



# Islam and Modern Life





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Islam International Publications LTD.

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Written by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan

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Typesetting and Published by Alislam

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# Foreword

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, as has been announced in the cards that were issued and has been repeated by Dr. Bishar just now, the subject of my address this evening is Islam and modern life. This is a very wide subject. It therefore follows that I shall touch upon only certain aspects of it. Some of them, I hope, fundamental aspects. Nevertheless, it will be for you then to apply the main ideas which I propose to submit to you to other aspects of the subject that you may have in mind. I do not know whether it is customary in the meetings here I have addressed to before, and at that time I was warned, in advance, but I do not know whether now it is customary for questions at the end of an address. But if at the end of the address you or some of you would be willing to spare the time and would wish to explore further some aspect of what I have said, I shall be at your disposal.

Now the central thing that I wish to take up this evening, and when we talk of modern life, that is the aspect that will readily come to our minds, is that this is the era of science and technology. Or as some have described it, we have entered upon the atomic age. And that raises problems in almost all spheres of life. This very rapid change in recent years, the very rapid advance in recent years in matters of science and technology, has brought about some spectacular changes in ways of life. In addition to having brought communities that only a matter of fifty years ago or a hundred years ago knew little of each other, into intimate contact with each other. The advance in respect of means of

communication has been particularly striking. One of the problems, but a very important one, that this rapid advancement in science and technology has raised, and which is troubling the minds of large sections of mankind, is will the moral and spiritual values that control, that inspire, that direct conduct and action, will they prove adequate to the age upon which we are entering?

Let me explain a little more. So far, the advance in these fields was such that man's ordinary notions of behavior and standards of value were able to keep pace with it, visibly. Now the advance is so rapid, almost every week we find some new step taken forward and we realize that as time goes on the advance will be still more rapid in these fields. It will go forward probably by what may be described as geometric progression rather than by arithmetic progression. And people feel that in many respects they are being left behind. Therefore, they are troubled with regards to this vast accession to man's power, to his mastery over the forces of nature. Will those in whose hands lies the direction of these forces, will they use them for the beneficent service of man? Or will they, or under certain circumstances they might be impelled to use them for the destruction of man? And inasmuch as the destruction which these forces can cause can be cataclysmic, under certain circumstances can be almost universal, the problem has become a very acute one in people's minds.



# The Historical Relationship Between Religion and Science

Now in one sense the problem is one of degree and not of kind. It is not of kind inasmuch as reduced to its simplest factors, as it is useful and wise always to do so with complicated problems. It is the question of the application of power. And therefore, as I said it is a problem of degree. It is not a problem which is new in the field of ethics or in the field of the spirit. So, through the ages religion has been the principal source of the determination and of the provision also of moral and spiritual standards and values. And therefore, it is to religion that people first turn when the question of the adequacy of moral and spiritual values and standards arises. And this problem in its essence, though in its primitive stages as it were, arose almost as soon as man began to apply his mind to the discovery of the operation of the laws of nature. And it was very early assumed, though we believe wrongly assumed, that there was a conflict between religion, or if you choose to put it so, between revelation and science. And for a long time, and still during the time when we were, our generation was at school and college, religion versus science used to be often a subject of debate.

Why did this conflict arise? And why did it become so sharpened in men's minds? The conflict arose because it was assumed that religion not merely furnished standards and values

in the moral and spiritual field, but that if in the scriptures anything was supposed to be laid down with regard to the working of the laws of nature, if further experience or experiment or research appeared to disclose an operation of those laws which was supposed to be in conflict with what revelation may have laid down, then people said, well here is a conflict. Here is the word of God on one side saying this matter is so. Here is this man who is saying this is not so. And therefore, this conflict took on a sharpened attitude, and there was great controversy as we know through several centuries. Incidents like the trial of Galileo by the holy office were illustrations of this conflict between science and religion. Or later, much later, the attitude in ordinary social circles which was adopted towards Darwin was also an illustration of this conflict. Now I am not going to explain to you the theory of evolution or how far it is well founded and how far it is subject to modification. I merely mention these two as examples as to how this conflict arose.

Now in the West, this supposed conflict, I am calling it supposed conflict and imagined conflict because my main thesis is that there is no, from the point of view of religion as such, or capital. Not any particular concept of religion, but religion. There is no such conflict, can be none. But anyway, this supposed conflict in the West was resolved, it actually was not resolved, it was really bypassed, or it was masked, by the assumption which gradually gained acceptance that science and religion operate within their own special spheres. These spheres are well defined, but they do not overlap. That is to say, a division was supposed to have been carried out to say that religion is concerned with the

organization of worship and certain rites and ceremonials and rituals, and it has nothing to do with science. On the other hand, science has nothing to do with the sphere which is occupied by religion. And then it was thought, well all right, then no conflict need arise. And in the end, as I have said, this bypassing process confined religion within certain strict limits. It is fair only to add that it is a fact that ministers of religion and church dignitaries have made throughout this period constant efforts to secure for religion its old and true position as the source of moral and spiritual values governing the whole field of life. Nevertheless, in spite of some signs of revival, there is no assurance, yet that religion will be able to regain its lost position in the West. In the meantime, the greater part of the West is well content with the position that has been breached.

