

Summary of the CASIS Saturday Night Lecture by Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on 20th Oct 2012

The Meaning of Happiness

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It has been 8 sessions since we started with this Saturday night lecture series by our renowned muslim scholar and thinker, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. All through those sessions, he had always conducted his lectures in a rather informal way, in a sense that it had always been a rather personal. But this week has added some variation to the familiarity. He started the lecture by reciting few pages from his book on The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam in order to advocate the audience to start referencing what they have learned from the series with the book to gather deeper and clearer meaning to things.

Happiness according to him is not defined as *tadribah*, instead the more accurate term referencing to it would be *sa'adah*. *Tadribah* is something that we could calculate and you cannot add scale to happiness. The reality of happiness (*Haqiqah al-sa'adah*) relates to two dimensions of existence, and that is the hereafter (*ukhrawiyyah*) and the present world (*dunyawiyyah*). The contrary to *sa'adah* is *syaqawah* which means great misfortune and misery in general (*genus*). The two dimensional existence is elaborated further, where he reads a passage from his book

“ With respect to the hereafter sa'adah refers to ultimate happiness, which is everlasting felicity and bliss , the highest being the Vision of God , promised to those who in worldly life have lived in willing submission and conscious and knowing obedience of God's commands and prohibitions”

Submission and conscious here is what he means by islam as a verb with the small 'i'. The requirement of having a certain level of consciousness when submitting to God is what we mean by having *niyyah* (intention) before performing any sorts of action. Analogous to that, submission to God must also be done willingly. For even *Iblis* submits to God and acknowledges Him, but unwillingly. However, Islam with capital 'I' constitutes the whole reality of submission. Islam is not an ideal, it is reality. It is not something we hope to be, it is what we are. Religion is what we must discover now, know now and practice now. The ultimate aim of religion is for man to return to their state when we were making our covenant to God. To return, we have to know who we are and whatever we seek must be relevance to our current state.

He further clarifies the significant difference between *Iman* and *Islam*. *Iman* is a verification in accordance to what is known to be the truth (*tahqiq*) and that you have to be true to the truth and confident in it. A person who has *Iman* must have *Islam*, but a person who has *Islam* does not mean he has *Iman*. By recognizing and acknowledging the truth, a person will come to reach *Iman*. The act of recognizing is clear in itself by the intuitive faculty, the heart (*qalb*) and in it is guidance. The intuitive faculty is one of the faculty of the self which is divided into four, namely *qalb* (receiving intuitive knowledge), *'aql* (intellect) , *ruh* (spirit) and *nafs* (soul) . These are not names of different objects, instead they're considered as attributes of the soul due to its accidental modes of states (they are all the time acted upon). The *self* is indeed the reality of man when he says 'I'. It is important to be conscious of our-*self* and knowing our-*self* despite everything that is changing in us. Allah is always creating and annihilating. Objects,

especially the molecules in us are always anew and similar at the same time. He continues “*There must be a coordinating principle that makes you, you*”

The possibility of our intuitive faculty to recognize truth is only when in it there is guidance. This guidance is only available through God. Without guidance, it is impossible for one to acquire true knowledge. Because *true knowledge* is knowledge that knows its limits. This limitation is not limiting by definition in the Western sense. Infinitesimal is not something that is in the worldview of Islam. We are created with limited ability to use our senses so we can see things as they are. If say we were given the ability to see as far as the eagle could see, and can hear as sharp as the cats ear, how will we be able to discern the actual thing as it is? If our touch has infinite capacity to touch a single atom, wouldn't touching a table be no more than touching sand? We have two groups of sense, one is internal (soul) and another is external (body). Our internal senses comprises of common sense, perceptions, imaginations and estimation. Whereas the external ones are the five senses, namely our eyes, hands, nose, ears and mouth. By using all senses, both internal and external, than only we can see things as it is. This is how knowledge is perceived, both in an objective and subjective way. The objective way to see things will describe reality as it is. At the same time, when the soul participates what is outside itself, it is called subjective knowledge. Both objective and subjective are interconnected like this, hence not a dualism.