
WHERE SHALL WE BEGIN?

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In the tradition of Abudhar, who is my mentor, whose thought, whose understanding of Islam and Shi'ism, and whose ideals, wants, and rage I emulate, I begin my talk with the name of the God of the oppressed (mustad'afan). My topic is very specific.

Often people who do not approach issues with scientific method and language criticize me for not including certain issues which they think have direct bearing on the topic of my speech. But you are well aware that once a speaker or an author chooses a particular topic, his sole responsibility lies in his staying within the scope of his topic, and doing his best to provide an accurate analysis or substantiation of the thesis he has put forward. For example, when the topic is Islam with special concentration on the charges brought against it by its enemies or those who are not familiar with it, a speaker or an author who wants to respond to those charges logically and scientifically must limit himself to the subject matter at hand, i.e., those specific issues to which he has raised objections. Such a discussion logically should not be concerned with providing an introduction to Islam in which every conceivable Islamic topic comes within the scope of the discussion. Our imaginary author claims only that, in some specific instances, Islam has been misunderstood, and he sets as his goal to correct those mistakes. Should he succeed in his endeavours, he has performed his responsibility.

With that in mind, the subject of my talk is a very specific subject and aims to answer an explicit and narrow question, one which is ever present in the minds of the masses in general, and the "enlightened souls" (roshan fekran) in particular. That question is: Where Shall We Begin? This is a universal, pertinent, and fundamental question. It is not a question that I have put forward based on my own understanding or as a result of my own contemplation; rather it is the question of our time, to which I have tried to provide an answer. When one looks at the history of social development in the world, one encounters certain historical epochs during which numerous works were published entitled "Where Shall we Begin?" or "What Is To Be Done?" At least five such works immediately come to mind. Most of them have been published at the times when the societies of their origin were in a particular state of social transformation. For example, no book with similar titles appeared during the Middle Ages. Such questions are raised when a society is in the process of evolving from one state to another. The social conscience warrants that certain steps be taken to free the society from the domineering effects of the existing social order and the status quo on the actual, intellectual and religious life of its members, and to replace that order with another. The question of where to begin, then, is a matter of 'social strategy' and not of 'ideology.' Therefore, I do not need to talk about the nature of a doctrine a religion or a particular scientific theory. Rather, I want to draw attention to where one should begin in terms of strategy in our society in a given period of time in order to achieve our shared

objectives and to protect our values which are at present subject to cultural, intellectual and social onslaughts.

The gravest tragedy in traditional societies in general, and in the Muslim societies in particular, is that there is a lack of communication and a difference of outlook between the masses and the educated class. Due to the broad extension of the mass media, literacy, and education in the industrial countries of the West, the masses and the intellectuals understand each other rather well and share a relatively similar outlook. In Europe, a university professor can easily communicate with the 'uneducated' masses. Neither does the professor see himself as of higher stature nor do the masses treat him as an untouchable person wrapped in a piece of cellophane.

Even in the early history of Islamic societies, the present large gap between the intellectuals and the masses did not exist. The great Muslim traditional intelligentsia, the ulama-including the jurist-consults (fuqaha), the dialectical theologians (mutakallimun), the interpreters of the Qur'an (mufasssirin), the philosophers, and the literalists (udaba)-had close bonds with the general public through religion. Despite teaching and studying in their seemingly isolated seminaries (hawzah), they successfully avoided losing touch with the people. Such rapport between the ulama and the people exists even today. The majority of our uneducated masses, who have never even heard of a night class or an adult course, can sit next to the ulama, who have achieved prominent scholarly stature, and discuss their problems. They feel comfortable enough with the ulama to discuss their needs, complaints, their personal or family problems, and to settle religious taxes or to ask for bibliomancy or legal opinion.

Unfortunately, under the modern culture and educational system, our young people are educated and trained inside invincible and fortified fortresses. Once they re-enter the society, they are placed in certain occupational and social positions completely isolated from the masses. In effect the new intelligentsia lives and moves alongside the people, but in a closed "golden cage" of exclusive circles. As a result, on the one hand, the intelligentsia pursue life in an ivory tower without having any understanding of their own society, and, on the other hand, the uneducated masses are deprived of the wisdom and knowledge of the very same intellectuals whom the masses have sponsored (albeit indirectly) and for whose flourishing they have provided.

The greatest responsibility of those who wish to rebuild their society and bring together the unintegrated, and at times, antagonistic elements of the society into a harmonious whole is to bridge the gap between these two poles-the pole of theory and the pole of practice-and to fill this great abyss of alienation between the masses and the intellectuals. For any responsible enlightened soul who wants to achieve something, regardless of his ideological conviction, it is a duty to build a bridge between the beautiful, valuable, and the mysterious (in the mind of the masses) island of the intellectuals and the land of the masses; a bridge across which both the intellectuals and the masses can interact. Regardless of any answer to the question "Where shall we begin?" and regardless of your agreement with my answer, we cannot help but accept and agree with this fundamental principle: the first step is to build such a bridge.

Implicit in the question "Where shall we begin?" there is an understanding on the part of the audience and the person who poses such a question that two prior questions namely, "Who should begin?" and "For what purpose?" have already been answered. Obviously, the question of where to begin is asked by those who have a sense of responsibility with regard to their time and society and wish to do something about it. Undoubtedly, they are the enlightened souls, for only

such individuals feel a social responsibility and have a sense of social mission. One who is not enlightened is not responsible either.

Note that I stress enlightened souls and not those who have obtained degrees. Enlightened does not mean "intellectual". The latter, which has incorrectly been translated into Persian as enlightened (*roshan-fekr*), refers to a person who does mental (as opposed to manual) work. Such an individual may or may not be an enlightened soul. Conversely, a person may not be an intellectual if he works in a factory for example-but he may nevertheless be an enlightened soul. The relation between the two is not that of two interrelated concepts. Not every intellectual is enlightened but some are and vice versa. Very few are both. For example, Sattar Khan was an enlightened man but was not an intellectual, while Allamah Muhammad Qazvini was an intellectual but not enlightened: (Ali Akbar) Dehkhoda was both. Many are neither and among these are the "honourable and great politicians!"

