

Personal and Social Functions of Religion

Hossein Habibitabar

Saveh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Saveh, Iran

ABSTRACT

The function of religion is any service, role and effects of religion on human life. Are these functions unique or some human resources can play the role of religion? Although the function of religion is a lot, in this paper we investigate the major functions of religion in personal and social life of human being by Holy Quran and sayings of Infallible Imams. The function of religion in personal life of human being is mental comfort, meaning of life, spiritual enjoyments, less problems and physical health and in social life is including unity, comfort in life, freedom and social justice, helping other, less crimes and deviations and the growth of culture and civilization. The mentioned functions were unique and other sciences don't have these effects. Western scientists confess about some of these functions.

KEYWORDS: Function; religion; personal life; social life

INTRODUCTION

The function of religion in the past was raised as the advantages of religion and the effects of faith. But after the development of human sciences, the function of religion is considered more and new questions are mentioned. What are the function and effects of religion and religious faith in the personal and social life of an individual? With the presence of human resources, the religion has unique function? Or some human resources such as psychology and sociology can play the role of religion? It is necessary that we determine at first the concept of function, and then the functions of religion in social and personal life should be investigated to answer the above questions (Khosropanah, 2004/252).

The concept of function

Most scientists believe that the concept of function was first obtained from physiology and entered social sciences by Spencer. He believed that human society is like a live creature that all its members are relate to each other. Function is derived from Latin word (funtio), meaning doing a duty and in Persian means role, action, service. In mathematics it means function, in social sciences is a role that a member or a part of total entity do it. In equilibrium theory, when a function is consistent with social system or responds to the main needs, it is called eufunction, but if it is opposite, it is called dysfunctipn (Baqer Sarukhani, 1996/303,304).

In other sciences like biology and sociology, different definitions are expressed but here function means all services and any role of religion in social and personal life of human being (Qaramaleki, 2008/293). Thus, the function of religion is investigated in two dimensions, social, and personal. The effects and functions of religion in addition to eternal salvation bring happiness in the worldly life but investigating all these aspects can not be possible. Only its important effects in personal and social aspect of human being life are considered. Religion means the set of beliefs, morality and rules that are given to them for personal and social management of human being via revelation (Javadi Amoli, 2004/27).

a. Personal functions of religion

1. Mental comfort: The most important problem of human being in the current era is anxiety, depression and the lack of comfort and inner confidence. Mental comfort is lost in human being life and he is really trying to achieve it. From religions aspects, the only thing that can fulfill human being need is religion. Religion gives comfort and reduces anxiety (Masood Azarbajani, 2006/293). Human being is always trying to achieve salvation and fears from a terrible future. Religious faith assures human being and removes all the anxieties and fears to the behavior of the world for human being and assures him. Generally, any person who is close to Allah, he will no fear, panic or anxiety. The Holy Quran says: "الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ بِرَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ مِنَّا الْجَنَّاتِ" (Truly you find rest in Allah remembrance)(Al-Rad/28). In another verse: «وَعَلَيْهِمْ خَوْفٌ لَّا وَرَبِّهِمْ عِنْدَ جَزَاءِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ» (The day when they will be afraid of Allah, and they will be in the Hellfire because of what they were doing).

*Corresponding author: Hossein Habibitabar ,Saveh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Saveh, Iran.
Email: habibitabar1390@yahoo.co.uk

b. Social functions of religion

The first section of religion functions was relate to human being himself without considering the society that have positive role in different fields of personal life of human being. The second part of function is related to society consisting of different people. Social life with all the positive and valuable results for human being, assures a series of problems and sufferings form human being life. These positive results and sufferings are due to the behavior manner of human being with social life equipments. Now we should see that what the function of religion is in the social aspect of human being.

1. Unity: The society to keep its unity requires a strong and beyond materialistic aspects factor. Divine religious namely Islam used super materialistic factor, religiosity for the unity of the society. Performing religious rituals in worshipping shows the unity of different groups of any race, language and nationality. Instead of thinking about personal, ethnical and regional benefits, they think about the benefits of the believers in different areas. **إِنَّمَا أَنشَأَكُم مِّن ذَكَرِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَكُونَ** O mankind, we created you all from a male and female and appointed for you tribes and nations to be known to each other . Verily in Allah's sight the most honorable of you is the most pious of you, Allah is the informed owner of knowledge (Hojarat, 13). **وَاعْتَصِمُوا** بالله بحبل واحد: and cling firmly together by means of Allah's strong rope and not divided among yourselves (Al-Imran 103). **إِنَّمَا هُمْ إِخْوَةٌ لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا** : لِحُوتِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِنَّمَا هُمْ إِخْوَةٌ لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا : The believers are brothers (Hojarat,10). From the Holy Quran, monotheism is not only the unity of Muslims, but also it is the unity of the followers of people of The Book like Jewish and Christianity and ask them to be united by monotheism. **يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْمَلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ** (O, people of the Book, come to the world of monotheism which is coming between us and you. That we worship none but Allah and that we shall not associate anything with Him (Al-Imran, 64). The Prophet (pbuh) condemned race and ethnical discrimination (Majlesi 1403,vol.350/76). O, people you are the sons of Adam and Adam is created of soil, so you are not superior to the Persian people, unless by piety.

