

RELIGION AS A BELIEF SYSTEM

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“Man is absolutely the most favored creature; even to the point that it was said - which is true - that he is favored over the angels. The preference of man lies in his intellect. The intellect of man is what raised his status, and made him superior to all creatures. Therefore, it is necessary to understand this intellect and accordingly it is necessary to know what is thinking (at-tafkeer, and what is the method of thinking? (Tareeqat ut-tafkeer). This is because this reality designated as thinking is what gives the intellect its value, and what brings those elaborate fruits, with which life revives and man revives. The whole universe, including everything, even the inanimate beings, plants and animals, revive.

Sciences, arts, literature, philosophy, jurisprudence, language and knowledge are themselves the **output of the mind, and consequently the output of Thinking**. Therefore, it is necessary for the sake of man, life and the whole universe, that the reality of the mind is comprehended, and the reality of thinking and the method of thinking be comprehended accordingly.

Humanity has made this great advance in life and in the time, whilst being mostly concerned with the output of the mind and with the output of thinking, without being concerned with the reality of the mind and the reality of thinking”. From: THINKING by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani

I considered it might spark your interest if I started with some paragraphs from a publication entitled simply, THINKING by a person who started an **Islamic** movement that I have found quite deep in its' approach to what when one hears the term “Islamic” or angel rather quickly gets linked to Religion and I know the term ‘reality’ generally gets dittoed in the thinking of most General Semanticist. Since I have as a subject matter, Religion as a belief system, I have found I have a very daunting task to reduce with some clarity the term Religion to a lower order of abstraction and then couple the specific Religion I have chosen to focus on, Islam, with the idea of its' functioning not just as a belief system but as a coherent system for all human beings to live by post, 9/11,--- all in thirty minutes. However, I can rest somewhat comfortable feeling that by-in-large this audience recognizes whatever I say and however long I have to say it, something will be left out. We understand then that this presentation can do no more than hint at some areas of a vast knowledge base that I have been interacting with for many years. With me this exciting area of understanding goes back as far as Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, men I knew well, and it is still evolving to date. I certainly am willing to take responsibility for everything I say but I will **not** take responsibility for how **you** take what I say since I don't have a lot of time to explain what may be some controversial areas that may unfold. GS allows us to understand that I am giving as many talks as there are people in the audience. Some, with Islam so much in the news since 9/11 and I confess to being a Muslim, would, I suspect, like me to deal with a close analysis of Islam in day to day practice; some would like a substantial exposition on how I integrate G.S and Islam; some will consider it important, as do I, that I be in tune with the Conference theme. But as Milton Dawes so often puts it, this is a story and it will be my story for whatever it sums up to be. That we know to be unavoidable. I understand that after my time has expired I will simply have to stop wherever I am in the presentation even though I may not be where I would like but hopefully we can follow up some points in the discussion sessions.

