introductory note which tells us as to what type of music must be played when reciting its scriptures. In its last chapter it says,
 "While playing Kur'naee (a musical instrument) you must sing the praise of Almighty. When playing bur'but and blow-pipe, another type of praise must be sung. When dancing and playing tubla (drums) praise the Almighty; in a high pitched melodious voice praise God while playing gaan'jh." (Torah: page 616, published by British and Foreign Bible Society,

Lahore 1966)

There are no two opinions on the fact that during the course of time Torah has undergone many alterations. Why we believe the above mentioned quotation on music is true, it is because Qur'an mentions musical sittings in the heavenly society. It can easily be surmised that messenger David^{PUH} indeed developed the musical compositions in art. In our *ahadith* literature this fact further confirms the use of singing with instruments of messenger David^{PUH}. The reader may kindly refer to 'Fatah al-Ba'ari,' by *Hafiz ibne Hjr As'kalani*.

There is also mentioned in *ahadith* books an occasion, when in a mosque once some Africans were dancing and messenger Muhammad^{PUH} along with Hazrat Ayesha^{PUH} was observing. The attitude of Hazrat Omar^R that we find in *ahadith* literature is that he had a very volatile temper. It is mentioned that Caliph Omar^R always walked in a frothy manner; a frown on his forehead, his eyes always red with anger and with always a rod in his hand. This indeed is a distorted projection of his image. He in fact possessed a very sensitive heart and personified a sublimely fine taste in aesthetics. We shall mention about his fine taste of poetry later. As far as aesthetics is concerned, he was an admirer of good music. Arab music in those days usually consisted of motivational war songs or soothing melodious lyrics of caravans' camel riders, which they sang while traveling through deserts. He was enchanted by these songs and many a times he personally recited poetry with melody. *Hazrat Abdul Rahman bin Auf^R* mentions, once he called at his residence and heard Caliph Omar^R singing in the manner of a common camel rider. Upon entering his residence Hazrat Omar^R inquired from his guest, "Did you hear what I was singing." When the guest answered in affirmation,

Omar^R stated, "In solitude I usually sing like a commoner."

Not only in solitude, this was also his attitude in public. Once when he was traveling with a caravan, he began to lyrically recite poetry. Those traveling with him started to gather around him, he immediately switched over to reciting the Qur'an. Each one of them backed away. Again he began to sing and again they all surrounded him, again he switched to reciting the Qur'an. Once again they dispersed away. With a smile on his lips he said, "Just look at the psyche of these Satan's siblings when I sing they clutter around me, otherwise when I recite the Qur'an they all run away!"

At another time Hazrat Omar^R, Hazrat Usman^R and Hazrat Ibne Abbas^R were traveling and a coterie of shepherds came and joined them. In a soiree, they requested a popular singer Ruby Fehry to hum a tune for them. The singer was reluctant as Omar^R will object to his singing. The others told him to start humming, and that he could always stop if Omar^R disapproved. When he began to sing, Omar^R did not say anything. On the contrary he was delighted. By morning time he asked him to end his singing, as it was now time to recall the Creator. The next evening again the shepherds requested him to sing for them, in the style of camel drivers. Hazrat Omar^R was pleased in their company and charmed by his songs. The third evening when his songs sounded a little demeaning, Omar^R admonished him politely to abstain from these kind of songs. Priggish and negative feelings which create jealousy and narrow mindedness are caused by degrading songs. From the above quoted examples we can testify and can easily declare, how far music is justified and what type of music qualifies in the principles of Islam.

