



The Contribution of Islam to the Solution of World Problems



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Introduction

The International Association for Religious Freedom [IARF] are to be felicitated upon their project of calling for contributions from the representatives of five great faiths on the solution of world's problems today. The problems with which the world is faced today are many and varied and have complicated aspects. They may be approached from various directions and may be discussed at different planes. It will be agreed that one of the most important approaches that can be made to these problems is on the basis of religion. Indeed it is essential that these problems should be studied on that basis and that the results of that study should be availed of towards working out their solutions. It is a matter of great satisfaction, therefore, that the I.A.R.F. should have provided this opportunity for all of us to get together and to pool our thinking on these problems, on the basis of our respective faiths in an effort to discover factors that might help towards a solution of these problems.

I feel greatly honoured that I have been invited to address the Congress of the I.A.R.F. on the subject under discussion as a representative of Islam. I am fully conscious of my shortcomings and inadequacies with respect to the purpose that I am called upon to fulfil this evening. I desire, however, to assure you that what I am about to submit to you is inspired by a sincere desire to advance the object which the Congress has set itself and is offered in a spirit of humble service.

All the great faiths whose representatives have to participate

in these discussions base themselves Divine revelation. The scriptures of Judaism, Christ and Islam are well known; in the case of Hinduism, Buddhism also, the revealed basis of the faiths is well recognised. The Vedas are generally accepted in Hinduism as containing revealed guidance, and Buddhism upholds the teachings of the divinely inspired Buddha, as the code should regulate various aspects of human activity.

In appraising contribution of each of these towards the solution of the world's problems today, it be of the utmost help and benefit if each of us who honour to speak on behalf of one of these great faith to base his presentation on the revelation which is the of the principles and teachings inculcating by the faith he represents. For, in respect of a faith that claims to be based on revelation, all fundamental guidance must be found in or derived from the revelation on which it bases itself. Guidance derived from other sources, however beneficial, cannot, in reason, be attributed to that faith. For my part, therefore I shall endeavour to make my submission in conformity with this requirement, and shall base myself in all that I have to say on the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Holy Prophet of Islam (on whom be peace and the blessings of God). If I did not do that I would not be speaking on behalf of Islam.

The Qur'an is the record of the direct verbal revelation vouchsafed by God to Muhammad (the Prophet of Islam), over a period of 23 years. The Holy Prophet's(sa) interpretation and illustration of the revelation is contained in separate records, So that, when one cites the Qur'an, one quotes the very words of the

revelation itself. It is God speaking. When reference is made to what the Holy Prophet(sa) said or did the context will make this clear.

A Universal Message

Many of today's problems derive from the fact that the world in which we live is rapidly becoming one world. Mankind must perforce learn to live close together in intimate contact with each other. In other words, they must become a true brotherhood. This requires many adjustments.

A faith, if it is to fulfill man's needs of today, must, therefore, transcend tribal, national, racial and cultural limits, and must speak to men at a universal level. Islam does that. The Qur'an opens with the verse:

All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds. (Ch.1: V2)

This presents the reader with a unified concept of humanity and of the universe. The message of Islam is not confined to any section of mankind. It embraces the whole of mankind and the entire universe.

Say; O mankind! truly I am a Messenger to you all from Allah to Whom belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no God, but He. He gives life and He causes death... (Ch. 7: V.159)

The advent of the Holy Prophet(sa) is described in Qur'an as:

...a mercy for all peoples. (Ch.21: V108)

Islam proclaims a universal brotherhood of man.

And hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah and be not divided; and remember the favour of Allah which He bestowed upon you when you were enemies and He united your hearts in love, so that by His grace you became as brothers; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah explain to you His commandments that you may be guided. (Ch. 3: V.104)

Today mankind again stands on the brink of a pit. He has for this age also, explained His commandments that mankind may be rightly guided.

Islam recognises as convenient and beneficial for certain purpose mankind's diversity of colour, race, language etc.

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours. In that surely are Signs for those who possess knowledge. (Ch.30: V23)

But it proclaims that none of these imports or confers any privilege, and announces that the only true badge honour is the purity and righteousness of a person's life:

O, mankind, We have created you from a male and a female; and We have made you into tribes and sub-tribes that you may recognise one another. Verily, the most honourable among you, in the sight of Allah, is he who is

*most righteous among you Surely Allah is All-Knowing,
All-Aware. (Ch.49: V.14)*

Every distinction or privilege, whether pertaining colour, race or caste, or derived from family, rank, wealth, is abolished. Islam makes all mankind one great brotherhood, and exhorts all of us to seek and win the pleasure of God through the righteousness and beneficence of our conduct towards each other.

Thus Islam bases itself upon a fundamental unity; unity of God, unity of the universe, unity of man and unity of life. The object of Islam is to establish a balance between all aspects of human activity and to bring about beneficent accord through adjustment.

