ISLAM

Society must be duty conscious

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

One unique aspect of the Quran is that it always lays stress on duties rather than on rights. There are many verses which tell us to do this or do that. But you will not find a single verse in the Quran that encourages human beings to make demands. No verse suggests that people should be able to expect that they can make claims on society.

The whole of the Quran is based on this norm. One such Quranic verse says: "God commands justice, kindness and giving their [due to] near relatives, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and transgression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed" (16:90).

Any ideology based on individual entitlement is unnatural, while any ideology based on duty is natural. Those who are conscious of their own rights will always make demands upon others. Their formula is: Others have to give to us. While the duty conscious person will always think in terms of self-construction. He will always try to fulfil his own duty. The formula of a rights-conscious person is: they must do it, while the formula of a duty-conscious person is: I will do it.

A rights-based ideology is focused upon what has to come from others, whereas a duty-based ideology starts with the self. The rights-based ideology is based on the "we and they" concept, while the duty-based ideology is based on the "we and we" concept.

A rights-based ideology is negative, while a duty-based ideology is positive. A rights-based ideology leads to social anarchy, for it is bound to create different rival classes, while a duty-based ideology leads to harmony, solidarity, peace and compassion.

This same principle is laid down in a hadith: "Give to others what others want from you and ask for your rights from God."

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