Who is an enlightened soul? In a nutshell, the enlightened soul is a person who is self-conscious of his "human condition" in his time and historical and social setting, and whose awareness inevitably and necessarily gives him a sense of social responsibility. And if he happens to be educated he may be more effective and if not perhaps less so. But this is not a general rule, for sometimes an uneducated individual may play a much more important role. A study of the societies that have leaped forward from the oppressive colonial state to a very progressive, aware and dynamic state demonstrates that their leaders and those who assumed leadership in the revolution and the scientific and social movements have often been unintellectual. The social movements in Africa, Latin America and Asia easily prove this principle, which has very few exceptions. One can safely conclude that revolutionary leaders have rarely belonged to the educated classes.

In the modern time, when man has reached a dead end in his evolving society, and when the underdeveloped countries are struggling with numerous difficulties and shortcomings, an enlightened soul is one who can generate responsibility and awareness and give intellectual and social direction to the masses. Accordingly an enlightened person is not necessarily one who has inherited and continues the works of Galileo, Copernicus, Socrates, Aristotle, and Ibn-Sina (Avicenna). Modern scientists such as Einstein and Von Braun complement and continue their achievements. In principle, the responsibility and the role of contemporary enlightened souls of the world resembles that of the prophets and the founders of the great religions-revolutionary leaders who promoted fundamental structural changes in the past. Prophets are not in the same category as philosophers, scientists, technicians or artists. The prophets often emerged from among the masses and were able to communicate with the masses to introduce new mottoes, project new vision, start new movements, and beget new energies in the conscience of the peoples of their time and places. The great revolutionary, uprooting and yet constructive movements of the prophets caused frozen, static and stagnant societies to change their directions, life-styles, outlooks, cultures and destinies. These prophets, therefore, are neither in the category of the past scientists or philosophers, nor are they in the category of unaware common people. Rather, they belong to a category of their own. They neither belong to the commoners, who are usually the products and also captives of ancient traditions and social molds or structures, nor do they belong to the community of the scientists, philosophers, artists, mystics, monks or clergymen, who are captives of abstract concepts and are overwhelmed with their own scientific or inner explorations and discoveries. Similar to the prophets, the enlightened souls also neither belongs to the community or scientists nor to the camp of unaware and stagnant masses. They are aware and responsible individuals whose most important objective and responsibility is to bestow the great God-given gift of "self- awareness" (*khod-agahi*) to the general public. Only

self-awareness transforms static and corrupt masses into a dynamic and creative cantor, which fosters great genius and gives rise to great leaps, which in turn become the springboard for the emergence of civilization, culture and great heroes.

Clearly then, it is the enlightened soul who should begin. Now we should turn to the question of "for what purpose?" This question deserves an independent inquiry. Here, I will look only at one interpretation of it and let the audience, which is familiar with this topic, ponders about it on its own. Although not a prophet, an enlightened soul should play the role of the prophet for his society. He should preach the call for awareness, freedom and salvation to the deaf and unhearing ears of the people, inflame the fire of a new faith in their hearts, and show them the social direction in their stagnant society. This is not a job for the scientists, because they have a clear-cut responsibility: understanding the status quo and discovering and employing the forces of nature and of man for the betterment of the material life of the people. Scientists, technicians, and artists provide scientific assistance to their nations, or to the human race, in order to help them to improve their lot and be better at what "they are." Enlightened souls, on the other hand, teach their society how to "change" and toward what direction. They foster a mission of "becoming" and pave the way by providing an answer to the question, "What should we become?"

A scientist justifies, explains, and creates the conditions for producing as affluent, comfortable, strong, and leisurely life as possible. At most, he discovers the "facts," whereas an enlightened person identifies the "truth." A scientist produces light, which may be utilized either for right or wrong objectives; an enlightened person, analogous to a "tribal guide", (ra'id) and as the vanguard of the caravan of humanity, shows us the right path, invites us to initiate a journey, and leads us to our final destination. Since science is power and enlightenment light, from time to time, the scientist serves the interests of oppression and ignorance; but the enlightened person, of necessity and by definition, opposes tyranny and darkness.

The word "hekmat" (wisdom), which is used in the Qur'an and within the Islamic cultural milieu, conveys the same meaning we have attributed to enlightenment. Even when there is discussion of knowledge (elm'), it does not refer to technical, scientific or philosophical learnings. It means neither "irreligious knowledge" (those disciplines which a religious student studies, i.e., jurisprudence, tradition, life of the Prophet, the Qur'anic interpretation, ethics, theology etc.) nor "temporal knowledge" (those disciplines which are pursued by a social or natural science students i.e., physics, medicine, sociology, literature, psychology, history, etc.). These are collections of specialized information and cultural knowledge, which are taught as particular courses in a specific educational system. While religious and secular knowledge can be helpful for enlightened awareness (agahi-e-roshanfekri), and may serve as valuable tools at the disposal of the enlightened individuals, they are not "in and of themselves" the desired "light" or awareness. That kind of knowledge (elm') which is emphasized in Islam is an awareness unique to man, a divine light and a source of consciousness of the social conscience. As the famous tradition puts it, "Knowledge is a light which God shines in the heart of whomever He desires." It is this awakening, illuminating, guiding and responsibility-generating knowledge which we call the "divine light," not the teachings of physics, chemistry, literature jurisprudence, etc. The former begets faith and responsibility of the kind the uneducated Abudhar possessed but Ibn-Sina (Avicenna) and Molla Sadra did not. That is why sometimes an uneducated person emerges and energizes life in a static society and leads it toward an objective, while numerous scientists do not even take the first step toward generating changes, self-awareness and the formation of a common ideal, a new faith and love in the conscience of their society. On the contrary, by utilizing their scientific power, the scientists may act as forces hindering the progress of their own

national societies as well as that of humanity. Therefore, the goal of the enlightened souls is to bestow upon their contemporary fellow men a common and dynamic faith and to help acquire self-awareness and formulate their ideals.