It is not necessary to set out in any detail the teachings of Islam with regard to the unity of God. It is well recognised by now in all quarters that the central doctrine of Islam is the unity of God. God is One. He is also Unity. Everything else proceeds from Him, and is dependent upon Him. The Qur'an is full of exhortations calling mankind to the recognition and acceptance of the unity of God and study and appreciation of His attributes and their operation. It is not necessary to multiply quotations One should suffice:

*He is Allah, and there is no God beside Him, the Knower
of the unseen and the seen; He is the Gracious, the
Merciful. He is Allah, and there is no God beside Him,
the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace, the
Bestower of Security, the Protector, the Mighty, the*

Subduer, the Exalted. Holy is Allah, far above that which they associate with Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. (Ch.59: Vs.23-25)

Unity of Universe

Attention could be drawn to various texts, which affirm the unity of creation proceeding directly from unity of the Creator. Again, only one text need be cited here:

Blessed is He in Whose hand is the kingdom, and He has power over all things; Who has created death and life that He might try you — which of you is best in deeds; and He is the Mighty, the Most Forgiving. Who has created seven heavens in harmony. No incongruity canst thou see in the Gracious God. Then look again: Seest thou any flaw? Aye, look again, and yet again, thy sight will only return unto thee confused and fatigued. (Ch.67: Vs.2-5)

The unity and accord of the universe derive from the unity of God:

If there had there been in them (the heavens and the earth) other gods beside Allah, then surely both would have gone to ruin. Glorified then be Allah, the Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute. (Ch.21: V.23)

Were it not for the unity of God, all would be confusion and conflict not only in the universe but even among the claimants to or partners in godhood.

Allah has, not taken into Himself any son, nor is there any other God along with Him; in that case each god would have taken away what he had created, and some of them would surely have dominated over others. Glorified be Allah above all that they attribute to Him. Knower of the unseen and of the seen! Exalted therefore is He above all that which they associate with Him!
(Ch.23: Vs.92-93)

Greek, Hindu and other mythologies furnish ample instances of the condition of affairs referred to in these verses.

Unity of Man

The unity of man is repeatedly emphasised for instance:

O ye people! fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate, and from them twain spread many men and women (Ch.4: V 2)

And again

And one of His signs is this, that He has created wives for you from among yourselves that you may find peace of mind in them, and He has put love and tenderness between you. In that, surely, are Signs for a people who reflect. (Ch.30: V.22)

The universe has been created with a purpose:

And We created not the heaven and the earth and all that is between the two in play. If We had wished to find a pastime, We would surely have found it in what is with Us if at all We were to do such a thing. (Ch.21: Vs.17-18)

Again,

We have not created the heaven and the earth and all that is between them in vain. That is the view of those who disbelieve. (Ch.38 :V28)

And Allah has created the heavens and the earth with

truth, and that every soul may be required for that which it earns; and they shall not be wronged. (Ch.45: V.23)

God has set up a balance, so that the truth and justice may be established.

Verily, We sent Our Messengers with manifest Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance that people may act with justice...(Ch.57: V26)

The heaven He has raised up high and set up a measure that you may not transgress the measure. So establish the Balance with justice and fall not short of the measure.

Unfortunately, however, religion itself, instead of being made the means of promoting amity, concord and brotherhood, has often been abused for the purpose of promoting discord and hostility between different sections of mankind. The attitude of Islam towards other faiths is calculated to eliminate all discord and conflict, and to bring about and promote beneficent relationship.

Belief in All Revelations

The unity of God is in itself a powerful factor in promoting beneficent relations between mankind, of emphasis on the unity of man tends in the same direction. But Islam does not stop there. It goes much further. It teaches that the Divine attribute of Providence has manifested itself not only in making provision for the material needs of man, but has, through the ages, made provision for his spiritual guidance also. Consequently, Islam requires belief not only in the truth and righteousness of the Holy Prophet(sa) of Islam and in the truth of the revelation vouchsafed to him, but also in the truth and righteousness of all prophets, and in the truth of all Divine revelations. This is repeatedly affirmed in the Qur'an. For instance:

Say, 'We believe in Allah and in that which has been revealed to as, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit.' (Ch.3: V.85)

As regard previous revelations, the attitude of Islam may be judged from among others the following:

Surely, We sent down the Torah wherein was guidance and light. By it did the Prophets, who were obedient to

*Us Judge for the Jews, as did the godly people and those
learned in the Law;... (Ch.5: V.45)*

And again :

*And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their
footsteps, fulfilling that which was revealed before him in
the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel which contained
guidance and light fulfilling that which was revealed
before it in the Torah and a guidance and an
admonition for the God fearing. (Ch.5: V.47)*

Freedom of Conscience

Further, Islam has proclaimed complete freedom of conscience. The Qur'an is unique among all the scriptures in affirming truth and righteousness of all the Prophets and the truth of all Divine revelations, and in establish and proclaiming the right of every human being to complete freedom of conscience:

There should be no compulsion in religion. Surely, right has become distinct from wrong.. (Ch.2: V.257)

Again,

And say, 'It is the truth from your Lord; wherefore, let him who will, believe, and him who will, disbelieve.' (Ch. 18: V.30)

The presentation of Islam to mankind must involve no pressure or coercion. Indeed no pressure or coercion was possible, as the Holy Prophet(sa) stood alone and unprotected against a hostile combination of tribes and he and his handful of early followers were subjected to the most bitter, cruel and persistent persecution all through the thirteen years of his ministry at Mecca. The manner propagation of the, faith is, however, laid down clearly the Qur' an:

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in a way that is best. Surely, thy Lord knows best who has strayed from His

*way; and He knows those who are rightly guided. (Ch.
16: V. 126)*

A way of accord between all those who believe God and in Divine revelation has been proclaimed in the Qur'an. The time seems to have come, it cannot be far when the invitation extended by Islam may be availed by the followers of other revealed faiths, for the purpose of achieving a practical brotherhood of man through common spiritual values.