I have been conversant with GS some twenty-seven years now and I have taken note that there has been an aversion to view what is generally labeled "Religion" when defined as a personal awareness or conviction of the existence of a Supreme Being influencing and controlling ones' own, humanity's or all natures destiny as a topic worthy of in-depth study and inclusion within general-semantics literature. There are some exceptions. One is a fairly lengthy chapter in LEVELS OF KNOWING AND EXISTENCE by H. Weinberg entitled simply, RELIGION but I consider his writing a clear exception in the general semantics literature. Another one was an article printed in Vol. 57 Summer 2000 of Etc entitled "Science, Religion and God: My Story" by Milton Dawes. I sensed he used the term Religion in the most general sense, inferring it seemed to me, that all Religions are pretty much the same and he is not comfortable taking them too seriously. Well, as he said and frequently reminded us, he was telling "His Story" and was gracious enough to state he would be ready to hear the stories of others who do not share his view. I also recall a very negative article about Prayer, using some examples from the Holy Quran and Islam that I considered was probably placed in an issue of Etc as a filler and I prefer not to dignify it with either an answer or a challenge. Then too there was William Pemberton's article CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS in the same issue presaging to some extent the title of this very conference. In this short presentation Religion, specifically Islam, as a belief system, indexed, Holy Quran, Prophet Muhammad, Abdul Salaam, I am putting forth some specifics that hopefully will help you to understand why I am comfortable in my acceptance of Islam as a belief system that is certainly considered a Religion and how I mesh my understanding of the formulations of general-semantics with ease in the context of that belief system. As suggested above it is clear that many GS'ers feel Religion is incompatible with general-semantics. If Religion is being considered in the abstract as an un-referenced word, I can understand that sentiment but for me, the Religion of Islam as I intend to sketch it in part and general-semantics as I have understood the formulations, are not altogether incompatible. How then is Religion generally viewed?. Up until 9-11, Religion, including Islam, was most usually thought of and practiced as a pattern of ritualistic worship--period. Many Muslims along with other religious adherents, in the sharply demarcated division between the Church and State environment characteristic of America, have acted in the same fashion. There is a particular day (or series of days) that a greater amount of attention is given to the contemplation of the existence of a Supreme Being and depending upon one's belief system and the set of scriptures adhered to, one does those things called for by the leaders of the Religion for that period of time and that's it. (I have noticed that by in large when Muslims are pictured close to nine times out of ten you hear the Adhan [call to prayer] and Muslims are shown prostrating themselves in prayer. Is someone trying to get viewers to think that prayer and some "terrorist acts" are all that Muslims do? That doesn't lead to much understanding). More often than not, once leaving the place of worship an entirely new series of behaviors may take place that have no bearing on or relation whatsoever to the professed religious beliefs. I know of no Religion other than Islam, if not detached from its original sources, the Holy Quran, the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, Ijma and Qiyas, (I am not going to try to explain those terms now) that embodies within its' makeup a complete and full system of guidance for our behavior economically, socially, politically, administratively, educationally, militarily and religiously. Since this conference, listed as an **International** one, has taken upon itself the herculean task of Confronting the Challenges of Conflicting World Views with one of the subjects up for discussion being beliefs, belief Systems and their Consequences, I would like to start here with you as a pilot study in working through this problem of conflicts between belief systems, modern

science and technology. Since many of you may have some real hang-ups about Religion, developing some understanding here, might help it spread abroad.

This being a General Semantics Conference and the preceding two or three days have been spent with some of you discussing the formulations within that discipline (which must really just have been a review course. I spent two weeks each in my first three GS Seminars), let me ask does Korzybski talk about morals and ethics or use the term faith in his writings? Yes, but one is hard put to find them as specific terms and even then (and there are a few) they are carefully ostracized with the dreaded single quote markings---watch out for elementalism that shouts. In a sense I'm rarely comfortable that I know what he means by the terms. On page xxxi in *Science and Sanity*, paragraph three Korzybski writes, "Theory and practice show that healthy, well balanced people are *naturally*" (italics mine) 'moral' and 'ethical' unless their education's have twisted their types of evaluations. What immediately pops into my head is a verse from the Holy Quran that reads, "And so set thy face steadfastly towards the one ever true faith, turning away from all that is false in accordance with the *natural* disposition which God has instilled into man, not to allow any change to corrupt what God has thus created---this is the purpose of the one ever true faith but most people know it not." Surah 30:30. This is further reinforced by a famous saying of Prophet Muhammad that states, "Every child is born in this natural disposition-a Muslim: it is only his parents that later turn him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian." I would like to remind you that Prophet Muhammad preceded Korzybski by about 1400 years. "In general semantics" says Korzybski, "we do not 'preach' 'morality' or 'ethics' as such but we train students in consciousness of abstracting, consciousness of the multiordinal mechanisms of evaluation, relational orientations, etc., which bring about cortico-thalamic integration, and then as a result, 'morality', 'ethics', awareness of social responsibilities, etc. follow automatically." Really? Now that's a mouthful. How if these things are not supported by the environment? Remember the old organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment formulation we push? Is that just poppycock? What's this 'naturally' he's talking about? Does that have to do with our created being--our nervous system, whatever it is that we came out of the womb with? Korzybski didn't say so I don't know and far be it from me to put words in his mouth. But I can place in juxtaposition to Korzybski's position an Islamic perspective, surprisingly enough quite comparable to his but in my humble opinion much more succinct. I can readily understand why Korzybski did not get himself into difficulty trying to define or use the term 'moral'. In Webster's, Third New International and seven language dictionary, composed of 3 volumes, in the attempt to describe the term moral a column 1 1/2 inches wide by 13 inches long is used. I'm certainly not going through all of that material so suffice it to say that it is most commonly thought of as relating to principles of consideration of right and wrong action or good or bad character. Now, if you're really conscious of choices you make in your use of language or words, you should immediately ask yourself, who decides what's "good" or "evil"? Pretty or Ugly? Who is the Terrorist? Where do we get our concepts of right and wrong? Are these terms relative to something else? How about context? Does that make a difference? Does ethics fit in there anywhere? These are the challenges we face. Here is what we say Islamically: Society, any society, is built upon the systems of life and it is consequently affected by the thoughts and sentiments that are prevalent in that Society. Morals, of and by themselves, have no effect in establishing the society or determining its' prosperity or demise." How does that grab you? Do you see any parallels here between that precept and what Korzybski has written? Perhaps this understanding might lessen the dismay of those who learned from a recent announcement that a poll showed only 37% of those polled felt that the morals and ethics of the upcoming generation were sufficiently sound enough to make a better world in the years to come. If we understand