In the reign of messenger Solomon^{PBUH} rare artisans

worked for him. The Qur'an has mentioned it in the following words:

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُونَ مِنْ حَرْبٍ وَتِهْلِيلٍ They constructed huge palaces, did sculpture work and made other fine pieces of art. The Arabic word *tama'seel* contains meanings which stand for both, sculpture works as well as for pictures. Where paintings are concerned, now there must not exist any slightest ambiguity, whether or not they are endorsed by Islam. I have on purpose added the word 'now' for the simple reason that a few years back, our reknowned scholars on Islamic jurisprudence, leave alone the fact that having your pictures taken, they did not even approve of looking at paintings or pictures. As for sculpture works, recently in the award given by the Saudia Arabia government to Mr. Maulana Maudoodi, one can see the portrait of late Shah Faisal in bas-relief on the medal. As mentioned above, in this case the matter goes beyond painting pictures. We can furthermore quote the event of Omar^R on this topic as an example. When his forces after achieving victory entered Qaisera; in the crystal palace they saw here and there rare specimens of sculpture works. Hazrat Sa'ad bin abi Waqas took every precautionary measure of preserving these pieces of sculpture works with the approval of Omar^R. Fine Arts is basically divided into four modes of expression. Those are sculpture, painting, music and literature. Before discussing further, we consider it important here to elaborate on a point mentioned in the Qur'an.

Beautiful Names

As said earlier, the Arabic word *hoo'sun* (beauty) connotes anything that is in balanced proportion and equilibrium. Whenever anything is off-balance, its

beauty is diminished. On the other hand, when complementary or compensating elements are combined or composed in a proportional manner, we are capable of creating beauty in them. In fact what are commonly known as Divine Attributes, they apparently seem contradictory in nature. Where we read the powerful quality of God, we also see the attribute of mercy in Him. All these complementary attributes or beautiful names in the Qur'an are termed as **الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى** (7:180). What the term in fact means is that these attributes exist in Him in ideally balanced proportions.

Human beings are also possessed with these compensating characteristics, for example as mind and matter. What actually is meant by a balanced personality is when the body and mind of an individual harmonize with each other. When the body (action) and mind (thought) synchronize with each other, we call that a beautiful deed. In art, these proportions and subtleties of balance attain sublime heights. In any portrait painting, the slightest addition or subtraction in the eye will ruin the beauty of the whole painting. It is the same in music also, a slight stretch or pause of a note can destroy the whole musical composition.

Balance

When balance and proportion in these things is given the name of beauty in the Qur'an; in order to take benefit and enjoy them, we must also be in knowledge of balance and ratio. That slight bit of indulging beyond the limits, renders the same beauty into ugliness. As stated before, wherein is expounded: "O Messenger! Ask them as to who has the audacity among them to refuse the décor and beauty?" Qur'an allows us to enjoy, yet in the same

sequence it also warns: وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا (7:31) thou must not indulge in them. إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ for He loves not the transgressors. Indeed to take pleasure and enjoy the benefits is not forbidden. God only admonishes when the limits are crossed.

What I wrote in the beginning of this discourse, it was this reality that is mentioned in the chapter of Al-Kahf in which it is written, إِنْ أَجَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَّهَا، (18:7). We have created beautiful things on this land. لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا (18:7). So that we may judge, who are those among them that maintain balance in life in their deeds. It even ventures a step ahead and states, وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا (7:180), the Divine Attributes are ideally balanced in precise manner to create beauty. So that human beings can follow them in like manner within human limits. وَذَرُوا الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي أَسْمَائِهِ (7:180) and must refrain and stay away from those who only accept His one attribute and cling with it. For example, in Christianity, they have taken the mercy characteristic to magnifying proportions, they forgot all about his laws of retention and retribution. Thus they have only renounced their own individuality, due to which, it has created chaos in their society. This in reality is that intrinsic clause which the altruistic Qur'an brings forth, if we want real beauty.

In life, the stabilization of functional and beautiful characteristics can be understood, for example, like the food and air we consume in our bodies. If we cease to eat or breathe, our body will stop functioning. If we inhale polluted air or overeat, again we impair and damage our bodies. Only by embodying the spirit and matter in precise balance, it is possible to bring out the beauty in us. As from the pen of Dr. Iqbal;

Divorce not, the voice of warmth and passion;
It has shaken, many a cultures' disposition

Further more he says,
 Great taste indeed is essential in any vision,
 If not profound in insight does it mean anything?
 A philanthropic spirit, or mind, or poets' aubade;
 Of what use is a breeze, that which deflowers?
 Nations in this world have arisen not in miracles;
 Of what use is a skill, without a cutting edge?