Say, 'O people of the Book! come to a word equal between us and you that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partner with Him, and that some us take not others for Lords beside Allah.' But if they turn away, then say, 'Bear witness that we have submitted to God' (Ch.3: V65)

As a corollary of belief in the existence and unity of God and in a divine purpose behind all creation, Islam emphasises the accountability of man in all spheres of life, and sets up a balance between this life and the hereafter. This constitutes the essence of Islam. Whoso, therefore, affirms faith in the existence and unity of God in the life hereafter and strives constantly after righteous action, becomes heir to the grace and mercy of God:

Surely, those who have believed, and the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians-whoso believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good deeds, on them shall come no fear, nor shall they grieve. (Ch.5: V70)

It will thus be seen that Islam does truly speak to man at a universal level and seeks, through the acceptance of common values which are essential to the preservation and fostering of man's moral and spiritual life to bring about accord in the religious sphere.

Social Values

Our problems of today are however, not confined to the religious sphere. We face many complicated problems in the social, economic, international and other spheres. Guidance is needed with respect to all these and is supplied by Islam. We shall touch here briefly upon the values sought to be established by Islam in the three spheres that we have mentioned.

We have seen that, in the social sphere, Islam has abolished all distinctions and privileges. All mankind is one vast universal brotherhood. This is a characteristic of Islam society, which has been amply demonstrated through the centuries, and is well appreciated outside Islam. In addition to the general principles already mentioned, attention maybe drawn to one or two aspects, which tend in the same direction, namely, to emphasise human equality and dignity. There is no priesthood or ecclesiastical hierarchy of any description in Islam. Each individual, man or woman may, indeed must establish direct communion with God. Islam recognises no intermediary between man and his Maker. Even the Prophets were only guides and teachers who taught and illustrated in their own lives, the pattern and ideal of right living. They were not, in any sense, intermediaries between God and His creatures. The realisation that to each of us is granted the privilege of having direct access the Divine Majesty creates a sense of dignity which would be lacking in the absence of such realisation. This is experienced very vividly by the participants in the five daily services of Islam, when each worshipper enters the House

God in the full consciousness that as a human being, he is equal to any other in the sight of God.

Again, there is a complete absence of caste or class. There are no reservations conferring privilege upon limiting it to, certain sections excluding others. Social intercourse is free and easy and is not inhibited by artificial requirements pertaining to dress, precedence ceremonial. Simple living is regarded as meritorious. The more devout a Muslim is the simpler is his way life. Yet Islam insists upon the acceptance of life and does not permit rejection or negative of it. For instance, monasticism is not permitted in Islam, (Ch.57: V.28)

The Holy Prophet(sa) has said:

‘There is no monasticism in Islam. Family life is our way. He who turns away from our way is not of us.’

The use of all good things is permitted; but with regulation and moderation:

O children of Adam! look to your adornment at every time a place of worship, and eat and drink, but exceed not the bounds; surely, He does not love those who exceed the bounds.

Say, ‘Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants, and the good things of His providing?’ ...

... Say, ‘My Lord has only forbidden foul deeds, whether

open or secret, and sin and wrongful transgression, and that you associate with Allah that for which He has sent down no authority, and that you say of Allah that of which you have no knowledge.’ (Ch.7: Vs.32-34)

The only prohibitions in Islam (for instance, against the use of liquor, the flesh of swine, gambling and lending money on interest) are those that are destined to safeguard society against damage or injury to physical, economic or moral health. In fact, the definition of virtue in Islam is the beneficent use of all faculties and capacities and the definition of vice is their abuse or misuse. Islam does not permit or approve of stultification.

Economic Values

In the economic sphere Islam recognises and safeguards the institution of private property, but makes all legal ownership subject to stringent moral obligations. It teaches that all ultimate sources of wealth, namely, the earth and all its treasures and capacities, the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds that bring rain etc, are the bounty of God, which he has provided for the benefit of his creatures.

Allah it is Who has subjected the sea to you that ships may sail thereon by His command, and that you may seek of His bounty and that you may be grateful. And He has subjected to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth; all this is from Him. In that, surely, are signs for a people who reflect. (Ch 45: Vs.13-14)

Again,

Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and caused water to come down from the clouds and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; and He has subjected to you the ships that they may sail through the sea by His command, and the rivers too has He subjected to You. And He has also subjected to you the sun and the moon, both performing their work constantly. And He has subjected to you the night as well as the day.

(Ch. 14: Vs.33-34)

Wealth is produced by the application of human skill, knowledge and labour to the resources, which God has provided. Produced wealth must, therefore, be shared not only between capital and labour, but also between these two and the general community.

