

# SPIRITUALITY AND ISLAMIC ACTIVISM

Among the vital ideologies that requires discussion is spiritual development and its impact on social and political activism.

There are several ideological schools that deal with the subject of spiritual development and its sociopolitical impact. Some define spiritual development in terms of isolation from society. They suggest that in order to attain piety and strong bondage with Allah (swt), one must live in isolation and in monastic facilities. **“...We sent after them Isa the son of Mariam, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy. But the Monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them”** (57:27).

This can be referred to as the School of Isolation. This trend contradicts the true Islamic principles mentioned in the Qur'an and in the traditions of the Holy Prophet (s) and the Ahlul-Bayt (as). The most serious problem with this school is that it separates religion from one's lifestyle and sociopolitical activities.

Opposing the School of Isolation which reduces the importance of engaging in one's society is another trend that reduces the importance of spiritual development and its role in social and political activities. This latter trend can, as will later be demonstrated, be more disastrous than the former. Among the

causes of this trend are:

1. Heedlessness of some Muslim activists regarding the importance of spirituality and remembrance of Allah (swt) in their social and political activities.
2. The pride affecting some of the Muslim activists who begin to lose the distinction between serving Allah (swt) and feeding into one's ego.
3. Muslim activists being engrossed in their daily lives and sociopolitical activities, to such an extent that they have no time to develop themselves spiritually and personally. They disregard the necessity of continuous spiritual development achieved, for example, by reading the Qur'an, performing extra salaah, and through good conduct.

Regardless of the causes contributing to this phenomenon, the dangers associated with what one may refer to as the School of Negligence are apparent. For committed Muslims who are concerned about changing their societies and are working in the Islamic arena, the need for the continuous remembrance of Allah (swt) and spiritual development is greater than those who practice Islam at a minimal level (i.e. those whose concern is not beyond the limits of their own personal and familial life). This is because if they deviate, they will have a negative effect on the opera-



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tional environment in which they conduct their activities. Subsequently, we read in the hadith, *“The deviation of the scholar causes the deviation of his society”*.

Finally, the third trend is what we shall refer to as the School of Balance. The Qur’an describes a balanced believer as follows:

**“Surely Allah has bought of the believers their persons and their property for this, that they shall have the garden; they fight in Allah's way, so they slay and are slain; a promise which is binding on Him in the Taurat and the Injeel and the Qur’an; and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Rejoice therefore in the pledge which you have made; and that is the mighty achievement. They who turn (to Allah), who serve (Him), who praise (Him), who fast, who bow down, who prostrate themselves, who enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and who keep the limits of Allah; and give good news to the believers” (9:111-112).**

In this verse we see extensive emphasis being placed upon the conjunction between striving in the way of Allah (swt) and pledging to Him with worship and spirituality.

**“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them**

**bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration; that is their description in the Taurat and their description in the Injeel; like as seed-produce that puts forth its sprout, then strengthens it, so it becomes stout and stands firmly on its stem, delighting the sowers that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them; Allah has promised those among them who believe and do good, forgiveness and a great reward” (48:29).**

Here, the people whom Allah (swt) describes are firm in their faith against unbelievers, whilst the signs of peace, tranquility, worship and prostration are apparent on their faces. We can see how their hearts are beating in love and compassion towards the believers.

In another ayah, Allah (swt) says to the Holy Prophet (s), **“Continue then in the right way as you are commanded, as also he who has turned (to Allah) with you, and be not inordinate (O men!), surely He sees what you do. And do not incline to those who are unjust, lest the fire touch you, and you have no guardians besides Allah, then you shall not be helped. And keep up prayer in the two parts of the day and in the first hours of the night; surely good deeds take away evil deeds this is a reminder to the mindful. And be patient,**



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**for surely Allah does not waste the reward of the good-doers” (11:112-115).**

Allah (swt) is advising the Holy Prophet (s) and his followers to be steadfast in their position against injustice without inclining towards the unjust. This then transitions into a discussion on prayer, worship and remembrance of Allah (swt).

Therefore, we see on many occasions that the Holy Quran clearly portrays the balance between activism and spirituality. Each verse clearly emphasizes the importance of self-discipline and spiritual development, especially for the committed Muslim. These verses are informing us that sociopolitical activities and steadfastness in the cause of Allah (swt) on the one hand, and the remembrance of Allah (swt), worshipping Him, and spiritual development on the other, are two sides of the same coin.

When reading through narrations and traditions of the Holy Prophet (s) and Ahlul-Bayt (as) one observes these two sides; spirituality, and social and political activism. Historians say that the Messenger of Allah (s) did not practice anything unless it was combined with the remembrance of Allah (swt).

This is also true of the Ahlul-Bayt (as), who combined spirituality with their social and political activism. Imam al-Sajjad (as) said, “My aunt Zainab (as), with all those afflictions and tribu-

*lations, on her way to Damascus never neglected her night prayer, and when she was tired, she nevertheless prayed it while sitting. Even on the night of 11<sup>th</sup> Muharram, she was praying it beside the pure bodies of Imam Hussain (as) and his family and companions.”* We also read in the records of Ashura that the companions of Imam Hussain (as), on the night of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Muharram, spent it in remembrance and worship of Allah (swt) like the buzzing of the bees.

Muslims must be active in both fields discussed - helping the advancement of society through political and social activities and organizations, while also persevering in their own personal spiritual development through continuous worship and remembrance of Allah (swt). It is the latter that gives the former perspective and shapes Islamic activism in light of servitude to Allah (swt).

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