that the effective factor in the prosperity and effective growth of a society is not morals but commonly held traditions which arise from ones' formulation about life, that the driving factor in society is not morals but the systems which are applied within it and the thoughts and sentiments that people adopt, we would not be dismayed by such a conclusion. Ask yourself what kind of thoughts and sentiments drive today's society not only in this country but in many parts of the world? If the major activity engaging the time and thoughts of people is sport and play, how does that play out in the development of the society? If 80% of the movies, television programs, billboards, advertisements, etc nurture and feed our sexual appetites, glorify violence or urge us to drink alcoholic beverages, and the billboards scream out to women that "you've come a long way baby" simultaneously projecting them to us standing in sexually provocative poses with a cigarette hanging from their lips, how much moral strength is that going to promote? I repeat, the Religion of Islam's position is that morals, good or bad, result from the thoughts, sentiments and the kind of system functioning in the society. I suggest to you then that our belief systems must somehow deal with these issues and if we choose for ourselves a Religion as a belief system, it too must embody that understanding. Some time ago I stopped speaking of Islam as a Religion. To speak of Islam only as a Religion promotes in many minds stereotypical, narrow, prejudicial thinking. Yes there are worship practices in Islam but they are part of the whole. They too are not arbitrary. We need to understand that Islam is essentially a system, a way of life that organizes our lives--both male and female as human beings in the way the Creator has deemed best for us. Korzybski pushes the formulation that the human being functions as an organism-as-whole-in-an environment. That's not a new understanding for enlightened Muslims. Islam too considers man an indivisible whole and it organizes his actions with divine rules (Ahkam Shariy'ah if you will) with one harmonically balanced organization. The number and variety of these actions is not the determinant of the method used to deal with them. When Islam deals with a problem, any problem, it is perceived and dealt with as a human problem. Not an African-American problem, not an Arab problem, not a social problem, not an economic problem, NOT A MORAL PROBLEM, but a human problem for which a solution if not already readily apparent must be deduced from the divine rules (hokum shar'iy) from the detailed divine commandments revealed by God to His Messenger. Now, back to the opening paragraph and **Thinking.**