Zakat

This is secured through the imposition of a levy, which is called the Zakat. The meaning of the word is 'that which purifies and fosters.' The Zakat purifies the earnings of capital and labour by deducting from the value of the goods produced, the share of the community and it fosters the welfare of the community, by its proceeds being applied towards purposes designed to secure the advancement of all sections of the people:

*Take alms out of their wealth so that thou mayest
cleanse them and purify them thereby. (Ch.9: V103)*

The Holy Prophet(sa) has defined the Zakat as a levy which is imposed upon the well to-do and is returned to the poorer sections of the community. The Zakat is not to be confused with charity, towards which there are frequent and detailed exhortations in the Qur'an. (Ch.2: Vs. 262-274)

Islamic Economic System

The object of the Islamic economic system is that there should be equitable distribution and constant circulation of wealth, and that there should be no holding back:

...that it may not circulate only among those of you who are rich. (Ch.59: V8)

Behold, you are those who are called upon to spend in the way of Allah; but of you there are some who are niggardly. And whoso is niggardly, is niggardly only against his own soul. And Allah is Self-Sufficient, and it is you that are needy. (Ch.47: V 39)

Spending in the way of God means spending in the service of man. The object is further advanced by the prohibition against hoarding (Ch.9:V34) and against the lending of money on interest. (Ch.2: V.276)

Inheritance

The Islamic system of inheritance also tends in the same direction. A Muslim may dispose of the whole of his property as he may wish during his lifetime, but he may not dispose of, even for charity, more than one third by testamentary disposition. The rest of the property must be distributed according to the prescribed rules of inheritance. Under these rules all children, the widow or the widower as the case may be, and either or both

parents, if surviving, are heirs. All heirs of the same degree share alike. As a general rule, the share of a male heir is twice that of a female heir in the same degree. This is not discriminatory in effect, inasmuch as under the Islamic system, the obligation of maintaining the family rests upon the husband and not upon the wife, even though, as often happens, she may be better off in her own right than the husband.

As already observed, the system is aimed at securing the widest circulation and most-equitable distribution of wealth. On the other hand, the production of wealth is not restricted. Trade, partnership, joint stock companies, and other commercial ventures and activities are lawful, and the enjoyment of a due share of the fruits thereof is ensured for those who participate in them. Every venture that puts wealth into circulation promotes employment and fosters the welfare of the community, is legitimate and its pursuit is encouraged.

Talents and Skills

Islam recognises and indeed stresses, the diversity of talents, skills, initiative, enterprise etc., and, in consequence, a disparity in earnings and rewards, wealth and worldly means. (XVI: 72). In fact it teaches that diversity is part of the purpose of life and is to be used for the purpose of promoting social and economic co-operation on a beneficent basis. It is through such cooperation, and not through coveting what others excel in, that healthy progress is to be achieved:

And covet not that whereby Allah has made some of you excel others. Men shall have a share of that which they have earned, and women a share of that which they have earned. Ask Allah of His bounty. Surely, Allah has perfect knowledge of all things . (Ch.4: V.33)

International Relations

In the international sphere also, we are taught that economic development should be promoted through beneficent co-operation between different peoples, rather than through the exploitation of the resources of one people by another, in as much as prosperity that is achieved through the former method is alone lasting and of permanent benefit.

The sanctity of treaties and engagements is repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an, (see for instance, Ch.5: V2) The Holy Prophet(sa) set the example of the most scrupulous observance of treaties and engagements even when such observation placed the Muslims at a disadvantage and appeared likely to occasion serious damage or injury. The strict observance of the very harsh and unequal terms of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah outstanding instance.

Just and equitable treatment must be accorded circumstances, even to the Muslim state.

O ye who believe! be steadfast in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah,. Surely Allah is aware of what you do. (Ch.5: V.9)

There is a host of directions and admonitions in the Qur'an designed to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace. It would take us too far afield to draw

attention to them in detail. There is, ever, a very clear direction with regard to the rest of armed conflicts which might well be followed advantage in certain contingencies with which we find ourselves faced. It is in the following words:

And if two parties of believers should fight against, other, make peace between them; then if after that one of them transgresses against the other, fight the party that transgresses until it returns to the command of Allah.. Then if it returns, make peace between them with equity and act justly. Verily Allah loves the just. (Ch.49: V10)

This means that if fighting should break out between two States, other States should intervene and should settle the terms on which peace should be restored. If a party should refuse to carry out the terms proposed should be treated as an aggressor. If it persists intransigence, force should be used against it until it; to carry out the terms proposed. The peace terms proposed in accordance with this procedure, for the purpose bringing an armed conflict to an end, are described as, 'the command of God'. When the recalcitrant State submits to the award and carries it out, the matter be treated as concluded. No ulterior questions are to be raised as part of the settlement, nor are the intervening States to seek any advantage for themselves out of settlement.

This is a very brief outline of some of the general principles on the basis of which Islam seeks to regulate racial, economic and international relations. If these other principles inculcated by Islam for the regulations and human intercourse were generally

accepted and put into effect, most of the problems with which we are faced today would be put in course of solution. A good many of these problems are, however, magnified in consequence of the very rapid advance recently made in the fields of technology and applied science. In one sense the problems, though vastly magnified, are not entirely novel. In other words, the question is one of degree and not of kind.

The vast accession to man's power over the forces of nature has multiplied manifold his capacity for beneficent action, as well as for destruction. The process is going forward very rapidly. The problem that troubles mankind is: will those who control this power, and are in a position to determine and direct its application, be anxious and able to ensure that it shall be used for the service of man and not for his destruction? The problem extends into many spheres. We are concerned with the answer, if any, which religion is able to furnish.

