

The Message of Islam to the Modern Man

It is said that modern man is like a modern shop where they hang everything in its show-window. When one goes inside nothing is to be found. Or sometimes he is compared with an onion. You peel off layer after layer and you find in the end there is nothing in it. There is, however, another way of defining a modern man. It is said that he is like an egg; too full of himself to hold anything else.

It is this kind of person with which we have to deal. He is either too empty or too full. Life to him has no meaning and purpose beyond the existence on the level of an animal. He has forgotten that human life consists of a spiritual as well as a physical self. To him the physical self is the only reality for which one should live and die. And that self is his goal, his destination, his idol or his god. He bows down before this self and worships it.

"Seest thou him who takes his desires for his god" says the Qur'an (45:23). Or he is like those who say:

"There is nothing but our life of the world; we die and we live and nothing destroys us but time." (45:24).

That is the materialistic view of life. We are born, we grow old, decay and disintegrate because of the passing of the time. An Indian poet reflects the same mood when he says:

"What is this life? A manifestation of the combination of the elements. What is death? Splitting up of these elements again."

THE ISLAMIC VIEW of life is, however, different. It is here that the Qur'an comes to the rescue of man. It says:

"And God created the heavens and the earth with truth" (45:22).

This is the oft-recurring theme of the Qur'an. We are also told that God *"created not the heaven and earth and what is in between them in vain. That is the opinion of those who disbelieve"* (38:27).

Thus faith in the materialistic view of life is not the only reality. Man is not a product of instincts and mechanical behaviour alone. Physicists have not been able to solve the problems of matter, which in the beginning they thought was inert or lifeless. In their higher researches, today, they have realized that matter is another form of thought or consciousness with the result that the whole field of research has to be moved from physics to a new kind of metaphysics. Life is no more a blind interplay of physical and chemical forces. Everything follows an order or submits to a pattern, although this pattern may be complicated or at times inexplicable to ordinary human intelligence. Pointing towards this reality the Qur'an says:

"Seest thou not that to God makes submission whoever is in the heaven and whoever is in the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many of the people?" (22:18)

It will be noticed that in the above passage it is mentioned that the mountains, and the trees, and animals all submit to God and when it comes to human beings the words used are *kaseerum minannaas* (many of the people), not all of them. Because in some ways man has been left to make his own choice in submitting to the Divine pattern. Although it is in his own interest that he should follow this pattern but as a free agent he could reject this guidance if he likes. However by rejecting this guidance he is confronted with another phenomenon in life, which is life without hope, life without faith, life without purpose. These are the

tragedies of the modern world and this is where Islam can help man to stand on his feet again.

To set our house in order we have to learn that there is a creative and directive force in this universe. According to the Qur'an:

"Our Lord is He Who gives everything its creation then guides it" (20:50).

The word *hadaa* (he guides) signifies that God leads it along to its goal of perfection. At another place we are told:

"Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High. Who creates, then makes complete, and Who measures and then guides" (87:1-3).

These verses speak of four Divine acts viz. creating, completing, measuring, and guiding. By remaining close to this reality we can understand the purpose of our existence in this world. If we forget to take heed of these simple and basic facts of life we may see and hear things without realizing their true significance.

When the gramophone disc is being played we see the movement of the disc and needle. Do these movements cause the music? A man who cannot see further will perhaps reply in the affirmative. But the truth is that neither the disc, nor the needle, nor the gramophone box is causing this music. The needle is being pushed up and down in the almost invisible grooves of the disc. In these grooves has been recorded the sound of music. These vibrating notes existed elsewhere before they could touch our ears and heart. We see the disc, needle and box, but we have to lift ourselves from this level of seeing, hearing and thinking before we could understand the source of the music.

In our every day life, we depend too much on outward sight, forgetting that it is the inner vision of our self, the inner drive of our soul, that can enlighten the dark and dreary paths of our lives. That is only possible when we remain in touch with that invisible factor who is behind the music of our existence. When we forget this Supreme Reality, in fact we forget our true selves:

"And be not like those who forget God, so He makes them forget their own souls" says the Qur'an (59:19).

This forgetting causes disruption in human relations. This forgetting brings conflict and tragedy in human life. When we forget God we forget our own souls. When we forget God, we turn our backs on our own happiness. When we forget God, we throw out the rest and peace which abides with us. When we break friendship with God, we bring grief and fear in our lives.

FEAR is a dominant factor in the mind of man today. It also haunted the primitive man. But the modern man is afraid of himself. Man must learn to save himself from himself if he wants to survive.

The only possible way is to go back and start again from where he lost his way. He must restore the broken link by surrendering himself to that Ultimate Reality to Whom all the mountains and the trees surrender. He must submit himself entirely to the All-Loving and Compassionate God and reflect this submission in his actions, which will finally make him free from fear and grief.

"Whoever submits himself entirely to God" says the Qur'an, *"and is the doer of good (to others) he has reward from his Lord. And there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve"* (2:112).