Now, we turn to the question of the "how". First, an important explanation is in order. Lack of a precise definition of "enlightened", coupled with the ambiguity of the ensuing responsibilities, have cost the human race in general, and the Easterners, in particular, dearly. To begin with, unless there is a universal man, there cannot exist a universal enlightened prototype with common values and characteristics. Man is far from the age when the earth will be one human society or one nation with common language, culture, ideals and common problems. As a corollary, whereas one can speak of the universal scientists with common characteristics and fixed values, there is no group of enlightened individuals in some universal mold with a common trait. After studying in a university, whether he has studied engineering, medicine, or astronomy, an educated person acquires the stature of a scientist, regardless of whether he is from an African tribe, the Islamic world or a Buddhist country; whether he is from the white, whether yellow, or the red racers whether he is a member of a capitalist society or a socialist one, whether a member of the old merchant class or the new bourgeoisie; in short, regardless of whatever background he comes from. The reason is that science is based on general laws, which govern man as well as nature, and whoever learns these can be useful and effective in any setting or environment. In short, a scientist learns a set of fixed principles, which are applicable in all cases irrespective of time, place or political regime. The same cannot be said about the enlightened person.

An enlightened person is not a man, who has gone to Europe, has studied a specific school of thought, has passed a specific course, or obtained a diploma. The fact is that our assumption that the "enlightened," "scientist and "intellectual," are synonymous has confused us so that we are not able to understand who is enlightened. Nor do the enlightened individuals know to what category they belong. The virtues of being enlightened cannot be learned in a prestigious university. If there is an exception in which an enlightened individual is also an educated one, his enlightenment is not due to the university education; rather, the individual was an enlightened soul even before his university education.

Another misunderstanding stems from the fact that, more often than not, people think that if a person has gone abroad and studied various social, political, ideological and philosophical schools of thought, and he has become enlightened. This is not the case. Granted that he has studied Marx, Sartre, Rousseau, St. Simon, etc. (i.e., the founders of the social theories and the ideologies that have played a constructive and revolutionary roles in European societies, and the source of inspiration for European enlightened individuals of the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries), this only makes him a specialist, analogous to his counterparts in medicine and natural sciences. He is a social scientist who can teach these schools of thought and ideologies at the universities. It does not follow that merely because one has studied these ideologies, he is capable of playing the role as accepting the responsibility of being an enlightened person in his society. The university education of such an individual makes him a scientist and enables him to teach wherever he goes. But it does not necessarily enlighten him to the point of understanding the inner pains of his society or enabling him to generate self-awareness in the people or help the masses fashion their common objectives and ideals.

In short, there is no universal prototype for being enlightened." There are different types of the enlightened. One may be an enlightened soul in Black Africa, but the same person is not one in an Islamic community. Or one may be considered enlightened in France or in post-war industrial Europe, a genuine and honest enlightened person who has made a difference in his

own society, but the same person in India will not be enlightened and may be unable to perform the role of an enlightened one there. More concretely, take Jean Paul Sartre, whose philosophy and personality I have great respect for and would never condemn based on my ideological convictions. In industrial Europe with its advanced capitalist system and its peculiar social stratification, and where there has been for several hundreds of years a turning away from its religious history of the Middle Ages, Sartre can be called an enlightened soul. Would a person who emulates Sartre's philosophy and practices his world-view of existentialism or methods of social and economic analysis-in short, who is a carbon copy of Sartre-still be considered enlightened if he went to a different country? It would depend on where such an individual went. In France, Germany, England or the United States he would be enlightened because the problems, attitudes, ideals, people, political system, and the historical conditions are similar. The Western societies in general are in need of a "Sartrean" revolution. Thus, Sartre or those who emulate his philosophy are enlightened only in the West where man has become the victim of consumerism and where all human dimensions and potentials have become restricted and limited by the production of goods, excess in consumption and the freedom of sex. It is thus in need of a saviour who will free it from this hedonistic lust of consumerism: Sartre is such an enlightened saviour.

Waving a Sartre-like saviour in Asia, Africa or Latin America, where people are struggling to eradicate poverty, hunger, ignorance and other shortages, and where they suffer from lack of industrialization, would simply be a catastrophe. In these societies, a Sartrologist or a follower of Sartre's philosophy would not be enlightened. In practice, his well-intentioned sacrifice would translate into disservice. Only the contemporary post-Medieval industrial societies face a philosophical impasse; hence they are in search of some kind of explanation of their being and in need of spirituality, or a religious mysticism to break their confined and restricted materialistic world view. A Western enlightened person is one who, understanding the situation, feels the urgency to provide appropriate slogans, objectives, and directions for his people in promoting a moralistic, monastic, and anti-consumerist life-style. Such a person should adopt Indian spirituality and philosophy of illumination, and even rebel against automationism and Cartesian rationalism.

Now, imagine a follower of Sartre in India. His words and deeds would invite the poverty-stricken people of India to stop consumerism, do away with the material things they possess and direct their attention to their inner spiritual instincts and needs. For the people who are being eliminated by famine and hunger, and whose religion or philosophical outlook calls upon them to retreat from the material world, such prophecies are nothing but tragic comedy. One may also see the actual cases in our own society. A preacher may be an excellent communicator in the Tehran region but not so in other regions. Sometime ago, I heard of a preacher from a small town who, emulating a successful preacher in Tehran, delivered the latter's sermon word by word. He repeated, "Ladies and gentlemen, O you who ride in your big Cadillac and drive in these streets, don't you know that there are people who do not even have a decent pair of shoes? If you do not help them, at least be careful not to bother them. O you who attend big parties and eat ducks cooked in whiskey, be aware that there are people who have only read in story books about eating a hot meal." These words are striking, but they only make sense in Tehran and not in a small town. The man who delivered this sermon in the town turned his pulpit into a comic tragedy.

A preacher is an enlightened individual and should act as one. But when the same enlightened individual takes the sermons, which are effective in Tehran to a different geographical location, he becomes an alienated person who cannot communicate with anyone. In other words, there is

no universal preacher. We have to ask, the preacher of what location? By the same token, there is no universal enlightened individual. In short, enlightenment is directly related to time, place, social environment and historical conditions. For example, we all know that Francis Bacon is one of the greatest figures in the history of human thought. He strongly propounded the notion that superstition must be done away with, and science be separated from subjectivity and eschatology. Moreover, he maintained that science should enhance material life by seeking to understand nature and thus improve people's lives.