Islam in the Scientific Age

Through the ages religion has been the source of moral and spiritual values and standards. Since the opening of the scientific age, however, that is to say, since the start of the era of investigation and research into the operation and application of the laws of nature, it has been assumed in the West that there is certain amount of conflict between science and religion. This sense of conflict was stressed and sharpened by incidents like that of Galileo's trial by the Holy Office and, in more recent times, by the attitude adopted towards Darwin.

In the West this supposed conflict is deemed to have been resolved by the assumption that gradually gained acceptance, that science and religion operate within their own special but well-defined spheres which do not overlap. In consequence of this erroneous assumption, religion was, in the end, confined to the regulation and performance of Divine Worship and certain rituals and ceremonials. Ministers of religion and Church authorities have made constant efforts to win back for religion its true position as the source of moral and spiritual values but signs of revival notwithstanding, there is no assurance yet that people are eager to turn to religion as the principal source of guidance in the moral and spiritual spheres. In the meantime, the West's attitude towards religion is being very largely copied in the East.

What is the attitude of Islam towards the problem that we have set out above? We have already mentioned that there is no church hierarchy in Islam. Not on the intellect always been free,

Islam has insisted the application of reason and intellect to all problems which man may encounter.

The very first revelation that came to the Holy Prophets(sa) of Islam was:

*Recite in the name of your Lord Who created... Recite!
And The Lord is Most Generous Who taught man by the
pen. Taught man what he knew not. (Ch.96: Vs.2-6)*

There is at every step in the Qur'an an exhortation towards the exercise of reason and judgement. People are invited to reflect, to ponder, to understand, etc.

*He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is
granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant
good; and none would be reminded except those endowed
understanding. (Ch.2: V.270)*

The Holy Prophets(sa) has said:

*The pursuit of knowledge is an obligation laid upon
every Muslim man and woman. (Ibne Majah)*

And again

*A word of wisdom is the lost property of a Muslim He
should seize it wherever he finds it. (Tirmizi)*

But the Qur'an does not stop short at general exhortation in support of learning and philosophy. At every it draws attention to the phenomena of nature in support and illustration of

spiritual truths, emphasizing the accord between nature and spiritual truth, thus excluding any possibility of conflict.

It goes further. It draws repeated attention to man's position as God's vicegerent upon earth, and lays emphasis upon God's bounty in making the universe subservient to man. This means that the universe is governed by laws and that, therefore, its operations are controlled and regulated, and that through research one can discover these laws and their operation. It also means that the whole of the universe and all its phenomena are at the service of man. Consequently man must carry on research into the laws and workings of nature so as to obtain increasing mastery over the forces of nature, and to put these forces into beneficent service. There is thus no conflict between science and religion so far as Islam is concerned.

Islam claims that its guidance is universal and comprehensive. The Qur'an claims that it comprises lasting commandments and teachings which are of universal application:

*A Messenger from Allah, reciting unto them the pure
Scriptures. Therein are lasting commandments. (Ch.98:
Vs.3-4)*

The Qur'an – A Perfect Guidance

The Qur'an comprises all that was revealed before it and which was of permanent and universal application. So much of it as had been forgotten and was still needed is revived in the Qur'an. That which was of local or temporary application has been replaced by universal commandments.

Whatever Sign We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than that or the like thereof. Dost thou not know that Allah has the power to do all that He wills. (Ch.2: V 107)

This is a Book whose verses have been made unchangeable and then they have been expounded to detail. It is from One Wise, and All-Aware. (Ch 11: V.2)

We have thus the assurance that if we turn to the Qur'an we shall find therein the guidance that may be needed at all stages and in all the spheres. The Qur'an being the very word of God is alive, and dynamic like the universe, and the guidance that it provides not only keeps pace with the changing pattern of human life, but runs in advance of such changes. All that is necessary is that mankind should continue to maintain direct communion with its Maker so that Divine guidance may continue to be manifested to it.

To revert to our problem. In as much as man has, within a certain sphere, been given the choice between different courses of

conduct, there can be no surety that he will not make a wrong choice. But guidance has been provided, following which he may safeguard himself against making a wrong choice, or against the evil consequence of having made such a choice. All advance in knowledge and science is a bounty of God. His law is:

...If you are grateful, I will, surely bestow more favours on you; but if you are ungrateful, then know that My punishment is severe indeed. (Ch. 14: V 8)

The problem is, what is it that will ensure beneficent use-by man of God's bounties? We have already seen that Islam insists, for this purpose, upon the certainty of faiths in the unity of God, and a vivid realisation of full accountability for one's conduct, both here and hereafter, that is to say, faith in the life after death:

Say, I am only a man like yourselves; but I have received the revelation that your God is only One God. So let him who hopes to meet his Lord do good deeds, and let him join no one in the worship of his Lord. (Ch. 18: V 111)

The Qur'an on Today's Crisis

In fact, there are clear and striking indications in the Qur'an of the crisis with which mankind is confronted today. The spiritual cause of the crisis is described as mankind's repudiation in practice of the Unity, Majesty and Power of God. The remedy indicated is that man should make his peace with his Maker and return to the true worship of the One God. All else that may be

needful will then be added. In other words, to him who has faith in the One God, all else shall be added; while from him who hath not this faith that shall be taken which he hath.