Does anything in the Islamic literature about thinking parallel some G.S. formulations? Yes, we have already discussed a few. Where are the differences and how important are they? Well how about the symbol most usually associated with General Semantics, The Structural Differential. In listening to Korzybski's historical note on the development of the Structural Differential and how he came about it, what struck me was his use of the term "sense" data. It struck me because of a term used similarly in the description by the author of THINKING from whom I quoted in the first paragraph and the striking parallel between how he asks those persons studying Islam with him to view the World and Korzybski's position. Let me briefly sketch out some of these parallels for you. Korzybski says that under the emotional stress of trying to convey the difference between man and animal to a highly influential and well known group of academics, as in a "flash" he says, a diagram came to him. Now let me ask you to consider right now a very important point that I intend to make throughout the balance of this presentation which is key. This "flash" Korzybski talks about, where did it come from? Could he have formulated the Structural Differential had he just dropped out of the womb and had no previous information within his nervous system to work with? An emphatic No! We know that Korzybski has labeled the dots we find in the parabola as processes at the submicroscopic level and that when we consider them as protons or neutrons, etc, they are the highest level of abstractions we have

derived from our interactions with these processes at a given date. "Now", he says," we must at this point make a distinction between, "discriminate" was the term he used, different kinds of so called knowledge. We have sense data which are given by the object, which means abstractions made by our nervous system from the submicroscopic level which is not on the sense level and the other kind of knowledge we have is inferential knowledge." Now that is an exact quote from Korzybski, so I ask you what is this sense data which Korzybski frankly states is not on the sense level? What in the world is that? As far as I have been able to determine, Korzybski says nothing else about this data. What is put before us is his map of the thinking process, the structural differential, cut off at the top because of our inability to circumscribe or grasp all there is and then we go from there based on our **PREVIOUS INFORMATION**. As stated in my opening paragraph, from an Islamic perspective a great deal of time and effort has been put into "thinking" that has yet to deal with and comprehending from whence comes the thinking process itself. If thinking is done by the "mind", how does it get there and how does one define the mind? Most of you know by now, Korzybski is very careful to insist that we should not use the word 'mind' alone. It has to be body-mind. On page 498 he very nicely puts it that "the verbal division of "body' and 'mind' remains verbal and also involves a language whose structure does not correspond to the structure of and functioning of the organism". Pula with his Pula experiment demonstrating how he can prove there are no out of body experiences that the mind partakes of itself is certainly dramatically graphic in so far as it goes but it begs a point. On the same page, in the last paragraph, Korzybski proceeds after making some other points by saying, "With this in mind let us briefly analyze.." No dittos over mind. Are you disagreeing with that position Salaam? No not really. I agree 100% that in order for thinking to take place, an appropriate brain is a fundamental and basic necessity. But, as Peggy Lee use to sing, is that all there is? Let me put before you what has become for me a very comfortable definition of the mind that has evolved from my Islamic studies that I find perfectly satisfactory and not in violation of GS formulations if the discipline is ready, as it claims, to accept knowledge at a different date that goes beyond outdated and limited thinking. And you know how hard that is for many of us to do, especially if it is our thinking or the thinking within the discipline that we have spent a great deal of time internalizing so it has almost become a Religion. **There is no thought without a reality.** The reality, undittoed, I put before you is what is before you; it is the clear sense data. Sense data, Korzybski, remember? Boy, I would love to talk more about "sense" data. No time. But I suggest you read "The Senses---Windows or Snares" by Raymond Gozzi Jr. Etc. Vol 60 No 1 Spring 2003. It hints at some of the things about sense data that warrant further exploration.

Think of the mind as that entity which comes into existence as a result of THE TRANSMISSION OF THE REALITY TO THE APPROPRIATE BRAIN VIA THE SENSES AND INTERPRETATION OF THIS REALITY BY PREVIOUS INFORMATION. WHEN WE **SENSE** SOMETHING, WITHOUT SOME PREVIOUS INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT WE ARE SENSING ITS JUST THAT--SOMETHING SENSED--A SENSATION. YOU CAN GET HIT WITH A MILLION SENSATIONS BUT UNLESS ONE HAS SOME PREVIOUS INFORMATION ABOUT THAT WHICH IS SENSED WE CAN NOT ARRIVE AT ANY COMPREHENSIVE THOUGHT ABOUT IT. WE JUST WON'T UNDERSTAND THAT WHICH IS SENSED. Even when speaking to Muslims, a group to whom to a large extent I direct my talk due to what might be considered the lowly state that Muslims and Islam has fallen to from the time the Middle East and the Islamic Centers were considered the very seat of Civilization and learning, I make this very important point: for those who do not speak or understand Arabic, IF I WERE TO GIVE YOU THE HOLY QURAN IN ARABIC, AS MUCH