At his time, Bacon was an enlightened parson. In his era and society, science was but abstract ideas and analysis, justification, and substantiation of religious texts and clerical postulations. Under such circumstances, by liberating science, reason, and the masses from the restriction (of the church), Bacon served humanity greatly. If Bacon were alive today, however, he would have to say almost the opposite of what he said then (if he wished to be considered an enlightened individual). In contemporary Europe, those who follow Bacon's footsteps and say that science should focus solely on economic and material production and that human potential should be used to promote consumerism and generate more power are not enlightened at all. Although they propagate and exercise Baconian philosophy, they are at best scientists in the service of the status quo. The reason is that times have changed, needs are different and contemporary problems and crises are such that any saviour in Europe today must begin from a different angle and take a different approach.

Third World countries, and particularly Islamic societies, have witnessed mistakes and deviations committed by the so-called enlightened thinkers. An unfortunate development, which I call the history of "confusing the issues" (awadi gereftanha) constitutes the story of the fundamental errors committed by the educated Muslims as well as those of other Eastern societies. Like a scientist who imports medicine to his country, these people believed that enlightenment could be imported to their home while they themselves played the role of enlightened persons. The tragic result was that the Eastern and Islamic societies were deprived of their best minds, individuals who could help their countries to recover from their backwardness. For years the feelings, consciences and thoughts of our people were directed by the so-called "enlightened," who delivered the wrong messages while thinking they were showing the path to salvation. Following their incorrect diagnoses, struggles and strivings, opportunities were lost, and people's potentials were wasted. The end result was hopelessness, desperation, hatred, evasion of responsibility, isolation, mysticism, and various games of existentialism. This continued until it was gradually replaced by another wrong direction, inappropriate objective or mistaken diagnosis. The cycle repeated itself with the result that the people wasted their talents gathering around these social prophets.

Take the example of Peter the Great. He studied in the Netherlands and then returned to Moscow to work for the welfare of his people. He was enlightened, but in the wrong way. Russia was a backward country, which had continuously suffered defeat by her neighbours. For example, Iran had defeated that country many times. Peter the Great asked himself why the Netherlands should rule the world and the oceans but Russia be so backward. After long contemplation, he saw the root cause in the beard! When he took over the government he ordered everyone to shave because, he argued, the reason Danish people are advanced is that they shave every day. The Russians began to look like the Danes but no fundamental change occurred. The beards were gone but that did not take the Russians even one step forward.

Another example goes back to my high school years in the city of Mashhad; we had a teacher who thought of himself as an enlightened social philosopher. He taught us drawings. He used to

argue that the only solution to our problems lies in drawing. He believed that drawing could show us the difficulties of our society as well as their solutions. To demonstrate his point, he would provide special models. His themes dealt with encouraging co-education in Iran. He thought that the cause of backwardness in Asia lay in lack of co-education, and he pointed to European school system for proof. Moreover, he said that Iran should encourage mixed schools, clubs, and organizations where men and women would interact freely. It appeared that he was projecting his failure in his love life on the society as a whole.

Even today there are thinkers and authors who try to convince parents and youngsters that the cause of the misery in Islamic societies lies in sexual restrictions. If these barriers are removed and men and women interact freely? They argue, Eastern societies will be free from all miseries. Note how deep the tragedy is and how the attentions of the young generation is directed to this. While parents resist and the young generation insists on this issue, the society is afflicted with sexual wars. Parents consider sexual freedom the root of all misery, while their sons and daughters see it as the cause of salvation, progress, civilization, independence and freedom. It is assumed that these "achievements" strike serious blows to colonial-ism! In reality the war of sexual freedom, which suddenly has assumed paramount importance in Africa, Asia, and especially in the Islamic societies, is a sham to prevent the occurrence of the war that ought to be taking place, the anti-colonialist war. This war of sexual freedom is waged in order to prevent the waging of a struggle, which would be dangerous to the powers that be in the world. Sexual freedom is used as a substitute for the other kinds of freedom by diverting the attention of the young generation and discouraging them from thinking about and pursuing economic or political freedom.

Sexual freedom is indeed freedom of the "bottom" in place of the freedom of the "top" (head). In African and Asian countries, this kind of freedom has been achieved, but social problems remain unresolved. The effect is felt in the cosmetics industry where, from 1955 to 1965, cosmetic consumption increased five hundred fold. But why? The answer lies in the fact that after a youngster goes to school reads books, enhances her knowledge, and acquires a degree of social and human awareness and an understanding of the responsibilities of contemporary man-and just at the time when human ideals begin to blossom in her mind her intellectual development is stopped and her ideals are all directed toward the "bottom" only. Her energy is wasted in delivering talks on or writing articles about sexual freedom. A group who also has only sex to worry about then emerges in the other side of the issue to oppose her. The result is that the society may waste ten or even twenty years.

Another example is related to the Persian alphabet. During the peak of the Iranian political struggle in Iran, 1941-1953, a group of intellectuals propagated the following: "O people of Asia, O Muslims, O Iranians, and O you who feel backward, decadent, miserable, hungry, and sick, beware that first you have to understand the root cause of your misery!" But what did they consider to be the root cause? The answer was the Persian alphabet! Their main objection was that the spelling of certain words is confusing and time consuming. Is our time so precisely allocated that spending a little time in writing could bring such disastrous results? I am not saying that the Persian alphabet is flawless. What I am saying is that to consider the flaws in the alphabet as the root of our misery and backwardness would be like attributing the illiteracy of our population to the potholes in the streets. This does not mean that potholes should be tolerated, but it means that our intellectuals have wasted their energies on the wrong subjects and "confused the issues." Besides, suppose we did change our alphabet, then we might become another Turkey. Is Turkey in a better condition than we are? Are we too far behind Turkey? And,

supposing we are! Is it because of our alphabet? In short, if the alphabets were the cause of backwardness, Japan and China should be the most backward countries in the world.

Someone even suggested that, if it is not the root of all our problems, our alphabet is at least the root cause of illiteracy in Iran. I argue that illiteracy is caused by those who have a vested interest in keeping the people illiterate. There are languages with more than a thousand characters but that has not been an obstacle in the way of literacy. Take the example of Islamic history during the third through the ninth centuries when Islam ruled over Spain. Illiteracy was uprooted altogether. Thus, those who blame the complexity of an alphabet for their misery are trying to divert the attention of the people from the real cause, i.e., those who benefit from illiteracy.

