

A DISCUSSION ON GOD'S ATTRIBUTE OF CREATOR:

FROM DALHOUSIE TO KHIJAR:

In the year 1925, to recuperate from illness, I took 6 months leave from work to rest at the hill station of Dalhousie (In Himchal Pradesh, India.). Dalhousie was a popular summer retreat for those who could afford it. One such person, was a distinguished lawyer, who held naturalistic views (i.e., he was a follower of the views of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, whose views were termed naturalistic, as he believed, for instance, that angels were only representations of natural forces.), whom I first met at the Friday Prayers which were led by Maulana Muhammad Ali.

Near Dalhousie is a beautiful scenic area Khijar. Encircled by mountains, is a wonderful green meadow, with its beautiful grass, which delights the heart and charms the eye. One is indeed mesmerised by the greenery. In the middle of the meadow is a small lake, wherein there is a tiny floating island, which is enchantingly moved hither and thither by gusts of wind. The meadow is bordered on all sides by majestic trees, which are arranged in regular lines. To ones eyes, it appears as if these trees were marching down from the surrounding mountains and suddenly stopped at the edge of the meadow, as if arrested by the beauty of the scene in front of them. In short, to take the effort to come to Dalhousie and not visit Khijar was almost inconceivable. So one day, some friends, including the lawyer mentioned above, and I, went for a visit. The route was scenic with colourful flowers abounding. Cool, sweet water from the natural streams, was also readily available to refresh the weary traveller. Nevertheless, it was a walk of eleven miles, and, therefore, it was necessary to spend the way in conversation, so that the journey would pass easily. Many matters were touched upon, some of which were of a religious nature. Among these was one interesting topic, debated between the lawyer and myself. I cannot recall the exact words used, however, I will present the meaning in my own words. It is possible that somebody will find this of some benefit.

HAS CREATION ALWAYS EXISTED?

My lawyer friend put forward the argument that creation must be co-eternal with the creator. Since God's attribute as creator has always existed, he argued, it follows that creation would also always co-exist with this attribute. In short, the attribute of creating is the cause, and creation is the effect, and where a cause exists, the effect would also be present. For example, a lamp is a cause and light is its effect. So if there is a lamp there will be light, or, where a sun exists there will be sunshine. We cannot say that the light is the lamp, or, that the sunshine is the sun. We can, however, definitely say that the light has always existed along with the lamp and that sunshine has always existed along side the sun. Similarly, creation has always co-existed along with the creator. This indeed, he concluded, is what the scholars and philosophers have written and this has also been accepted by the late Maulana Shibli (A well-known religious scholar of that time.).

I replied: First I will answer you, assuming that your example of the lamp is correct. From your example you pose that the relation of the creator and creation is like that of a lamp and its light. But, the lamp is self-existent, whereas, light has only a contingent existence. That is to say that a lamp exists in itself, while light does not have any separate independent existence. It is like an attribute which is sustained by the lamp. If the lamp is extinguished, then the light would vanish. According to this example, the creator is, therefore, self-existent and creation only has a contingent existence. So, if anything has any eternal existence it would be the essence of the creator and not the essence of creation, as creation does not exist in itself, but is only like an attribute. As creation does not have an independent existence, it is meaningless to state that it has in itself eternally existed.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE LAMP AND ITS LIGHT IS INAPPROPRIATE:

This example of the lamp and its light, even though it has been put forward by many great scholars, and has unfortunately been also accepted by the religious scholars of Islam (who have tried to reconcile it with the religious teachings of Islam) is nevertheless totally inappropriate. "By the grace of God," I continued, "I will, today, prove the error of this argument." My lawyer friend perked up with interest on my statement. Listen, I said, if the relationship of the creator and creation is similar to that of a lamp and its light then it necessarily follows that God, too, is evolving for there could be no change in the light until its cause, that is the lamp changes. For instance, the more powerful the lamp, the more powerful its light would be. Only when there is a change in the lamp can there be a change in the light. In other words, change in the light is caused by change in the lamp. Now it is an accepted fact that creation is changing and progressing under evolution. Thus it follows, the cause, i.e., the creator, is also changing and progressing under evolution. When the cause, i.e., the creator, emitted a lower form of creation, then the creator was also at a lower stage, and now, as higher forms of creation have emerged, the creator, too, has progressed to a higher stage, and may indeed in the future, progress even further. My lawyer friend appeared quite annoyed at my argument. Regrettably, I continued, it never occurred to our religious scholars that this example is totally inappropriate. As they accepted the principle of cause and effect, the example of the lamp as a cause and light as its effect, was, therefore, considered correct by them, even though it is not appropriate.

GOD IS A PURPOSEFUL BEING:

The example of the lamp and its light was given by people who were primarily concerned with this world, and who only accepted God as the First Cause. Their observation of the continuous chain of cause and effect operating in creation, left them no recourse, but to accept a first cause. However, they did not allow this cause to have any purpose or intention. Instead, they believed this cause to be like a lamp needed for light, without being aware of any purpose of its own. But, we (Muslims), believe the first cause to be a Purposeful, Knowing and Wise Being. Why should we not believe this, when a special purpose is apparent in the order and arrangement of the Universe? The fact that each particle in this universe, both individually and in totality, is so bound in the straightjacket of the laws of nature, points out that there is some Wise, Knowing, Purposeful Designer. So we accept God to be a Purposeful, Knowing and Wise Being, and we further accept that He

has created all creation for some purpose and intention. Furthermore, as the Quran states, "*fa'alol-lima yurid*" (The Holy Quran 11:107) (He does as He desires), therefore, all the laws of nature, and His own actions, operate under the jurisdiction of His will and intention. An appropriate example of His attribute of being a creator, therefore, should be given by a being, which in some small measure also acts purposefully, and possesses some quantum of knowledge and wisdom. Man, who under his own will fashions some object, is a more appropriate example of this attribute. A lamp, on the other hand, emits light automatically and without any intention on its part, i.e., light is emitted from a lamp or a sun, not due to any conscious intention on their part, but because their very nature demands that light be automatically emitted from them.