AS YOU BELIEVE IN THE HOLY QURAN, AS MUCH AS YOU BELIEVE IT IS THE WORD OF GOD, NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU COULD SEE OR FEEL OR TOUCH IT, YOU WILL NOT UNDERSTAND A SINGLE WORD OF THE BOOK UNTIL YOU ARE GIVEN THE RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARABIC LANGUAGE. ONCE AGAIN, THOUGHT CAN'T BE PRODUCED UNLESS PREVIOUS INFORMATION IS COUPLED WITH THE TRANSFERENCE OF A SENSED THING THROUGH THE SENSES TO THE BRAIN. **Now, you have a mind**

So what's this **Previous information**? You know our, or at least my thing, words don't mean, only people mean so we have to dig a little more into this **previous information** thing. The previous information I would like you to think about is the information that the very first human being had to have available to him in order to make a judgment about reality, in order to have a thought, in order to link or connect information, in order for the mind to function coherently. Many people attempt to cite the first human being in terms of how through hits and misses, environmental circumstances, mistakes and hapininstance rational processes were generated. This is put forth to support their hypothesis that this is how man came into thinking and to even understand and use language. We say to you such things do not generate thinking in the sense we are discussing. Such activity simply results in recollection and not coherent connections and linkage. It is specific to the instincts and can't be applied to judgment on things by understanding them. But I don't want to get bogged down here in the study of the first human being as he is generally portrayed historically or anthropologically with all of the assumptions, speculation and fantasies attendant thereto. Our studies have concluded it would be best instead of choosing the first human being and comparing him to the present man, thus comparing the present to the absent, let us take (for discussion) the present man before us, whom we see and sense, and compare to him the absent, i.e. compare the absent to the present. Thus what applies to the present man through sensation and inspection applies to every normal person, including the first human being. The present man, who has been studied ad infinitum is before us, where we witness him and sense him, so, let us examine him rationally, regarding his instincts and what is related to his judgment on things by understanding them. Then we may examine the recollecting and what it is, and the connecting and what it is, and find out the difference between them. We would then notice that previous information is necessary for man to connect the reality –what's "out there"- within the brain to produce a meaningful thought, so it is a necessary requirement in the rational process. This is different then just the recollection of an activity or sensation, something which exists in both man and animal, and it does not represent a rational process; it is neither the use of the intellect, thought or thinking. So as not to raise argument over language and reality (tangible reality—the map is not the territory), let us discuss reality directly. Any one who has witnessed or studied the activity and growth of a child should have no problem understanding this assertion. The child is born with the ability to sense but he/she arrives without any previous information. Let us put before that child a piece of gold, a piece of copper, a piece of stone, or any object you can think of and make all his senses participate in sensing these things. The child would not be able to evaluate them, no matter how much these sensations were repeated or varied. However, if the child was given information about them after sensing them, the child would use this information and understand them. The sensing must be tied to a reality and it must be accompanied by clearly linked, connections to the sense data if that child is to comprehend what is put before it. Even if this child grew up and became 20 years old, if not given any information, he would remain as he was when born, he sensed the things only without understanding them no matter how big his brain became. This is because what makes him comprehend is not the brain; rather it is the **previous information**, together with the brain and