Another example was the problem of "book burning," an issue which afflicted our society for some time. There were intellectuals who used to argue that none of our miseries were caused by feudalism, external conditions or internal degeneration; rather, they were caused by the ways in which poets described their mistresses. They reasoned that our poets', particularly Hafez's, descriptions of their feelings had led our society toward nonchalance, lyrics, poetry and literature. To remedy this, these people and their followers congregated once a week and burned selected books in a ceremony accompanied with speeches, excitement and fanfare. It is not my aim to defend Iranian traditional poetry. My intention is to point out that this issue was brought to the fore as a way of setting a false direction so that the real causes of the problems in Iran would be pushed into oblivion. The best opportunities and the best talents were wasted on defending or condemning book burning, while the real criminal lived in peace and security.

Once, someone asked my opinion about Mr. Kasravi. In my answer I told him that I have a thesis. I do not discuss the content of these people's ideas. I do not ask whether Kasravi's criticism of the sixth Shia Imam, Ja'far Sadiq, of Shi'ism, of Islam and its history and literature is valid or not. I even assume they are valid. The question is that, given the particular historical epoch in our society 1941-1949, and given the deep impact of Kasravi's works on our youth, were his words warranted and were the topics he raised of the most pressing and the most fundamental issues? Why was it that during that particular time, (after 1949), all attacks were directed against religious materials and Hafez's paramour, identifying them as the most tragic problems facing our society, but no mention was made, for example, of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company? During this relatively democratic era, what was the most pressing and fundamental issue to raise? Was it identifying Hafez as the root of all Iran's misery, or was it elaborating on the economic, political and colonial conditions which prevailed in the world? The opportunity to analyze political and economic problems does not present itself often.

A general principle may be deduced from the above discussion. In academic settings debate on scientific, philosophical, technical and even artistic issues affords the luxury of logical evaluation and revision. Everyone may express his particular opinion, but the view, which is substantiated by experimentation and stands the test of scientific laws, will prevail and be acknowledged. For theories on social issues, however, logical consistency does not suffice. The context of the argument or the thesis should be taken into account. A valid and true statement expressed at an improper time and place will be futile. Conversely, an unsubstantiated argument may be of significant consequence in a particular atmosphere. For example, during the recent struggles in Africa, the African leaders and the enlightened persons relied on much mass folklore in order to achieve their goals. They capitalized on the popular notion that if one strikes one's enemy but only injures him, the enemy's soul would get revenge and kill the person who had struck him. Naturally, to avoid the revenge of enemy souls, an African would try his best to kill the enemy. This belief certainly lacks scientific basis and is logically "false"; yet, in the African

struggle against colonialism, the enlightened persons utilized it as an effective weapon. Another example is nationalism. It played a very positive role in European countries toward the end of the Middle Ages, but now it plays the opposite role in Africa. There, nationalism is like a dagger which, in the face of colonialism, chops up Black Africa, a continent which faces a common destiny and thus should be united. In contrast, towards the end of the Middle Ages, nationalism emancipated European society from the yoke of the Popes who had used Christianity to dominate Europe.

In Algeria in the 1950s, in order to divide and fractionalize the people and in turn to inflict a great disaster in North Africa, the colonial powers propagated the progressive views of thinkers such as Rousseau, Voltaire, and Morris Dubare, which are scientific and emphasize nationalism. The central thesis of nationalism that each nation should have its own state was used to divide the Arabs and Berbers, who had until then been united by their belief in Islam- thus they became victims of French colonialism. Now, in place of fighting the common enemy, Arab and Berber nationalists were facing and fighting one another. In short, when presented with a social theory, before evaluating its positive or negative contribution, one should understand the context and consequences of its presentation. Another example in my discussion is what I call "false bonds" or "fake common denominators." Just as it is possible to create animosity between two related groups, it is equally possible to establish spurious or false links between two enemies. This is a tactic, which has been used in Africa, Latin America and the Islamic East, by misusing the theses of common religion, nationalism, and humanism. These three schools of thought are legitimate ways of thinking, but if utilized in the wrong time and place they can easily turn into the tools of creating unity among people who should be fighting one another. Humanism is a school of thought, which is used to combat nationalism, because today the latter has become a progressive anti-colonialism front in African Asia, and Latin America. In the Third World, particularly African it is even more progressive than Marxism. It has taken the leadership away from official Marxism in the struggle for independence.

Humanism is a thesis utilized by the powers that be in the world, which control the destinies of other nations to establish superficial and false relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. It aims to eliminate the natural state of enmity, struggle and rancour between these two opposing poles and to create a mystical, humanistic and general peace between them. Obviously, I am not talking about the scientific and philosophical aspects of humanism, for certainly, the oneness of the human race is a sacred truth. The questions I am raising here are those of by whom, for what purpose, and at what time this sacred truth is being utilized. Are East and West and the colonized and the colonizer the members of the same camp?

Referring to a particular nation, when used in the wrong place, nationalism serves as a camouflage, a way of establishing an artificial blood-based unity and relationship, but only by and for those who do not truly believe in this idea, in order to suck the blood of the people under the banner of nationalism. Ironically, such a relationship really is based on blood because, after all, the blood of a leech is the same as that of its victim.

Under the disguise of the existence of common religious conviction and rituals, religion has also been used to create a false and spurious relationship between the exploited and the exploiter. Religious rituals, slogans, and false indoctrination are easily misused for the attainment of this purpose. As a result, people who in actuality should be enemies are linked together with the false presumption of "religious brotherhood."

Having said all this, the greatest responsibility of the enlightened soul is to identify the real causes of the backwardness of his society and discover the real cause of the stagnation and degeneration of the people of his environment. Moreover, he should educate his slumbering and ignorant society as to the basic reasons for its ominous historical and social destiny. Then, based on the resources, responsibilities, needs and suffering of his society, he should identify the rational solutions, which would enable his people to emancipate themselves from the status quo. Based on appropriate utilization of the resources of his society and an accurate diagnoses of its suffering, an enlightened person should try to find out the true causal relationships between misery, social illness and abnormalities, and the various internal and external factors. Finally, an enlightened person would transfer this understanding beyond the limited group of his colleagues to the society as a whole.