Importance of Standards

The most debated question is what are those standards by virtue of which we can measure, whether we have maintained balance in the stabilization of function and form? Obviously, this question cannot be left on subjective choices. There are basic rules and standards in every department of science and in all areas of art; hence to have balance in function and beauty, one has to conform to some basic principles. In Quran these are known as permanent values or standards. لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ (10:64) Meaning these permanent standards have been laid forth by the Divine Being and they shall never change.

If we are working within these set principles and standards, we remain in the paradigm of Islam, otherwise, when we trespass the standard parameters then we enter into forbidden territories. It is concerning these artists, who crush the delicate beauty, about whom Dr. Iqbal laments:

His self indulgent songs, that poison the air;
 Singer! Whose conscience Truth will not bear.

These standards or criteria are preserved in the Qur'an, the Divine book of God, who is the original Creator of function and form in this universe. Being the Creator, He is aware of all the requirements of humankind. Now as far as poetry is concerned, while talking about the last Messenger^{PBUH} the Qur'an tells

us, وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشِّعْرَ وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ (36:69). We did not teach him poetry. The fact of the matter remains, poetry does not behove a messenger of God. It is unbecoming of a messenger to be a poet. It is therefore, more often than not argued, why Qur'an discourages poetry. This point in Qur'an needs further elucidation.

First of all it must be understood, when the benevolent Qur'an condemns poetry, it certainly does not mean, if something is explained in prose only then it is acceptable. The same will be declared repugnant if it is interpreted in verse form. Qur'an does not debate on the type or form of narration. Qur'an debates on the purpose of facts which are debated in any poem. Hence the verse which I just quoted above, "We did not teach him poetry, neither poetry befits the character of any messenger of God," after that Qur'an further explains in the same sentence, إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُبِينٌ (36:69) What has been revealed unto him are historical facts that did or did not embrace the basic principles and values of life. In the very next verse it still further explains, لِيُنذِرَ مَنْ كَانَ حَيًّا (36:70), so that for those who have any spark of life and want to live, these standards may fore warn and keep them at bay from the destructive elements. The benevolent Qur'an debates on historical grounds and concrete pragmatic facts of life. Poetry on the contrary plays with feelings and leaves the person in solitude, dreaming in fantasy. The messenger of God has a specific destination to reach in his lifetime. His each and every step is directed towards that purpose. No problem is too stupendous in his path, nor can any kind of personal selfish temptation persuade him away from his destination. The aura he exudes, in the words of Dr. Iqbal who was inspired by Goethe's verses (*Mohammet's Gesang*) in praise of Muhammad^{PUH}, is as follows:

Spring created magical meadows in his path,
 Daffodils began to sing and butter cups bloomed;
 A flower bud smiled and grasped his footsteps!
 Lush green freshness that wasn't there before,
 Slashing hilltops, deserts, oozed ever'where!

Without fear he gushed like a rising tide,
 Walking like others and yet unusual in pace.

(The beauty of eloquence and well expressed impact in the original can only be felt by those who are fluent in the idiom of Persian language. Converting them into English is like trampling on the soft petals of this beautiful bouquet. If I've failed to do justice, I request to be excused.)