the reality that he senses that makes the difference. So the **previous information** about the reality, or related to that reality is a fundamental and main condition for the rational process to take place. In other words it is a main and fundamental condition for the mind. The body-mind entity that Korzybski speaks of and that plain just mind that I am talking about does not exist except in man. I'm sure you all know the structural differential well enough to know that Korzybski firmly puts forth that what Korzybski called Fido, (any animal really) represented by the side object in the structural differential does not think in the terms we are speaking of. Animals function purely on instinct. Our Muslim author of Thinking points out in his publication as clearly as does Korzybski in his discussion of the Structural Differential the difference between man and animal. Korzybski uses neurological terminology, the Muslim brother I have chosen to quote from uses fairly plain easily understood language. Let me give you a direct quote from one of my teachers to make my point. He says, "As for the difference between the brain of man and the brain of the animal, the brain of the animal has no capacity to connect information. It rather has the capacity to recollect (*istirjaa*) the sensation, particularly if it is repeated. This recollection, which the animal does naturally, is specific to what is related to the instincts and organic needs exclusively. So if you rang the bell and offered food to the dog at the same moment, and repeated that process, the dog would understand that when the bell is rung the food is coming, therefore, its saliva flows. Similarly when the donkey sees a mare its desire is aroused, but it does not do so if it saw a bitch. Likewise the cow, when it grazes, it avoids the poisonous grass and that which harms it. All of this and the like is an instinctive differentiation. As regards what people see of animals carrying out some movements or actions that is not related to the instincts, they do them as imitation and copying (others) and not based on mind or comprehension. This is because the brain of the animal does not have the characteristic of connecting information. Rather it has the capacity to recollect the sensation, and instinctive differentiation. So whatever is related to the instincts it remembers it, and whatever it senses, it can recollect its sensation; particularly if this sensation was repeated. In regard to whatever is related to the instinct, the animal undertakes it naturally, whether it senses it or it recollected its sensation of it, but whatever has no relation with the instinct, it cannot undertake it naturally if it senses it. However, if this sensation was repeated and it recollected it, it can undertake it as an imitation and copying, but not as a natural action." Great shades of Korzybski!

So in truth, Korzybski's Structural Differential as much as I have seen and heard it discussed over and over again does not seem to get discussed from this very important point of view: the need to recognize that no thought, no clear speech, no judgements, no rational thinking comes into existence without the availability of previous information. The diagram to make any sense at all has to be discussed within the framework of previous

information. From whence as far back as we can go, did the first human being gain previous information and the ability to relationally connect it? All Creation and previous information came forth from a Creator and that same Creator provided for us scripture coupled with Prophets and Messengers to deliver it as a way of life for His Creation; He simultaneously allowed for and stressed the need for the development of the mind and the fruits of that mind, thinking. The very

first revelation to Prophet Muhammad in the Holy Quran reads
Iqra' bismi rabbi kal la zi khalaq (2) khalaq qal insana min alaq (3) iqra' wa rabbu~kal - akram (4) allaz i allama bil qalam (5) al lamal- insana ma lam ya'lam

“Read in the name of thy Lord who creates. Creates man from a clot, Read in the name of thy Lord who is most generous, who taught by the pen; taught

Man what he knew not.” Holy Quran 96:1-5 The onset of Time binding!

This complex we have labeled Religion. We firmly say to you then that Religion from such a source is not just a belief system but a comprehensively, rationally established way of life for all creation. In this sense Religion, put into place and followed “religiously” is certainly a formula for resolving conflicts in world views.

Before closing, certainly for this audience I must touch on the recognition that within the framework of correct Islamic understanding, **the scientific method of thinking is a correct and extremely useful one but it is not a final and end all basis of thinking, rather we see it as a constant style of thinking.** It is not applied in every matter. We need to understand that it is applied most fruitfully in one area, that is the tangible, material object so as to grasp as much information as we can about it, to know its ‘reality’ through carrying out experiments on it. It should not be considered functionally operant outside the empirical sciences. The scientific method requires that everything that can’t be touched materially, through whatever devices we have invented to make that happen, has no existence in its’ view. Does that mean there is no existence for logic, history, jurisprudence, politics, Religion, God, because they can’t be touched by hand? Clearly there is much, much, much more to this subject but time has run out and I thank you for your kind attention.