Before we proceed to state these indications it is necessary to remind ourselves that revelation often speaks in parables and similitude. In this connection it is of particular significance that Jesus Christ(as) himself often spoke in parables. One reason that these parables often contain prophecies of great import, and it is of the nature of prophecy, which is designed to create and strengthen faith in the unseen, that it should be subject to interpretation. The import of what we are about to consider is however, clear that in today's circumstances there is not much risk of error in interpretation.

We should also remember that the events of the very brief period of his ministry spent by Jesus(as) in the Holy Land have come down to us in very meagre form. A great deal must have passed between him and his disciples which is not recorded in the Gospels.

Towards the end of the fifth chapter of the Qur'an we read as follow:

*When the disciples said, 'O Jesus, son of Mary, is thy Lord able to send down to us a table spread with food from heaven?' he said, 'Fear Allah, if you are believers.'
They said, 'We desire that we may eat of it, and that our hearts be at rest and that we may know that thou hast spoken truth to us, and that we may be witness thereto.'
Said Jesus, son of Mary, 'O Allah, our Lord, send down to*

us a table from heaven spread with food that it may be to us a festival, to the first of us and to the last of us, and a Sign from Thee, and provide sustenance for us, for Thou art the best of sustainers.’ God said, ‘Surely I will send it down to you, but whosoever of you disbelieves afterwards – I will surely punish them with a punishment wherewith I will not punish any other of the peoples.’
(Ch.5: Vs. 113-116)

It is clear that according to the Qur’an, the disciples asked Jesus(as) to pray that God should bestow material prosperity upon his followers. The first reaction of Jesus(as) was to warn them against making such demand, but they persisted and explained why they desired to be blessed with material prosperity. Jesus(as) then prayed that God should bestow upon his followers material prosperity, ‘to the first of us and to the last of us,’ that is to say, that Christian peoples should enjoy long periods of material prosperity both during the early ages and also during later ages. God accepted the prayer of Jesus(as), promised to bless the Christian peoples with two long periods of outstanding material prosperity which should be a sign from God. But He also warned that if the bounties bestowed by Him were not properly used, and the people who were the recipients of these bounties did not maintain communion with God, punishment would overtake them such as had not overtaken any other people.

No detailed comment is called for. History bears witness that the Western people who, since the fourth century of the Christian era, have constituted the bulk of the Christian

community have enjoyed two extended periods of outstanding material prosperity. We are now witnessing the culmination of the second of these remarkable periods. The achievement of the last quarter of a century in the fields of science and technology would have been considered impossibilities at the close of the nineteenth century. Yet these very achievements have become a source of fear and dread through the enormous power which they have suddenly placed in the hands of man.

Prophecies Relating to the Present Crisis

The prophecy that we have just referred to does not stand alone. There are other indications in the Qur'an that when the time indicated in this prophecy draws to a close the world would be ranged in two powerful groups opposing each other.

Soon shall We attend to you, O ye two big groups!
(Ch.55: V.32)

The Holy Prophet(sa) gave warning against the trial and tribulations of our present age and when asked what would be the remedy against them, said:

Keep constantly in mind the opening and the concluding verses of Surah Kahf (Chapter 18 of the Qur'an) and ponder over the guidance therein contained.

The opening verses of Chapter 18 read as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah Who has sent down the Book to His servant and has not put therein any crookedness. He has made it a guardian, that it may give warning of a grievous chastisement from Him, and that it may be the glad tidings that they shall have a good reward, Wherein they shall abide

forever. And that it may warn those who say 'Allah has taken unto Himself a son..' No Knowledge have they thereof, nor had their fathers. They speak naught but a lie. So haply thou wilt grieve thyself to death for sorrow after them if they believe not in this discourse. Verily, We have made all that is on the earth as an ornament, for it, that we may try them as to which of them is best in conduct. And We shall make all that is thereon a barren soil. (Ch. 18: Vs. 1-9)

The concluding part of Chapter 18 reads as follows:

On that day We shall leave some of them surge against others, and the trumpet will be blown. Then shall we gather them all together. And on that day we shall present Hell, face to face, to the disbelievers-whose eyes were under a veil so as not to heed My warning, and they could not even hear. Do the disbelievers think that they can take My servants as protectors instead of Me? Surely, We have prepared hell as an entertainment for the disbelievers. Say, 'Shall We tell you of those who are the greatest losers in respect of their works? – Those whose labour is all lost in search after things pertaining to the life of this world, and they think that they are doing good works. Those are they who disbelieve in the Signs of their Lord and in the meeting with Him. So their works are vain, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall give them no weight. That is their reward – Hell; because they

disbelieved, and made a jest of My signs and My Messengers... Say, 'I am only a man like yourselves; but I have received the revelation that your God is only One God.. So let him who hopes to meet his Lord do good deeds, and let him join no one in the worship of his Lord. (Ch. 18: Vs.100-107, and V.111)

The opening and concluding parts of this chapter warn against a severe chastisement which would take the form of peoples surging against each other, in consequence of which veritable hell would be let loose, and the earth would be converted into barren waste. The spiritual cause of this conflict, of this chastisement, is described as 'ascribing a son to God' and 'taking God's servants as protectors, instead of Him.'

The remedy is indicated in the very last verse of the Chapter 18:

Your God is only One God. So let him who hopes to meet his Lord act righteously, and let him join no one in the worship of his Lord.