Contemporary "intellectuals" generally believe that dialectical contradictions at work in any society, of necessity move the society forward toward freedom and revolution, and give birth to a new state of being. According to this logic, mere "poverty" or "class differences," which symbolize the existence of social conflicts, inevitably lead to a dialectical contradiction. Which in turn creates motion in the society. In reality, however, this is not more than a big illusion. No society will be mobilized and obtain its freedom merely because of the existence of class difference or tragic disparity between rich and poor. Poverty and class conflict may exist in a society for thousands of years without causing any structural transformation. Dialectic has no intrinsic motion.

Considering that motion in any given society is the product of transformation of the social conflict from within the society into the conscience of its members, the responsibility of the enlightened person is obvious. Briefly, it is "to transfer the shortcomings and abnormalities of his society into the mind and conscience of the members of that society." Then, the society will take it from there. Another definition of the enlightened person is that he is one who is aware of the existing social conflicts and their real causes, who knows the needs of his age and his generation, who accepts responsibility for providing solutions as to how his society can be emancipated, who helps his society to shape and define its collective goals and objectives and, finally, who takes part in mobilizing and educating his static ignorant society. In a word, a contemporary enlightened person should continue in the path of the prophets. His mission is to "guide" and work for justice, his language is compatible with his time, and his proposed solutions conform to cultural values of his Specify.

Therefore, "Where shall we begin?" is an irrelevant question. One should ask, "Where shall we begin in our society?" Our greatest and most pressing responsibility is to see, historically speaking, where the Muslim society is. Do Muslims live under the same conditions as those of twentieth century Europe, and is it thus possible for European solutions, ideologies and writers to be useful? Do Muslims live in an industrial age, and so experience the same problems as those of industrial societies? Have Muslim societies reached the modern bourgeois era? Have they passed the era of the rule of religion? Are they experiencing some kind of religious reform! Are Muslims living under the same conditions as were the Europeans during the Renaissance or during the French Revolution? How does one characterize Muslim culture? Once the historical condition and the culture of the society are understood, both the enlightened and the general public will know what their responsibilities and duties are.

Historically speaking, the present condition of Muslims, as compared to that of the West, is where the latter was at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance. Similar to that time, Muslims are in a period of social and intellectual transformation. Economically, the

dominant system in the Islamic societies is an "agricultural market" or the intermediate bourgeoisie. In other words, the largest and the basic foundation of the economy is agricultural production and not urban-market economy and bourgeois capitalism, as commonly understood. The reason is that European bourgeoisie, which contributed greatly to the French Revolution, was completely different from that of the present Iranian or other Islamic societies. The bourgeoisie in the Islamic Societies includes the bazaar merchants and not the modern industrial and banking capitalists. To be more exact, the bazaar merchants lack the vigor and dynamism of the modern bourgeoisie. They only act as a mediator between the agricultural sector and the consumer. There is, no doubt, a newly evolving bourgeoisie resembling that of eighteenth century Europe, but it has not had the same influence that the latter had. The new bourgeoisie in Iran has replaced the old shops with modern ones, only to become a middleman in spreading Western culture in these traditional societies. Unlike its counterpart in eighteenth century Europe, which prompted urban production at the expense of rural production, the Iranian bourgeoisie has only enhanced urban consumption without contributing to urban production. Of course, there are individuals who have begun urban production, but they are simply scattered enterprises, which cannot be called a national modern bourgeoisie.

We also need to know our "cultural taxonomy." For example Greece has a philosophical culture, Rome a militaristic and artistic one, India a spiritualistic one; and our societies have a religious and Islamic culture by "cultural taxonomy". I mean the prevalent spirit that governs the body of knowledge, characteristics, feelings, traditions, outlooks and ideals of the people of any given society. The common spirit, which connects the said characteristics of the society and gives meaning to them is culture by which people breathe, get nourishment and grow. As such, to know the culture of a society is to know its inner truth, its inner sensitivities and its inner feelings. For instance, it is hardly possible to claim that one knows the Greek culture without having a philosophical understanding and knowledge. Similarly, one cannot claim to be an expert in Indian sociology without knowing Buddhism and Vedanta. It is also unacceptable for one to claim to be an enlightened person without having a profound knowledge of and a presence in the conscience of the masses of his society. For instance, if one is an enlightened Indian, he must have complete knowledge of Vedanta and Buddhism. Indian culture being Vedic, a modern Western educated sociologist has very little relevance in India. A Gandhi, because he knew his society and the mind of his fellow Indians, could move the society far greater than others could. The same is true of an enlightened Muslim. He must know that the Islamic spirit dominates his culture and that the historical processes of his society, as well as its moral codes, have all been shaped by Islam. To fail to understand this, as the majority of our "intellectuals" have, limits and restricts a person to his own irrelevant atmosphere. Also, since generally such an individual has no religious belief and behaves within the bounds of his European educational background and experience, he fails to establish any relationship with his own people. Conversely, he is never accepted in the community.

Franz Fanon, whom I knew personally and whose books I translated into Persian, was pessimistic about the positive contribution of religion to social movement. He had, in fact an anti-religious attitude until I convinced him that in some societies where religion plays an important role in the culture, religion can, through its resources and psychological effects, help the enlightened person to lead his society toward the same destination toward which Fanon was taking his own through non-religious means. I added further that Fanon's anti-religious feeling stemmed from the unique religious experience of Europe in the Middle Ages and the ensuing freedom of European society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One cannot extend this experience to the Islamic world, because the culture of an Islamic society and the tradition which has shaped that society is utterly different from the spirit which under the name of religion ruled

Europe in the Middle Ages. Logically, therefore, one cannot judge and condemn both religions on the same ground. A comparison between the role of Islam in Africa and that of Christianity in Latin America illustrates my point.

