

Understanding Perfection in Human Beings

It is necessary for Muslims to know the definition of a perfect human being from the viewpoint of Islam because it would serve as a model and example. By emulating that we can by try to attain our perfection per Islamic teachings.

A perfect man means an exemplary human being, who is superior and exalted. Like everything else, a human being may be perfect, or he may be imperfect. This is regardless of normal functioning, or, being deficient. We have human beings who are physically sound, or, defective. But you do not consider blindness, deafness, paralysis, or, shortness of breath as defects of virtue, personality or humanity.

In Arabic the two words meaning 'Perfect' and 'complete' are close to each other but not exactly interchangeable in meaning. Both of them have an antonym meaning 'defective'. The difference between the two words is as follows: The word 'complete' refers to something which is prepared according to a plan, like a house and a mosque. If any part of it is unfinished it is incomplete or defective. But something may be 'complete'; yet, there may exist a higher degree of completion or many degrees higher than that. That is called 'perfection'. 'Complete' is a horizontal progress to maximum development and 'perfect' is a vertical climb to the highest degree possible.

When we speak of 'perfect wisdom, or, knowledge', it refers to a higher degree of an already existing wisdom or knowledge. A man may be complete in a horizontal sense, without being perfect vertically.

From the viewpoint of Islam, there are two ways of knowing a perfect person: One way is to refer to the Holy Qur'an and to the traditions (Hadith). The second way is to regard a real individual who is built up on the model of the Holy Qur'an and Islam, and not an imaginary being. Rather a real and objective personality who exists in various stages of perfection.

The holy Prophet (S) himself is an example of a perfect man in Islam. Imam 'Ali ibn Abu Talib (a) is another example. The process of knowing 'Ali (a) reveals a perfect man, meaning that one knows him thoroughly, and not only his name, lineage and apparent identity. We may know that 'Ali is the son of Abu Talib and the grandson of Abd'ul-Muttalib, and that his mother is Fatima, daughter of Assad-bin-Abd'ul-Ezi, and his wife is Fatima Az-Zahra' (a), and he is the father of Imam Hasan (a), and Imam Husayn (a), and the dates he was born and died, and the battles he fought etc. But this knowledge is not about him as a perfect man. Recognition of 'Ali means knowing his personality, rather than his person.

Once we get acquainted with his entire personality we will know him as a perfect man of Islam. Then we take him as a model and accept him in actuality, not limited as our leader and Imam in literal sense. Following to emulate him, we will be true Shi'a follower of this perfect man.

Ibn 'Arabi holds that human beings are the phenomenal existents that best manifest the divine attributes within the created world. The Perfect Human, then, is the human being who manifests the divine names and attributes in the most complete manner.

Shahid Mutahhari writes;

What is the state of the human who is the Perfect Human? Is it the state of the one who is only a pure worshipper? Is it the state of the one who is only a purely free man? Is it the state of the one who is only a pure lover? Is it the state of the one who is only a purely rational man?

No! None of these is the Perfect Human. The Perfect Human is that human within whom all the human values have grown, to the highest degree, in co-ordination with one another.

The Perfect Human means the human who is a champion of all human values, who is a champion in all domains of humanity.

What lesson should we learn from this? We should learn from this that we should not make the mistake of obtaining one value alone and forgetting about the other values. Although we ourselves may not be able to be a champion of all values, nevertheless we should possess all the values together to the extent that we can. Even if we are not the Perfect Human, in the end we will become a balanced human. It is then that we will take the form of a true Muslim in every field.

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Extracted from:

<https://www.al-islam.org/perfect-man-murtadha-mutahhari>

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