The Chastisement

There are further indications with regard to the nature of this chastisement which are also striking. A reference to some of them might help us to appreciate the contingency that might overtake mankind unless God's grace and mercy sought and won within the time that may be left.

We have already drawn attention to Verse 32 in Chapter 55, which refers to two big powers. Verse 36 of the same chapter, still referring to the two powers, says:

There shall be sent against you two a flame of fire, and smoke; and you shall not be able to help yourselves.

The immediately following verses refer to the heavens being rent asunder and appearing like red hide, and men being caught between fire and smoke and fierce boiling water. Here is another clear and explicit warning:

By Our own command. Verily We have ever been sending Messengers, as a mercy from thy Lord. Verily, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if you would only have faith. There is no god but He. He gives life and He causes death. He is your Lord, and the Lord of your fore fathers.

Yet they play about in doubt. But watch thou for the day when the sky will bring forth a visible smoke that

will envelope the people. This will be a painful torment. Then will the people cry: O' Lord, remove from us the torment; truly, we are believers'. How can they benefit by admonition when there has already come to them a Messenger, explaining things clearly, and yet they turned away from him and said, 'He is tutored, a man possessed' We shall remove the punishment for a little while, but you will certainly revert to disbelief. On the day when We shall seize you with the great seizure, then certainly We will exact retribution. (Ch.44: Vs.6-17)

We have, save for the briefest comment, refrained from interpretation of the texts quoted both on account of limitations of time and because interpretation and detailed comment are, in the conditions of today, really unnecessary. Any thoughtful reader of the verses just read out can gather a great deal of guidance if he will reflect over them. The indications of what may overtake mankind and why, and in which direction the remedy lies, are absolutely clear.

Attention may also be invited to the opening verses of Chapter LXX which run as follows:

In the name of Allah the Gracious, the Merciful. An inquirer inquires concerning the punishment about to fall. Upon the disbelievers, which none can repel. It is from Allah, Lord of great ascents. The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a day the measure of which is fifty thousand years. So be patient with admirable

*patience. They see it to be far off. But We see it to be nigh.
The day when the heaven will become like molten
copper.*

*And the mountains will become like flakes of wool; and
a friend will not inquire after a friend. They will be
placed in sight of one another, and the guilty one would
fain ransom himself from the torment of that day by
offering his children. And his wife, and his brother. And
his kinsfolk who sheltered him. And by offering all those
who are on the earth, if only thus he might save himself.
But no! Surely, it is a flame of fire, stripping off the skin
even to the extremities of the body. It will call him who
turned his back and retreated. And hoarded wealth and
withheld it. (Ch.70: Vs. 1-19)*

Here again, a severe chastisement is announced which would proceed from God, Lord of great ascents. It is characteristic of the Quran that wherever an attribute of God is mentioned, it has reference to the subject matter of the context. It is not without significance that the attribute 'Lord of great ascent' is mentioned in connection with this warning of a severe chastisement. The nature of the chastisement is sufficiently described in the succeeding verses, but the mention of this attribute shows that the chastisement will have an element of great heights, or graduated ascents about it. The skies becoming like 'molten copper' would indicate, among other things, the generation of intense heat. Mountains becoming like 'flakes of wool' would

indicate tremendous impacts, which would scatter mountains, like flakes of wool. The 'stripping off of the skin even to the extremities of the body' would indicate a 'Hiroshima' the horrors of which may be multiplied many times. The swiftness with which the horrors might spread is indicated by its overtaking those who turn back and seek to escape.

It is not our object to pile horror upon horror. We desire to stress; however, that a cataclysm of unparalleled severity and destructive power is here clearly foretold. Indeed, in the circumstances of today, this is no longer a matter of speculation. Unless adequate remedies are devised and put into effect there may be no escape.

Is there a remedy?

Verse 16 of Chapter 17 of the Quran says:

...We never punish until We have sent a Messenger.

This means that a calamity on a wide scale, which has the character of punishment for the misdeeds of a people, would not overtake them until they have been warned to make amends, through a divine Messenger. It may be asked, 'Has there been a warning regarding the calamity or calamity with which the world is threatened today?' In the first place, the Quran itself has set out all these warnings, some of which have been quoted above.

The Messenger through whom these Warnings were given was the Holy Prophet(sa) of Islam. Now that we are threatened with the literal fulfillment of these warnings, it behooves us to pay sincere and earnest attention to them and to draw the necessary

lessons from them. If we proceed to do so, and to put our lives in accord with the Divine Will there is the Divine Assurance that neither fear nor sorrow shall overtake us.

It so happens, however, that in this age also a Divine Reformer was raised to give due warning of the approach of these calamities. He called on mankind to make its peace with its Maker and to turn to righteousness before it was too late. Ample warning has been given. Few have paid heed to it so far, but the time is coming, it is fast approaching, when mankind at large must take the warning to its heart, or perish.

Remedies may be of various types. In as much as the indications are that the cataclysm that is threatened would overtake mankind as the result of certain spiritual causes, the real and effective remedy is the removal of those causes. Once those causes are removed other devices will come into operation and will lead mankind out of the shadow of the cataclysm that threatens.