Thus, to fight Islam the same way that the enlightened individuals of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe fought Christianity would be the gravest error, because religious feelings and the religious culture of Iran are completely different from what existed in the Middle Ages under the name of religion. To draw the same conclusion after comparing Christianity with Islam is a mistake. For a historian or a philosopher to see all religions in the same light is tolerable, but not for an enlightened person. He has to identify the kind of society in which he lives, understand its people, and at the same time, appreciate the historical condition they are in. An enlightened person in the Islamic world can commit a great error by mistaking the religious feeling that exists among the Muslim masses today as their true historical and cultural religion, thus fighting it as a source of calamities. He may then invite his society to accept an ideology compatible with nineteenth century German industrial society, thereby playing a deviant role in his society. Such an "intellectual" will frighten the masses by alienating them from the educated class, which in turn will force them to take refuge with the reactionary, deviant and colonial element in order to escape the anti-religious educated group. This may, in fact, be the central cause of the estrangement of the intellectuals from the masses in Islamic societies. A strictly formal and proper intellectual has no place among the masses and cannot communicate with them. It is as though they share no common language or culture.

An enlightened person should be aware that the deviant and reactionary elements which have always been against the masses and have always played with their destiny and exploited them-misuse religion as an effective weapon to divert the feelings and the attention of the masses from their present affairs and make them think about past problems only. They divert people's attention from the present as well as the actual and material problems while, in the name of religion keeping the people preoccupied with the afterlife as well as abstract and subjective issues, so that Muslims are prevented from striving for a comfortable, affluent, and free life, Even their ideals and thinking regarding these matters are focused on the hereafter. As a result religion, which had been the greatest source of energy and aspiration and the guide to a meaningful life on earth, becomes distorted to such an extent that the eyes, ears and hearts of its followers are focused on the hereafter. Paying attention to life on this earth is considered a source of corruption while mysticism and eschatology are greatly encouraged.

Most contemporary enlightened individuals are aware and feel these issues, but their appreciation is not deep enough to draw the right conclusion. They think that religion [i.e., Islam] plays a negative role in the society by causing the masses to neglect their actual and material lives. Secretive and reactionary elements along with invisible foreign hands take advantage of this erroneous conclusion and use this crucial force against both the masses and the enlightened alike. An enlightened Muslim should avoid imitation and superficial understanding of social problems, and appreciate the fact that the corrupt role which, at present religion plays among the masses has no relationship to the true Islamic culture and religion which constitute the philosophical foundation of his society. More- over, the anti-religious experience of Christianity in the Middle Ages cannot be extended to the Islamic world, whether its past or its present. An enlightened person in an Islamic society, regardless of his own ideological convictions, must, of necessity, be an Islamologist. Having understood Islam, he will in astonishment realize the grave and disastrous waste of the intellects and the efforts of the people due to "wrong start," misunderstanding, irrelevant appreciation and irrational connections.

The tragedy [in Iran] is that, on the one hand, those who have controlled our religion over the past two centuries have transformed it into its present static form and, on the other hand, our enlightened people who understand the present age and the needs of our generation and time, do not understand religion. As a result, our Islamic society, despite Islam with its rich culture and history which would have otherwise enabled it to emancipate itself, could not acquire the religious awareness necessary for its salvation. The intellectuals erroneously fought Islam and the reactionaries used it to narcotize the masses and to maximize their own gains. Meanwhile, true Islam remains unknown and incarcerated in the depths of history. The masses buried in their own static and restricted traditions. and the intellectuals isolated from the masses and disliked by them.

Western and Eastern "intellectuals" know that, in principle Catholicism, Buddhism, Vedism and Taoism are individualistic schools of thought, which divert people's feelings from this life. With its actual and objective issues, to the hereafter and other abstract and subjective concerns. Furthermore they realize that their task is to bestow upon their societies power, responsibility and objectivity. What they do not recognize, however is that our religious culture- particularly Shi'ism, which is a unique interpretation of Islam-is completely the antithesis of those schools of thought and religions. The enlightened person who sees that the present condition of Muslims resembles that of Christians in the Middle Ages commits the error of fighting Islam, just as the nineteenth century intellectuals fought Christianity. The reactionaries referred to earlier have caused this confusion.

What was an enlightened Christian, a Protestant, doing during the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries? He was pointing out that by ignoring and neglecting the progressive elements of Christianity, the established church and priesthood had caused malice and misery. Moreover, they had encouraged monasticism, introversion, individualism and metaphysical beliefs and prayers. Thus, the enlightened knew that, in order to implement religious reform and Christian Protestantism, he should revitalize and revive the awakening and motivating elements of his religion. In Islam, however, such is not the case. Islam has never ignored the progressive, awakening and motivating elements. In a very clear manner, the two slogans of "blood and sword" and "leadership and justice," which embody all the relevant dimensions of the process of generating movement and awareness, have been adopted as the symbolic essence of Shi'ism. These slogans have endured in Islamic history. Indeed, of all aspects of Islamic ideology and culture, people preserve most dearly the uprising of Hussein. It is his martyrdom that they mourn and commemorate yearly. On the other hand, the Prophet of Islam and other religious leaders have always invited people to wage struggle (jihad). Yet, in actuality, one sees little effect. Why? The reason is that although slogans are authentic and genuine, their interpretation has been negative. The form has been kept intact but the content has been distorted. It is as though a numbing mechanism is at work to transform the rage of Hussein's blood to mourning tears. To be sure Karbala is not forgotten, but the sword of Islam is. The sword is now used only for beating oneself on the days of mourning.

An enlightened Muslim, thus, should not be easily deceived. He should be fully aware of the fact that he has a unique culture which is neither totally spiritual, as is the Indian culture nor totally mystical, as is the Chinese, nor completely philosophical, as is the Greek, and nor entirely materialistic and technological, as is the Western culture His is a mixture of faith, idealism and spirituality and yet full of life and energy with a dominant spirit of equality and justice, the ideology that Islamic societies and other traditional societies of the East are in desperate need of. Therefore, instead of being a translator of the works of foreign authors-which are useless to the masses anyway- a Muslim enlightened person should engage himself in discovering, extracting,

and refining the life giving and powerful spirit of his society. He exists in the context of a dynamic culture and society as well as in the conscience of his people.