This is the attitude of life of the messenger of God, who invites all mankind towards the slow process of universal evolution. On the other hand, the compassionate Qur'an describes the mental state of poets in the following words, *أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي كُلِّ وَادٍ يَهِيمُونَ* (26:225). Have you not seen, how they (poets) wander in valleys and deserts like *Aa'heem*. In Arabic the word *Al-aheem* means, a camel that is ailing with artificial thirst, due to which it wanders aimlessly, since the camel cannot cure its disease of thirst. Poets usually do not have any specific goal in their own life, they get carried away in the torrents of their passions and flights of thought. These pseudo passions can never crystallize nor shall their false speculations be formed on pragmatic principles of life, they therefore remain unfulfilled. The poet is lost all his life, in an imaginary world. *يَكُفُّهُمْ أَلُتَاؤُنَ* (26:224). And those who follow him, also live in the same state of mind. These followers deceive the poet, since they are in large numbers, they make him feel that he is on the correct path. They are nothing except a mere crowd, they are like locusts. In Arabic *Al-ghaa'vi*

means locust. They appear thousands in number, yet, without any destination. Without any destination this crowd is driven into annihilation with devastating consequences. These poets are a kind of their own, **وَأَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ مَا لَا يَفْعَلُونَ** (26:226) "They speak on matters," the Qur'an states, "on which they do not act themselves." In fact when the very thirst of ideas is false, how must one expect the words and actions to synchronize?

We therefore draw the inference by the word poetry the compassionate Qur'an is not addressing the mode of expression; whether it is prose or poetry. By prohibiting poetry, Qur'an means a specific state of mind, which is quite contrary to the mental state that Qur'an intends to create. And so is the reason why after explaining the state of mind of these poets, it says, **إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ**, (26:227). On the contrary, the mental state of those who are convinced of Divine revelations is a relentless involvement towards a certain destination in life. This involvement deals with the unfolding of their own potentialities and flourishing of human faculties, besides, it solves the enigmatic situations that surround them. **وَأَن تَصْرُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا ظَلَمُوا** (26:227) when somebody exploits them, they are not like the poet Sauda (of eastern subcontinent), who would call his weaklings and say, "Just fetch my pen, I want to give him my piece of mind, for his impetuous actions." They take their exploiters to task. **وَسَيَعْلَمُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَيَّ مُنْقَلَبٍ يَنْقَلِبُونَ** (26:227). So that the cruel exploiters may not be able to roam freely or do whatever they like. In this real system, the exploiters see the consequences of their deeds and how the rest of the society views their life styles.

Here rests the difference between a poetic state of mind and that of a true Muslim. The compassionate Qur'an does not censure the words of any poem or rebuke the mode of expression, it condemns the

poets' world of fantasy. When Coleridge said the anti-thesis of poetry is not prose - it is science. He was pointing towards the same fact.

Poetry and Messengers

It is necessary here to elaborate on yet another seriously debated argument. Like the Greeks, as in other civilizations of this world, the Arabs also believed in the concept that poets' inspirations are in fact intuitions. *(I have tried to interpret the Urdu word il'haam. Ill'haam connotes getting messages from the world of beyond, but, it is considered a degree less than revelations.)* The last Messenger^{PBUH} was accused of being a magician, others called him a soothsayer and at other times the locals labeled him a poet. The benevolent Qur'an shattered this concept and clearly expounded that *messaging* (nabuwat) is not poetry. The intuitions and inspirations of any poet are renditions and figments of his own imagination. On the contrary, Divine revelations are an external Truth. This Truth or revelation is not a product of Messenger's personal passions, ideas or inspirations. Qur'an's criticism of poets as I said before, is to refute the concepts of fantasy.

This should explain (as in music and painting also) why Qur'an does not denounce poems. It is mainly concerned with the message which the poems convey.

Enlightened mind, renders a warm hearted life;
Lifeless words, closed minds, are a dirge on life!