Social researches support the role of religion in the unity of the society. A research in Australia showed that of 310000 people that go to church on Sundays, 24% know their closest friend the people who go to the church (Azarbayejani,2006/165). The sociologists emphasized on the role of religion in the social unity. Kent says:" The religion is not only an attempt to determine the reality; it is the unity principle of human being society (Malkem Hamilton, 19998/40). The reason is that acceptable beliefs are the best factor of social unity and such acceptable beliefs is found only in religion. Durkhaym, the prominent sociologist says: Religious rituals are necessary for correct function of our ethical life that food is required to makes us healthy because via religious rituals, some groups confirm themselves (cited in Qaramaleki, 342). Robert smith says: religion has two functions. One is regulating the personal behavior for the benevolence of others and the other is motivating the common feeling and social unity. Thus, religious rituals are repetitious expression of unity and functions strengthening social common aspects (ibid). Thus, one of the effects and functions of religion is unity and social strength and as the western scientists believe, another factor can not play such a role.

2. Comfort in life: Human being in addition to mental comfort requires comfort and wellbeing in materialistic life to attain worship, correct thinking, service to people, attaining science and spiritual positions. The wealthy society is less encountered with tension, because nobody thinks about the other one rights and avoid transgression to the wealth and property of others. Thus, religion doesn't ignore the wellbeing of people and presented some solutions for it and if the followers of religion resort to it, they will attain wellbeing and comfort. From religious point of view, faith and piety are the way of increasing the God blessings and if the people of the society have correct faith, they will attain materialistic wellbeing. The Holy Quran says: **وَإِن كُنْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّنْ مَا نَزَّلْنَا لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهُ لَوَجَدْتُمْ فِيهَا آيَاتٍ لِّبَالِغِينَ** : **يَكْفِيُونَهُ كَأَنؤَابِرِمَاءَ أُمَّةٍ كَانُوا إِتَّقَاهُمْ كَثِيرًا وَكُنُوا رِضًا** : and if the people of the towns had believed and tried to be pious, we would have opened upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth, but they relied our signs and miracles and we seized them for what they used to do (Aeraf, 96).

Thus, one of the functions of religion is the wellbeing of materialistic life of people that is attained by faith. Faith and piety increase the God blessings and in this way all the requirements of the society will be fulfilled.

3. Freedom and social justice: one of the main requirements of human being is justice and freedom in the society because in a society without justice and freedom, there is not progress and growth. The main part of the world is based on justice and a particle of injustice in the world creates imbalance. The important function of religion is freedom and justice. The religious person and a person who believes in the Day of Judgment and its chastisement, observes the rights of others and justice and freedom are at the top. Atheist person knows the life only in this world and he doesn't believe in the Day of Judgment and try to transgress the others.

Divine messengers tried a lot to fulfill the freedom and justice in the society. In religious sources, there are many verses and traditions and observing them fulfills the principle of freedom and justice in the society. According to religious teaching, the people in the society should know themselves responsible and in the piety, honesty should be revealed to fight against oppression and respect the ethical values and be as the members of a body united (Beheshti,

2008/70). What fulfills these affairs is only religious faith that penetrates piety to the depth of human being and validates the ethical values and cause that the courage of fighting against oppression results into martyrdom and by united principle relates all the members of the society (Motahari, 1990, vol, 49/2). The Holy Quran knows one of the missions of Prophets as establishment of justice as: *«الْقِسْطَ الدَّائِمَ لِيُقْضَىٰ الْمِيزَانَ وَ الْكِتَابَ مَعَهُمْ أُنزِلْنَا بِهِ الْبَيِّنَاتِ رُسُلَنَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ»*. Indeed we sent our Messengers with signs and miracles and revealed to them Books of religion and gave them the criterion of establishing justice among the people (Hadid, 25). In another verse says: *«عَلَيْهِمْ وُجُوهٌ كَأَنَّ الْغُلَّالَ وَ إِصْرَهُمْ عَنْهُمْ يُضَعُ وَ* And he removes from them their burden and yokes which were upon them (Aeraf, 157).

Thus, the teaching of Messengers, namely Islam that is the final religion and is not distorted, is the cause of freedom and justice of human being. We should distinguish between the religious leaning and the behavior of some of the Muslim people. The religious learning not only prevents use of being good to others but also we can be good to other people that don't have the same religion and encourage use to establish justice about them. If we are invited to jihad and fight, it is about the people who tried to destroy the religion and plunder the property of people (Momtahene, 8). Imam Ali advised Malik Ashtar to kindness and affection toward people when he was appointed as the ruler of Egypt". They are your brother in the religion or the creation. If they made a mistake, forgive them as you like, God forgives you (Nahjolbalaqeh, letter 53). Tokoyl regarding the situation of America and salvation ways says:" The religion guides people to have clear ideas and observing divine rules guides human being to freedom (Jean paul Vilem, religions sociology, 16).

