Personal and Social Functions of Religion

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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 (functio), 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 dysfunction (Baquer 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 Azarbayejani, 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: "(Truly you find rest in Allah remembrance)(Al-Rad/28). In another verse: وَ عَلَيْهِ خَوْفٌ لَا رَبِّ إِنَّهُ عَدَّلَ فَلَنِّهِمْ صَالِحًا عَمَّالُ وَأُمَّةٌ أَمَامَ مِنْهُ": (Al-Adl/106)."

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and those who believe in Allah and the day of Judgment, and do righteous deeds, shall have their reward with their creator, and there shall be no fear for them, nor shall they grieve (Al-Baqareh/62).

The divine tranquility into the hearts of the believers (Al-Fath/4).

Allah sent His divine tranquility on the Messenger and on the believers (Al-Tohe/26). Allah sent down His divine tranquility on His messenger and upon the believers (Al-Fath/26). And fear of God. The tranquility that is created due to divine faith in people, reduces social abnormalities. (Abdollah Javadi Amoli, the society in Quran, Nashr Asrar, 2008, first, p. 61).

Allameh Tabatabayi says: “Human being resorts to everything but all these instruments are dominant on one hand, they are defeated on the other hand except the Almighty Allah (Tabatabayi, 2007, Vol 11/487).

Imam Khomeini at the end of his life with all its ups and downs said: “Now with a comfortable life and assured heart and hopeful go to my Allah” (Will of Imam Khomeini).

According to Holy Quran, the remembrance of Allah brings comfort and forgetting God make the life terrible and bitter. The Holy Quran says: "مَعْيَتَةٌ لَّهُ ﺾَوْانٌ ذَكُوراً ﻋَرْضَ ﻣَنْ وَأَمْوَاءٌ لَّهُ ﺾَوْانٌ ذَكُورٌ ﻋَرْضَ ﻣَنْ " : And whoever turns away from My Message, for him life will be strait ended and on the day of Judgment we shall raise him up blind (Al-Taha/124).

This hard life is not due to materialistic poverty, it is possible that these people are wealthy but they don’t have any comfort and they are anxious and this is due to not having a good reliance and fear of the future and the end of life. Thus, only believing in God makes the life better and reduces mental pressures (Motahari, 1990, Vol. 46/2).

Totally, religion guides us toward Allah remembrance, the lack of loving the world, not having stress and optimistic view to evil issues and optimistic view about the death (Qaramaleki, 2008/151.159).

Freud, the prominent psychologist, Carl Yung (1961) said that a believer person is the owner of a precious thing, it means that he owns something that gives meaning to his life and it is the origin of life and beauty and give magnificence to the world and individuals, such a person is having faith and comfort (Carl Gustav Yung, 1975, 1976/207,120).

Robert Hume, the contemporary historian says:” the religion gives something to human being that can not be received from any other source (Hume, 1996/18).
3. Spiritual enjoyments: Other effects of religiosity are having some enjoyments except materialistic enjoyments and it is called spiritual enjoyments. Beside materialistic enjoyments like taste, touch, seeing, there are other enjoyments relate to the depth of soul and are not influenced by having relationship with an external material such as the enjoyment that is achieved by giving service to others or respecting and worshiping Allah that is the taste of faith. The faith is sweet better than any tastes (Motahari, 1990, vol. 43/2). Spiritual enjoyment causes sacrifice and selflessness and in the hard conditions of life, he prefers others to himself. Only religious faith can give such attribute to a person. The holy Quran says:’’وَقَدْ قَالَ رَبّي قِنَّئِي مِنَ الْإِيَّامِ وَالدَّارِ وَذُو الْآبَايَاتِ وَأَطُورْنَاهُ اللَّهُ وَأَهْلَكَ نَفْسَهُ وَأَطُورْنَاهُ اللَّهُ وَأَهْلَكَ نَفْسَهُ وَأَطُورْنَاهُ اللَّهُ وَأَهْلَكَ’’ (Al-Baqareh, 161). And after these behaviors and assure their health. Imam Ali Says:’’إِنْ نَحْضُرُهُ ﻋَلَی ﺧَلْقِنَا وَنَحْضُرُهُ ﻋَلَی ﺧَلْقِنَا’’ (Al-Baqareh, 124). In another verse says:’’وَإِنْ نَحْضُرُهُ ﻋَلَی ﺧَلْقِنَا’’ (Al-Baqareh, 124).

4. Less problems and sufferings: Human being life is full of enjoyments and happiness and suffering and losses and failures. Some of the events like oldness and some diseases are not cured and these suffer human being a lot. Religious faith creates resistance force in an individual and by correct interpretation of bitter events, makes them sweet and by believing in the Day of Judgment, they believe that any suffering and pain in this nature is compensated by God. Religious faith makes death a tool to return to God and enjoy the eternal blessings and in this way, not only it is bearable, but also it is a sweet phenomenon (Motahari, 1990, vol. 48/2).

5. Physical health: One of the requirements of human being is physical health that pays heavy costs to cure himself. Religiosity results into physical health. In a research it is found that going to church is relate to the physical health of human being. On the other hand, soul and body are relate closely and always is not thinking about more benefits and having the rights of others and he will be more comfortable. This causes that he will be away from many physical diseases of mental problems.

Considering the above mentioned items and the confessions of western scientists, personal functions of religion are unique and no scientific field can have the role of religion in human being.
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 sufferers form human being life. These positive results and sufferers 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, ethical and regional benefits, they think about the benefits of the believers in different areas. Allah (azza wa jall) says: "أَقْرَأْنَا لَأَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أَنْ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَكُلَّمَاهُمُ الْكُتُبَ وَهُمْ لَا يَظْهَرُونَ مُكَبَّرٍ." O mankind, we created you all from a male and a 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). Andreas J. Zuckerman (2006) revealed that 24% of Americans believe in the Day of Judgment and its punishments. The religious person and a person who believes in the Day of Judgment and its punishments forms part of the society. Performing religious rituals for the unity of the society. 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 doing good deeds for the benefit of others and the other is motivating the common feeling and social strength and as the western sociologists 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 others, 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: "طَلِبُكُمْ إِلَى الْخَلْقِ وَأَمْدَادُهُمْ أَنْ لَوْ وَإِذَا أَخَذْتُمْ مَلَائِكَةَ وَمَلَائِكَةَ ضَرْعُوبٍ لَّخُذُوهُمْ وَأَنْذَرْنَاهُمْ كَثِيرَةً وَلَكَنَّ الْأَرْضَ لَا رَضِيَتْ وَالْمَاءُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَّمْ يَكْبُرُ وَإِنَّا نَباَسِلُونَ". 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 and 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, 2006).
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: And he removes from them their burden and yokes which were upon them (Aerof, 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 leaning 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 advisedMalik 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 Vilém, 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 (Azarbaijani, 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 crime. 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 (Azarbaijani, 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 region 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. As 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: 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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