And this alighting mind is achieved by carrying the torch of permanent values which widens the avenues of life and steers others into the lost Paradise. This

state of mind Dr. Iqbal says:

If the purpose of a sonnet is to make humanity;
Then your poetry is very close to prophecy

Hazrat Hus'aan bin Sabit^R himself recited poems in the company of the Messenger^{PBUH}. At times the Messenger^{PBUH} himself requested him to recite poems. The same was the attitude of Omar towards poetry and verse. Only that poetry which reflected facts of life, always enchanted Hazrat Omar^R. He advised his son, Abdur Rehman, to learn verses of wisdom so as to enhance his cultural values. One who is not into poetry he said, cannot be acclaimed as a groomed scholar. On poetry of Arabs, he once said, "Arabs, in aesthetics, are proud of their profound poetical wisdom. Poetry, when necessary, softens the hearts of humanitarians and even contemptible hearts become soft." At another instance he explained, "The art of poetry was the only possession of the nation, who knew not, of any better art. When Islam was spreading, Arabs became busy in their constructive struggles (Jihad) and forgot everything of the art of poetry. Later, when Islam was established and victories were achieved, Arabs settled in their homes and had leisure to revert to their only art that of poetry. The elders of their generation had all passed away, while others became the target of swords. There was no *magnum opus* on poetry which they could find. Whatever little they were able to locate, they memorized it by heart. A huge amount of treasure was lost and very little of it was left behind."

It is not possible to testify with certainty, if Caliph Omar^R himself wrote poetry or not. However, historical events stand witness to the fact Omar^R had memorized so many verses that he had a verse for every vital occasion. His choice of verses and taste in

poetry is considered prolific. So much so, when reviewing poems, everyone present in poetical sessions was left speechless. On this topic he has been eulogized in many exalted works and books by erudite authors. This kind of poetry had the acumen and strength to overthrow the governments of Pharaohs, Hamaans and Qa'roons or other rich magnets.

The message of Qur'an is a life giving message, an evolutionary message. To undo every department in a corrupt system and replace it with correct values of life is its message. It is a message to develop the potential of human personality, in order to unfold the beauty of its surrounding. This message unites the divided schisms and makes you walk with alacrity. To introduce human values to those living an animal existence and to elevate man to the status of human being is its message. This message takes a person to heights where (in Nietzsche's words) 'one looks down on the fate of the stars.' Songs or sculpture, painting or poetry, if it propagates this message, it is not only benevolent, it is a duty. On the other side if it is a decadent message that is given to a lively nation, then it is forbidden.

Only that can be given the name of art, which balances itself on *grandeur* and *glory*. When no harmony is present that very art is no better than opium.

A warm heart without deeds, is all philosophy;
A warm heart with deeds; is all about prophecy.

This is gentlemen, according to my humble knowledge, the definition of art in the spirit of Qur'an.

Its angelic elements are the aesthetics of Gabriel;
In the hilarity of a commoner, in pathos of an elite.

We can visualize its influence when as one united nation what we experienced in the 1965 war. The heart warming renditions of various famous singers were miraculous. On the morning of September 6, we were taken off-guard by the stealthy attack by India's forces. On the same day in the evening, the thunder of charismatic and motivational songs, "My soldiers! The nation has arisen from its slumber," echoed from all nooks and corners of the nation. The songs, resonated in full volume, from radios in bazaars and homes; creating a highly explosive atmosphere. The vibrant and commanding pitch, elevated each and everyone's spirits. The effects of these war songs that continuously pounded the hearts for seventeen days can be heard from the soldiers who were on the front borders. The heat of pulsating hearts, re-enforced the spirits of soldiers. And this was, yet only our first encounter in war.

It can be surmised, if we combine a voice on fire with a life giving message, it brings out unconquerable passions and takes us to unimaginable heights. With pure hearts and sublime passions, if we act under the guidance of Divine revelations we attain God speed, super energy and supreme courage. The huge volume of potential granted to us by nature is neither good nor evil by itself. It is how we use this potential which makes it good or evil. If we make it function under the guidance of permanent standards the consequences are bound to be good in every respect. Be it in prose or poetry, or dressed in silky attire. Human potential,

"If out of God's system, it's worse than poison;
Within God's system, is a cure to every poison."