SUBMISSION to God has been coupled with righteousness. Submission without deeds of piety is like a bird with wings which can merely hop but cannot fly. Thus faith and works should go together. Life without faith and life without moral discipline is worse than death. We must discover the spiritual meaning of our existence if we want to make ourselves free from fear and grief. God did not leave man alone to grope in darkness to find the solution of problems. He did provide him with means of his spiritual nourishment as he did for his physical sustenance. This however bring us to another aspect of the problem under discussion.

A MESSAGE, however, cannot be delivered without a messenger. The Divine method of supplying spiritual nourishment to humanity was through Divine Messengers. These messengers, according to the Qur'an, were sent to every nation of the world (10:47; 35:24; 4:164). Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) was one of them and *the last of them* (33:40). He was a guide and mercy to the nations (21:107). He was neither God nor an angel. If angels were walking around the earth, God would have certainly sent angels as messengers, says the Qur'an (17:95), but as earth was inhabited by human beings, mortals were sent, who ate food and went about the market as other mortals did (25:7). These mortal messengers were warners and bearers of good news (2:213) and brought mankind from darkness into light (5:16) by the help of God. The object of their advent was to recite God's messages and thus purify their followers. By purification is meant not only purification from sin, but also setting the believers on the path of moral, spiritual and physical advancement.

These messengers who came to purify the world from sin, and lead men to righteousness were themselves sinless. They were the honoured servants of God, and acted on God's commandments (21:25-27); they could not act unfaithfully (3:160). The chief object of their appearance in the world was to remind men of their duties to their Creator and their fellow-beings.

The Qur'an itself has been called a **REMINDER FOR THE NATIONS** (*zikrul lilaalameen*) (12:104; 38:87; 68:52; 81:27). This is where the Qur'an makes an impact on the human mind. It makes us remember of what we have forgotten, it makes us recollect of what has gone out of our memory—or in other words out of the upper surface of our mind, yet lies latent deep down in our souls. This forgotten truth has to be retold. Being in consonance with human nature, the Qur'an is a reminder of what is already imprinted therein. This indicates the essential worthwhileness of human self which was made in the best make by our Creator (95:4). According to the Qur'an, paradise is man's birthright; he is born on the banks of virtue. By his own folly he falls in the mire of sin.

The Qur'an again reminds us that mankind is a single nation (2:213). We are told:

"O mankind, keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two many men and women" (4:1).

"O mankind We have created you from a single male and female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with God is the most dutiful of you (49:13).

"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for the learned" (30:22).

The diversity of tongues and colours is a sign of God for human beings, but we have made it a bane and a curse to ourselves.

The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

"O mankind surely your God is one and surely your father is one. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor of a coloured man over a white man or of a white man over a coloured man. The noblest in the sight of God is the most dutiful of you" (Bukhaari).

The modern world today is torn on the question of race, colour and rank. The Qur'an has not only condemned this approach towards life in theory (mere sermons were not enough) but also eradicated these prejudices from the minds of Muslims, by establishing institutions such as prayer and pilgrimage where all people meet on equal footing irrespective of their position, colour or race.

The good and righteous people among the followers of other religions

The Qur'an reminds us that there is also light and guidance in the Torah and the Gospels (5:44:46). There are good and righteous people found among Jews and Christians.

“They are not all alike”, says the Qur’an, “of the people of the Book there is an upright party who recite God’s messages in the night time and they adore (Him). They believe in God and the Last Day, and they enjoin good and forbid evil and vie one with another in good deeds. And those are among the righteous. And God knows those who keep their duty” (3: 112- 114).

Conquest of natural forces

The Qur’an reminds us that man is not made a slave of the natural forces, but a ruler over them. His rank in the scale of creation is so high that everything in the universe has been made subservient to him.

“God is He Who made subservient to you the sea that ships may glide therein by His command, and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks. And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth all from Himself. Surely there are signs in this for a people who understand” (16:12).

Life and its problems

The Qur’an reminds us that man has been created to face distress and difficulties (90:4). He has to face problems as long as he lives. Problems run like a stream in our lives; constantly passing away yet constantly coming. When we face problems and overcome them we become better human beings. Thus pain and suffering have a great value in our lives. However the business of man is to go forward under all conditions. That is only possible when the modern man corrects his attitude towards life and learns to be grateful, faithful, hopeful and trustful of the mercy and compassion of God in his life.

As I have said before the modern man is fearful of his own destructive powers. He can destroy himself and all that he has achieved in centuries, within a matter of a few hours. But in spite of this, fear should not prevail in our minds. Until death, it is all life, and we in the meantime should not forget our duty to God and to our fellow beings.

As long as we live we must keep on learning how to live. And when the time of our departure comes, the Qur’an reminds us that we do not fade away into nothingness. We keep on living in another world. Men are sleeping, says the Qur’an, when they die they wake up.

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