

The Inner Profundity of Humankind

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The human being is the essence and the vital element of being, the index and core element of the universe. Human beings are at the center of creation; all other things, living or non-living, compose concentric circles around them.

It could be said that the Exalted Creator has oriented every creature toward human beings, and He has oriented human beings toward His Divine Attraction by making them aware of the fact that this is the point where support and expectation of help can be found. Taking into account all the honor that has been granted to humanity, compared with all the rest of creation, humanity must be seen as the voice that expresses the nature of things, the nature of events and, of course, the nature of the All-Powerful One Who is behind everything, as well as being understood as a heart that encompasses all the universes. With human beings, creation has found its interpreter and matter has been distilled through the cognition of people, finding its spiritual meaning. The monitoring of things is an ability peculiar to human beings, their being able to read and interpret the book of the universe is a privilege, and their attribution of everything to the Creator is an exceptional blessing. Their quiet introspection is contemplation, their speech is wisdom, and their conclusive interpretation of all things is love.

Humans are the ones who have been granted the privilege to rule and make use of creation; and humans are the ones who reveal all the aspects of the truth behind natural phenomena, offering these to the Creator. Humans sense and discern the relationship between humanity, the universe, and the Creator—a relationship which leads them to knowledge. They discover their potential and depths, surpassing the angels as they are granted the ability to reflect the grandeur of the ocean in a single drop and to reflect all the suns within a single atom. Having honored the Earth, humanity's heels have become the crowns of those who were previously created, and their being created on the Earth has been the pride of this physical world related to the spiritual beings in heavens. If we think of the whole of existence as an immense ocean, then the human being is its most precious pearl. If the universe is an exhibition hall, with all its glories on display, then the human being is its appreciating visitor. If things and events are a captivating harmony of balances, then the human being is the sensitive spectator. In the light of faith-oriented thought and the healthy consciousness of humanity, existence, which used to seem quiet and surrounded by darkness, has been illuminated, and it has gained beauty—making our hearts feel as if we were in Paradise. Until the time when humanity ascended to their throne on Earth, the angels and other spiritual beings bore the flag that proclaimed the truth on the horizons of the spiritual realm. The flag, honored by the advent of humanity, started to wave in the heights of the mortal realm, and this globe—so small when compared to the skies—has become equal with the heavens by becoming the horizon of the realms beyond. Humanity has always been the crown of creation; this has been true for as long as faith has been the source of joy, for as long as Islam has been the code of life,[1] for as long as the knowledge of God and love have been the inner dynamics. The Earth is dependent on the light that is diffused by humanity . . . this light has been granted by the Almighty, out of His special favor. This special favor has honored humanity, making it the rarest of roses in this garden of beauty. Imam al-Ghazali[2] described this elegance in the following way; “the present creation cannot be more aesthetic, beautiful, or fascinating.” Humanity can be seen as the sole nightingale of this world, a world which is but a shadow of Paradise.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that these galleries—nestled one within the other—have been arranged and designed solely for humanity. It would not be an overstatement to say that this world has been created as the garden for this rarest of roses, or that the sea of existence has been created as the womb of this pearl; rather it would be a modest expression of the true state of things. As a matter of fact, the whole of existence, in a way, has been interpreted and voiced in unison via humanity, for humanity, and at humanity's service; it is virtually dependent upon humanity; and in terms of humanity's dependence upon the Creator Who has yielded everything to the command of humanity, such an intense relationship is felt between humanity and God that the purpose of all of creation can be nothing other than humankind and their servanthood to God.

In fact, the needs of humanity are so extensive that they cover all of creation, and are so deep that they extend to eternity. Above all, human beings have been created for eternity, and they long for it. The wishes and demands of human beings are boundless and their expectations are infinite. Even if the whole world were to be given to humanity, its appetite would not be satisfied nor would its ambitions cease. Explicitly or not, human souls expect another eternal abode, not to mention the fact that they hanker for the continuation of this transient world. Anybody who owns a heart that is open to the truth wishes to see Paradise—which is no more than an insignificant shadow of His Grandeur, and they wish to see the Exalted Creator in all His magnificence and beauty.

People who can feel and sense the truth in the facet of things and occurrences, and who are aware of their position in the universe are on this journey. At the same time, these people are appreciative of themselves and are open to showing respect for their Lord. As for those in opposition, they cannot be said to feel respect for either themselves or for their Lord. Moreover, they cannot even recognize their Lord as they should. Even if they should do so by chance, they are not able to glorify Him as His Greatness requires. Attaining true humanity depends on the recognition of the relationship between the Lord and His servants. Paradoxically, human beings, who are considered to be more blessed than the angels in terms of their potential, are likely to sink lower than the most contemptible of beings if they do not sense or appreciate this relation; this is stated in the verse: . . . those are like cattle, or rather are even more misguided. (Al-Araf 7:179)