Messenger's Literary Perception

The following addition to this epistle is like a heavenly gate that leads into the valleys of peaceful meadows. Muhammad^{PBUH} the model and final leader of Muslims, reviewed the poets of his times and his judgements and opinions about those poets have now become golden words in the literature of Arab history. In the mixture of ahadith, at least, what he said on two occasions can immensely benefit the Muslims of this sub-continent. The present literature of these Muslims is a product of decadent era and they are urgently in need of positive ideas to fill the vacuum caused by pessimistic poets. The Messenger^{PBUH} stated the rule around which the poets must revolve their minds.

Ummra ul Qais was an Arab poet who lived 40 years before the advent of Islam. We know from ahadith the Messenger expressed his following opinion about Qais on one occasion. He said, "He is no doubt the king of all poets in this world and he shall be their leader in Hell also." When we scrutinize the content of his poetry, which the Messenger decided was derogatory, we read nothing else but wine, women and base love that is poured with overwhelming passion indulging in emotional odysseys that enrapture. He mentions the ruins of political tornadoes and heart rending narrations which depict the barbarism and savagery of pre-Islam Arabs. Instead of giving positive feedback and lending hope, Qais mesmerizes his readers and audience by sinking all rational thought and reason. The rule which Muhammad^{PBUH} endorsed was that it is necessary the beauty of narration must also have beauty of thought. It is the duty of poets to extract optimism from the treasures of the world and share it with readers and audience. When the poets paint

pretty pictures of an imaginary world, instead of using words to give hope, they in fact, take the people into the dreary dungeons of illusions.

At another instance Muhammad^{PBUH} heard a verse of Entra who was a well known Arab in those years. The meanings of the verse were that 'I have spent many nights in labour so that I may honestly earn my food.' We are keenly aware of the fact the existence of Muhammad^{PBUH} was meant to change the direction of humanity towards honest living by demonstrating that it is possible and that hardships can be overcome. When he heard Entra's verse, it so moved and touched him, that he said to Rizwan who was one of his companions, *"No famous Arab has ever produced an urge in me to visit and meet him. After listening to this verse I have a burning desire to meet this poet."*

Allah is Greatest! Muhammad^{PBUH} the greatest lover of humanity that ever was born on this earth and whose face was an honour for every Muslim to see and cherish the memory; this greatest of all was expressing his desire to see a common idol worshipper. The question again arises what was so important in his words that Messenger^{PBUH} expressed his desire to go and see this poet.

All attributes that have been infused into human nature, all passions and energies of heart and mind that have been bestowed upon us are meant to mature and achieve the highest of all purposes of life, unity of mankind! All those conferences that put us to sleep and make us walk with our eyes closed towards the living realities of life, in fact, is a message for all of us of decadence and death. The industrialist must not join the lovers of a harlot. An artist must be allowed to refuse opium in order to show the natural colour of life. The immature and raw sentence *"make industry at any cost"* with which our ears are entertained daily, has been coined to deceptively steal the life giving

qualities in us, individually and collectively. The verse of poet Entra which attracted the Messenger, in reality, laid the foundation stone of the principle of labour. (Courtesy Sitara e Subho 1917 Lahore)

“Just as we must learn Arabic to read Qur’an, in the same way we must know the basic rules of art to appreciate. Every person who has talent cannot be an artist without knowing the rules of good or bad art.”

A B R

PREWORD

The need of rendering this article into English is a personal non-funded effort to acquaint those naïve and simple minds who believe that painting, poetry and imagery is prohibited in Islam. Creativity in evolution is a process that needs tremendous patience and respect besides other factors. Art in the true sense is any activity that promotes the growth of life. Without knowledge art decays into plagiarism

In my narration, I may not radiate the profundity of my friend and teacher Parwez^R whose spontaneity of thought I cannot imagine to challenge. Our doubts are as old as Satan. If you are not convinced of these thoughts, I am in no position to force anybody to change his mind. Perhaps it is the limitation of language or else you are thinking in a preconceived state of mind. Either way you have my respects and sympathies.

A B R

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