One characteristic of this spirit is that, unlike other religions, which justify poverty, Islam condemns it. A great student of Islam, Abudhar, says, "When poverty enters a home, religion exits from the window." The prophet of Islam and the founder of that religion declared: "Whoever is not able to provide for himself will not have a good life in the hereafter." These are contrary to the contemporary understanding of Islam which claims that "one who is caught in poverty and misery has a cleaner and humbler heart and is, thus, more amenable to receive unseen inspirations." An empty stomach lacks everything. A society, which has economic problems also, lacks spiritual wealth. Whatever is called ethics in a poor country is nothing but deviant customs and habits, not spirituality.

One way that the dynamic aspects of Islamic culture can be understood is through comparing Imam Ali's way of life with that of the Pope. When Ali assumed power he ordered all existing pay scales to be canceled, and began paying equal salaries to everyone whether the highest ranking military officer, who was at the same time an important social and political figure in the society, or the slave of the same officer. Is there any government in the contemporary world which is committed to the principle of equality as much? Is there any contemporary socialist system, which would be ready to implement such a measure? We ought to state and express the outlook, the objectives and the inclinations that make up Islam and tell the enlightened persons that, in the context of their society and culture, in order to be able to obtain mutual understanding with the masses and in order not to be separated from the masses not only must they rely on religion (i.e., Islam) but also honestly believe that the elements of this religion do not invite people to think of the past instead of the present. These elements are based on constant striving (jihad) and justice ('adala). Islam pays attention to bread, its eschatology is based on active life in the world, its God respects human dignity and its messenger is armed.

'adala is not simply a religious principle but the spirit that governs all aspects of Islam, and is considered the very objective for which all the prophets were sent. One day Imam Ali noted that Maytham, one of his companions, had divided the dates that he was selling into two different Categories and was selling them at two different prices. He angrily reminded Maytham that he was not allowed to categorize God's people into different classes by dividing the fruits into various types. Then, he mixed the dates with his own hands and ordered Maytham to sell them for one price to everyone. Or, note the practices of Abudhar as compared with those of St. Paul. If one passes identical judgments about the two. It is not enlightenment but in fact the exercise of absolute ignorance and injustice Abudhar, who devoted all his life to the struggle against exploitation and eventually died in the process cannot be compared with St. Paul, who claimed that "the temples of God are built upon hunger," and that "hunger is accompanied by inspiration."

A philosopher or a historian can study religion any way he wishes. An enlightened person, however, is not allowed to consider religion, either scientifically or subjectively, as an absolute phenomenon. Every enlightened person must find out for himself what the social role of his religion is. This is extremely important because the mistake of an enlightened person is not similar to that of an ordinary writer it is the mistake of a social leader, of a social saviour, of an heir to the prophet of Islam as well as other prophets in the history of mankind.

Let us summarize the points raised here. Given our culture and specific definition of "enlightened" as a person with a prophetic mission, the objectives and responsibilities of such a

person are to transform the existing social conflicts from the context of the society into the feelings and self-consciousness of its members. An enlightened person should obtain the raw materials from his contemporary society and social life. There exists no universal type of enlightened person, with common values and characteristics everywhere. Our own history and experience have demonstrated that whenever an enlightened person turns his back on religion, which is the dominant spirit of the society, the society turns its back on him. Opposition to religion by the enlightened person deprives society of the possibility of becoming aware of the benefits and the fruit of its young and enlightened generation. Due to their unique worldviews and awareness, enlightened individuals can play the most effective and long-lasting role in educating and mobilizing the masses of their society. With great intensity, the society expects its enlightened persons to educate it concerning various elements of danger, reactionism, corruption, anachronism and confusion. The dominant spirit of the Islamic culture is that of Justice and Leadership. Islam is a religion unlike other religions it challenges other religions, expresses lack of belief in them and declares them void. Our society is based upon a religion and outlook, which is the ideal of all contemporary men, because our religion has the "tradition of martyrdom." None of the holy leaders of Islam have died of natural causes in isolated caves or monasteries: rather, they have all been martyred in prisons or on the battlefield.

To emancipate and guide the people, to give birth to a new love, faith, and dynamism, and to shed light on people's hearts and minds and make them aware of various elements of ignorance, superstition, cruelty and degeneration in contemporary Islamic societies, an enlightened person should start with "religion." By that I mean our peculiar religious culture and not the one predominant today. He should begin by an Islamic Protestantism similar to that of Christianity in the Middle Ages, destroying all the degenerating factors which, in the name of Islam, have stymied and stupefied the process of thinking and the fate of the society, and giving birth to new thoughts and new movements. Unlike Christian Protestantism, which was empty-handed and had to justify its liberationist presentation of Jesus, Islamic Protestantism has various sources and elements to draw from. Such a movement will unleash great energies and enable the enlightened Muslim to:

1-Extract and refine the enormous resources of our society and convert the degenerating and jamming agents into energy and movement.

2-Transform the existing social and class conflicts into conscious awareness of social responsibility, by using artistic, literary and speaking abilities and power as well as other possibilities at hand.

3-Bridge the ever-widening gap between the "island of the enlightened person" and the "shore of the masses" by establishing kinship links and understanding between them, thus putting the religion, which came about to revive and generate movement, at the service of the people.

4-Make the weapon of religion inaccessible to those who have undeservedly armed themselves with it and whose purpose is to use religion for personal reasons, thereby acquiring the necessary energy to motivate people.

5-Launch a religious renaissance through which, by returning to the religion of life and motion, power and justice, will on the one hand incapacitate the reactionary agents of the society and, on the other hand, save the people from those elements which are used to narcotize them. By launching such a renaissance, these hitherto narcotizing elements will be used to revitalize, give awareness and fight superstition. Furthermore, returning to and relying on the authentic

culture of the society will allow the revival and rebirth of cultural independence in the face of Western cultural onslaught.

6-And finally, eliminates the spirit of imitation and obedience, which is the hallmark of the popular religion, and replaces it with a critical revolutionary, aggressive spirit of independent reasoning (Ijtihad). All of these may be accomplished through a religious reformist movement, which will extract and refine the enormous accumulation of energy in the society, and will enlighten the era and will awaken the present generation. It is for the above reasons that I, as a conscientious teacher who has risen from the depth of pains and experience of his people and history, hope that the enlightened person will reach a progressive self-awareness. For whereas our masses need self-awareness, our enlightened intellectuals are in need of "faith."

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