The recognition of this association, which is generally phrased as belief, is a position through which a human being can

attain virtual humanity, and from which they can ascend above all other creatures. As for disbelief, another term that indicates the lack of such an association, it turns human beings into beasts. Societies formed by such individuals suffer from severe resentment, fury, lust, greed, mendacity, hypocrisy, envy, deception, and intrigue; that is, disbelief creates societies in which everyone must be on alert. In any case, the people who have yielded to these evil habits can never be recognized as being a nation or a society, rather they can merely be described as being non-conscious masses. When Diogenes was searching for a human being in the street during the daytime with the aid of a lantern, he was probably trying to counsel or show his reaction against such people. Mark Orel, the author of *Thoughts*, another person who reflects the same idea from a different perspective, says "Every morning, when I join other people, I think to myself: 'Today, I will meet some beasts in human form again. If I reach the evening without startling them or without being bitten by any of them, I will consider myself happy.'"; Rabi'a al-Adawiya took a more serious and reactionary approach to the matter: "I hardly ever see a human on the street. What I see are some foxes in front of shops, some wolves and other creatures snarling at each other. . . . For a moment, I saw a half-human and I arranged my veil regarding him," Obviously, these people do not intend to condemn all members of humanity. Rather, they are trying to depict the inner worlds of those who have turned their inherent human values into selfishness. If people do not control their behavior according to the purpose of their creation or control their inner worlds with respect to their outward appearance in an effort to eliminate inconsistencies, then they are quite likely to appear as those described by Mark Orel and Rabi'a al-Adawiya.

Among these people you can sometimes come across people whose visage appears to be cheerful even though they are miserable inside. They, too, are another type. One philosopher has compared them to a building with two different sides. Its facade is clean, splendid, and impressive, whereas the side facing the rear is dirty, shabby, and derelict. When we see such a building on the street, we say "very nice," making a pre-judgment. When we examine the other side, however, we condemn the building that we so eagerly praised a few minutes before. The same is true for people. We will always be misled if we evaluate them from a single aspect. What matters is to see them as they really are and to make some efforts to improve their rear walls, as well as considering them in accordance with their good sides.

Human beings are the children of their own attributes and attitudes. We can judge which characteristic or attribute is dominant according to the behavior that a person demonstrates, good or evil. Sometimes people can turn into monsters, ready to bite those closest to them. Sometimes people turn into "Josephs," their faces shining like the moon, illuminating the dungeon, and rendering it a corridor to Heaven. Sometimes they become so pure that even the angels envy them. And sometimes they are so wicked that even the devils feel ashamed.

Human beings can sometimes become so heavenly that they reach the height of the skies; yet sometimes they are so mean that they become worse than snakes or venomous insects. Human beings are creatures who can demonstrate such a wide range of behavior that they can possess corrupt qualities alongside their merits; and they can be readily tempted to evil, in spite of possessing lofty virtues. Faith, wisdom, love, and spiritual pleasures are as much a part of them as their own hearts are; loving others, embracing everyone, living with feelings of kindness and making others live with the same is the ultimate goal of their lives. Eliminating evil through goodness, loving "love," and being in a constant struggle against feelings of enmity are as sweet to them as the whisper of their own soul. Evil feelings, such as greed, resentment, hatred, lust, slander, mendacity, hypocrisy, corruption, opportunism, egoism, cowardliness, and ambition stalk them stealthily, waiting for a weak moment. They might be seized by evil feelings and passions, becoming enslaved by them, making them evil to the utmost degree, in spite of the fact that the same people have the potential to be the masters of the universes through their virtues and good behavior. Even if such a person may seem to be free, in reality they are the most enslaved; freedom can only be achieved by success in the inner struggle—a struggle termed "the greater jihad" in Islam. Improvement of the inherent potential and the attainment of a second nature that is open to a relationship with the Almighty depend on success in this struggle, a struggle that takes place deep in the soul, on whether or not those undergoing the struggle appreciate this victory, and on whether or not they bend their heads to the level of their feet, forming a circle in their modesty and humility.

The weak-willed, who are unable to pass beyond superficiality to look into their inner depths, to see the gaps and defects within their nature as well as the merits of their souls, and who are unable to restore themselves every new day, can never progress in their inner worlds. Even if they continue to talk about making progress, whenever they try to step forwards they slide ever backwards. Such people cannot manage to rid their eyes, ears, tongues, lips, hands, or feet of their captivity to their own egos; they live as slaves throughout their lives without even being aware of this tragic fact. To tell the truth, these people, mere slaves of their corporeal desires, are in a pitiable condition.

To love and care for those who preserve and improve their humanity is to give them what they deserve. As for the rest, they should be shown love and sympathy so that they can be saved from the grasp of their evil feelings and passions. Such an attitude is an expression of caring for human beings, whom God created as worthy of respect . . . and the human being is an entity created to be loved.

[1] The faith revealed to humankind starting with Adam has always been the same; the faith has been perfected with Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an, and it was given the name Islam by God.

[2] Imam al-Ghazali (1058-1111): An important Muslim jurist, who came to be known as Hujjat al-Islam (Proof of Islam). He is considered to be the Reviver of the fifth Islamic century. *Ihya' al-Ulum al-Din* [Reviving the Religious Sciences] is his most celebrated work.