God – The Lord of Mercy

We must remember, and the opening verse of each chapter of the Quran reminds us that two principal attributes of God are that He is the Lord of Grace and the Lord of Mercy. With regard to punishment and chastisement, His law is:

...I will inflict My punishment on whom I will; but My mercy encompasses all things... (Ch.7: V 157)

Again

And when those who believe in Our Signs come to thee, says: 'Peace be unto you! Your Lord has taken it upon Himself to show mercy, so that whoso among you does evil ignorantly and repents thereafter and amends, then He is Most Forgiving, Merciful'. (Ch.6: V.55)

God's purpose is to lead mankind into His grace and mercy: His purpose is not to punish. Misfortune and calamities overtake us in consequence of our defaults and transgressions, but the gates of God's mercy are ever open, and everyone may enter them through righteous action and humble supplication. Even when wrong has been committed, the door of repentance is open:

Why should Allah punish you, if you are thankful and if you believe? And Allah is Appreciating, All-Knowing. (Ch.4: V 148)

Here is an assurance of great comfort:

Say, 'O my servants who have committed excesses against their own souls! despair not of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives all sins. Verily He is Most Forgiving, Merciful. And turn ye to your Lord and submit yourselves to Him, before there comes unto you the punishment; for then you shall not be helped. And follow the best teaching that has been revealed to you from your Lord before the punishment comes upon you unawares; while you perceive it not; Lest a soul should say, 'O my grief for my remissness in my duty in respect of Allah! and surely I was among those who scoffed. Or lest it should say, 'If Allah had guided me I should certainly have been among the righteous', or lest it should say, when it sees the punishment, 'Would that there were for me a return to the world, I would then be among those who do good.' (Ch.39: Vs.54-59)

Turn to God

The true remedy, therefore, for the ills that afflict us today and that threaten to overwhelm us tomorrow, is for us to turn to God with the single minded purpose of making our peace with Him, having sincerely determined that in all matters whatever our guiding rule shall be, 'Thy will, and not mine.' Truly we stand again at the brink of a pit of fire. God's grace and mercy alone can save us. To win His grace and mercy we must turn to Him alone the One God, ever Gracious, most Merciful, discarding all that may ever have been associated with Him and from whom mankind may at any time, have brought protection, beside Him.

There is no other way.

Once we turn to the One God in sincere repentance, He will lead us out of the shadows and the darkness into the light. He will guide us along the paths of peace:

O People of the Book there has come to you Our Messenger who unfolds to you much of what you had hidden of the Book, and passes over much. There has come to you indeed, from Allah, a light and a clear Book.

Thereby does Allah guide those who seek His pleasure on the paths of peace, and leads them out of every kind of darkness into the Light by His will, and guides them to the right path. (Ch.5: Vs.16-17)

Again,

Allah is the friend of those who believe; He brings them out of every kind of darkness into light. And those who believe not, their friends are the transgressors, who bring them out of light into every kind of darkness. (Ch.2: V.258)

All knowledge proceeds from God. Man encompasses only so much of it as God pleases:

...He knows what is before them and what is behind them; and they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases. His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth; and the care of them burdens

Him not. He is the High, the Great. (Ch.2: V.256)

He who has, in due order, vouchsafed to man the knowledge of the properties of the atom and of the principles of fission and fusion, surely has it in His power to bestow upon man of the knowledge and comprehension, or principles and properties which may provide adequate safeguards and full immunity against the aggressive use of nuclear power:

And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures thereof, and We send it not down except in a known measure. (Ch. 15: V.22)

God constantly revealed Himself in a new state. Having revealed Himself as creator or nuclear power, He surely, may go on to reveal Himself as its guardian and controller; for all is within His power and under His control. It is only by turning to Him that security may be achieved:

Of Him do beg all that are in the heavens and the earth. Every day He reveals Himself in a different state (Ch.55: V.30)

The two powers to whom reference has been made have been warned:

...if you have power to go beyond the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do go. But you cannot go save with authority. (Ch.55: V.34)

But, with authority from on high, there is no limit to

beneficent achievement:

And He gave you all that you wanted of Him; and if you try to count the favours of Allah, you will not be able to number them. Verily, man is very unjust, very ungrateful. (Ch.14: V35)

He, surely, also has power to inspire the minds of those who are today in control of nuclear power, and are in a position to determine and direct its application to agree upon measures which would ensure that such power shall be used only for the beneficent service of man, and shall not be employed for his destruction. He also has power to drive away from positions of authority those who continue to resist His will, and to oppose His designs:

Say, 'O Allah, Lord of Sovereignty, Thou givest sovereignty to whomsoever thou pleasest: and Thou takest away sovereignty from whomsoever Thou pleasest. Thou exaltest whomsoever Thou pleasest and Thou abasest whomsoever Thou pleasest. In Thy hand is all good. Thou surely hast power to do all things. Thou makest the night pass into the day, and makest the day pass into the night. Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and bringest forth the dead from the living. And Thou givest to whomsoever Thou pleasest without measure'. (Ch.3: Vs.27-28)

Such is God our Lord. Let us, therefore, turn to Him, to Him

alone, The True, the Living the One God. Let us humbly beseech Him to make our night pass into day and to bring us forth alive out of death,

Say, 'O People of the Book! come to a word equal between its and you that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partner with Him, and that some of us take not others for Lords beside Allah.' (Ch.3: V.65)

Our last observation is:

All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds. (Ch. 1: V2)