THE EXAMPLE OF MAN:

The sun or lamp, have no will or desire. Their attribute of giving light is not subordinate to any intention, but is something automatic. God's attribute of creation is subordinate to His will, as the Quran states, "*iza arada shaiun ay-yaqula lahu kun fayukun*" (The Holy Quran 36:82) (when god desires to create anything He states be and it is). So, if there is any similitude of God as creator, then it must be a being that also possesses a will, and such a being is man and not a lamp or the Sun which do not possess any will. A man has a specific purpose in mind when he creates a watch. But the fact that he has once made a watch, definitely does not mean that he must then, uncontrollably and unintentionally, continue to automatically make watch after watch, and no matter how much he desires to cease this activity, be compelled to continue making watches. We would laugh at such a picture, for we all know, that the making of watches is subordinate to a man's intention and desire. This attribute, therefore, can only find expression as and when intended by man: He can make a watch if he desires, and if he so desires, not make a watch. It is definitely not correct to say, that man's ability to make watches, requires that watches should at all times and all places be coexistent with man. In the same way, God's ability to create is subordinate to His will. Whenever He desires He can create something and whenever He so desires, He does not need to create anything.

ATTRIBUTES AND THEIR POTENTIAL EXISTENCE:

To sum up, God's attribute of a creator can in no way require, that without his intention and beyond his control, things be continuously created. Therefore, God's attribute of creator does not mean, that like himself, creation would always be necessary. God has always existed and his attributes have always existed, too. Nevertheless, the attributes that are subordinate to His will and desire, although they have always existed potentially, are only activated as and when He so wills. The Quran also tells us this: "*iza arada shaiun ay-yaqula lahu kun fayukun*" (The Holy Quran 36:82) (when He intends a thing He says be and it is). Because man is a being with a will and intention, one can perceive that he also possesses the potential to carry out various deeds. However, these deeds are only actualised as, and when, he so desires. So, to believe that the attributes of God, Most Great, whose will is All-powerful, can only be manifested in an automatic manner, is to believe that God is a mere constrained being and this just shows a lack of knowledge of God and the blind following of irreligious people. In short, by following this belief, the naturalists, and the unthinking scholars and philosophers, have mistakenly accepted God as a kind of cause, which in

some automatic manner causes things to happen. For example, the steam in an engine, without any intention on its part, is bound to cause motion in the engine. So, in this example, the movement of the engine and the presence of steam are bound to occur together. But the truth is that God acts according to his purpose and intention, and, therefore, we must accept God as a cause, that creates an effect as per His desire and intention, and, not because He was in any way constrained to do so. Take the example of the man who made the engine for some purpose: When the engine was not present the man still existed and his capacity to make the engine existed. So, when he desired to make the engine, this capacity became activated, and he made the engine.

GOD'S POWER TO CREATE HAS ALWAYS EXISTED:

In the same way, God has always had the potential to create. So when He intended to bring forth creation, this capacity was activated, and creation came into being. To sum up, it is totally wrong to say that creation always co-existed with God. His power to create did indeed co-exist with Him from eternity and was activated (and is still activated) as and when He so intended. The blind following of materialists/atheists in this matter has caused the naturalists to deny the efficacy of prayer. Steam in an engine will never hear you, no matter how much you shriek and cry for it to stop, rather it will continue to propel the engine, even if it causes the engine to fall into a ditch and cause the death of people; for it is bound under the law of physics, which it must fulfil. But, a human being with a will, listens to us, may have mercy on us, can reward us, and can act purposefully in this world to benefit others. So, if God is a Purposeful, Sovereign, Knowing, Wise, Merciful and a Generous being, then why should we accept the naturalists view, that He is beyond the reach of His created human beings: That He keeps Himself totally away from the affairs of this world and does not listen to our pleas, and like the steam in an engine, is a lifeless constrained being, so that whether He exists or not has no practical import. In short, and I seek the refuge of God from such views, God is no more than a stone idol, on which the Quranic statement "*Alazi yuniqu bima la yasmao illa dua'a wa nida'a*" (The Holy Quran 2:171) ("one who calls out to that which hears no more than a call and a cry") is applicable. In other words, a person can cry his life out in front of God, and plea forlornly, but God, poor being can hear nothing: He, poor thing, is a being without any will or control, whom fate set up as the first cause. His working is subordinated to some law, i.e., He is only a lifeless machine, which without any intention of its own, is continuously fashioning new creations. Such views can only be called materialism. By God, would one accept that in created beings one can find will, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, planning, control and power, but in the creator of these beings these attributes are absent. A purpose is apparent in the fashioning of the entire universe, which forces us to acknowledge the presence of a Supreme, Purposeful being. Yet, strangely when we humans seek to deduce (knowledge of His attributes from the universe) we tend to overlook that God has a will, and, therefore, anything that a created being with a will can do, the creator with a will must certainly be also able to do. We reduce God in His relationship to His creation to an automatic cause, and not to His rightful position of a purposeful willing being. So, we need to remember that God's attribute as a creator is subordinate to His will. Therefore, the fact that God's ability to create is eternal does not necessitate that creation has also been eternally with Him. Creation only appears when the attribute of creation is activated under God's intention. "So Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds" ("*fa-alhamdu lillahi rabbil alameen.*") (The Holy Quran 1:1.)