4. Helping others: Different religions are agreed about ethical issues. For example, all the religions advise their followers this point: behave with others as you like them to behave with you. Regarding helping the weak, poor and helpless people such agreement is observed. Sacrifice and selflessness is encouraged in religion. Religious people helped the poor people and advised the others to do the same. Religious institutions and religious people help the poor. Charity boxes were always in the mosques and most of the needy people are helped via these boxes.

Some researches in Europe and America showed that there is positive correlation between religiosity and helping the poor and charity and the collaboration of religious people is high in this regard (Azarbayejani,2006/174).

Islam as the last religion has a valuable position in helping others. In the Holy Quran regarding the Ahle Beit is said that and for Alla's pleasure they feed the needy, the orphan and the captive thought themselves go hungry (Insan, 8). Feeding the needy, helpless during the night was one of the characteristics of religious leaders. Ansar of Medina who before them had home in the home of migration and faith they give them their house (Hashr, 9). 5. Reduction of crime and deviations: One of the signs of religiosity is less crim. It is expected of religious people to less commit crime and this expectation is due to religious learning about the murder, drugs abuse, alcohol, and other deviations. When a person is familiar with religious learning, can not commit crime and go astray. On the other hand, a person due to religiosity and assurance and not loving this world, controlled anger and joy that are the source of many deviations thus he is not motivated to do these deviations. Thus, religion is a part of social control system. Because people in the society and government are controlled by two methods, first external supervision via punishments, second internal supervision that is fulfilled by religious beliefs and this kind of supervision is less costly and is influential (Azarbayejani,2003/265).

Indeed, avoiding crimes and deviations is not possible without religiosity because these crimes are mostly related to ethical issues and ethical issues without the support of religion are not valid. A person who doesn't believe in God and the Day of Judgment how should ignore his personal benefits and don't commit crime. Thus, nothing except religion cannot create resorting to ethical issues and avoiding crime and deviation. Religiosity avoids sexual perversion because a devout person by avoiding of unlawful look, pervert parties and other desires is not necessary to have illegitimate sexual intercourse and only tries to satisfy himself through legitimate relationship. But unreligious people that don't avoid themselves of unlawful things, feel more thirsty about sexual intercourse and try to go astray. Suicide is seen less in religious people. The researches clarify this reality. Suicide amount among people who go to church once a week is 11 and for people who go less than 1 time in a week is 29 people (ibid, p. 167,169).

6. The growth of culture: The religion in addition to afterlife salvation has main role in social progress. Islam via encouraging to science and knowledge and respecting the work and development play important role in human being culture. *«لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَهُوَ يَتَكَلَّمُ إِذْمَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَا الَّذِينَ وَ يَعْلَمُونَ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَوِي لَ»* Is such person is entitled to receive Allah's favor or the one who is an obedient worshipper, are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only men of reason are reminded by these words of revelation (Zomar, 9). The prophet said: *«مسلمة و مسلم كل على فريضة العلم طلب»*: learning knowledge is necessary for each Muslim man and woman (Mohammad Rey Shahri, 2004. Vol. 3946/8).

Western theorists emphasized on the role of Iran in human being civilization. Gustav Lubun says:" We don't have any nation like Arab people and Muslims who influenced the world considerably. Because most of the nations who were connected to them, accepted their civilization. (Gustav Luben, Islam and Arab civilization/701). Dr. Hunke says:" Islam civilization was started by Muslim and not only save the legacy of Greece from destruction but

also arranged it and gave it to Europe and they were the pioneer in chemistry, physics, Al-Gabr, calculus and spatial triangle, sociology and geology. Islam civilization gave many valuable discoveries in all parts of natural sciences to the West. However, the most precious of them is the researches of natural science and it resulted into giving the opportunity to Europe to identify the nature rules and controlling it (Montgomeri Watt, the effect of Islam on Middle age of Europe/11). Montgomeri Watt said:” Islam world not only shares the materialistic productions and technology innovations in science and philosophy with Europe, obliged Europe to make a new image of themselves to make them informed and this is the duty of we Western Europe to modify the previous mistakes and confess that we are indebted to Arab and Islam world (Ibid). The capacity of Islam civilization is such that could make from the deprived and ignorant people of Arab a nation as superior to all the nations. This shows that if stagnation is occurred in the progress of Islamic society, it is due to the lack of their attachment to Islamic learning not the neglect of religion. Here we mentioned some of the functions of religion. Other functions of religion are knowledge in monotheism aspect, world, anthropology, Returning to God and removing wrong beliefs, protest against the good condition, preferring others benefit upon themselves, etc that require more opportunity.

Conclusion

The function of religion in human being life is a lot and is present in all aspects of human being life. Some of functions of religion in social and personal life are mentioned. Religion functions in personal life are mental comfort, meaningful life, spiritual enjoyments, reduction of pains and physical health. In social life aspect are social unity, wellbeing in life, freedom and social justice, helping others, less crimes and the growth of culture and civilization. Considering the researches and confessions of western scientists, no factor can have the role of religion.

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