Now, on the other side, traveling further east, during the recent years, in consequence mainly of the two world wars and the emergence of nearly a score of sovereign and quasi-sovereign Muslim states, the West has begun to pay more attention to Islam and the Muslims, and there is a desire for greater understanding and appreciation of Islamic values. Incidentally, from the point of view of our subject, these two world wars in their turn have also furnished the greatest impetus to this advance of science and technology to which I have drawn attention. Now, the Muslim peoples, on their side, who have recently emerged from a state of dependence upon certain European colonial powers, or are in the process of emerging from such control, are taking stock of their position in the modern world, in this world of science and technology, in this atomic age, and they are anxious to re-establish

their standards of values afresh in this age. They have a parallel problem also attended, a supposed problem which they wish to resolve. On the other hand, at the same time, they are eager to take full advantage of the opportunities of beneficent progress thrown open by these recent rapid advances in the field of science and technology. Now the question is, in the first place, whether their problem is the same, or has the same aspect, as the problem that confronted the West had. And if it is, or even if it isn't, whether the same solution would be appropriate, or whether they are likely to find some other solution of the problem, whether it is the same as confronted the West, or whether it presents itself to them in a different aspect. That is, in brief, the subject to which I wish very humbly to address myself and to invite your attention this evening.

# Islam's Encouragement of Knowledge and Learning

Now at the very outset of our examination of these questions, we are struck by the contrast between the attitude of Islam and the attitude of the medieval church towards such matters as knowledge, learning, philosophy, science, research, etc. When I say knowledge, I mean secular knowledge, as it used to be described during the Middle Ages, not knowledge of scripture or religious knowledge. Now the church claimed to control all such activities and impose rigid conditions and restrictions upon their pursuit. As a matter of fact, not only upon these, because up to a certain point in the development of the study of religion also, the strict orthodox church attitude was that even the study of scripture must not be permitted freely, must be permitted only to the clerical section of the populace and should not be everybody's business. The church took its stand on authority. This is so because the church says so, the interpretation. This should not be done because the church prohibits it. This may be done because the church permits it. Now at a certain period of its development, particularly in Spain and also in the Italian states, this strictness sometimes became even ruthless. This is not the issue we are discussing. It is again a passing phase to which I wish to draw attention. But the annals of the Holy Office of the Inquisition would bear out the statement to what degree this control was

exercised over thought, which is the source of all speculation, experimentation, research, and therefore of progress in the fields that I have mentioned.

As we know, whether the incident is actually historically accurate or not, one does not know. But when in the end Galileo had to face the Holy Office and he retracted what he had written, he admitted that it was contrary to scripture, that he was wrong in making this statement, that he would not repeat it, and that he humbly retracted it with regard to particularly the motion of the earth around its axis, it is added, I personally consider the story rather doubtful, but it is illustrated, it is added, he said, my statement that the earth goes around its axis is wrong, utterly wrong, and I retract it humbly, wish to be forgiven for it, and then he said, but it moves just the same. Now, that is illustrative of the conflict. If a man's observation, if such experience, experiment as he could carry out, as such research as he could make, led him inevitably to a certain conclusion, but he was prohibited from proclaiming that conclusion, let us say, openly, well then, a conflict was set up and somehow it had to be resolved. But whatever, anybody of men, with whatever authority or lack of authority they might pronounce their views, whatever they may say, the phenomena of nature will go on occurring.

Now, it was this attitude which had given rise to what we have called this conflict between science and religion. Power in itself, however vast, is not a problem. In itself, power is neither good nor bad. It's a matter for pride, for man, that he is, by the application of his mind and intellect, and learning from what he has already discovered with regard to the operation of the laws of nature,

increasing his power over the forces of nature. It's a matter of intellectual pride at any rate. But in itself, this accession of power is neither good nor bad. It is the application of it which might make it of the utmost benefit to mankind, or of the greatest injury to mankind. Now here is something which I, in my experience, have found for Western audiences very difficult to grasp. Here is a faith which claims allegiance of over 400 million people, which through 14 centuries has shown how strong a hold and deep a hold it has over those who profess this faith. It's a living faith, and yet it manages to survive, and not only to survive, but to control the lives of those who profess this faith to a much greater degree than any other faith, and yet it has no church organization. Now this puzzles the West, but it's an explanation to us. It governs the lives of the Muslims, unfortunately today not to the same degree, I shall come to that later, but nevertheless it governs the lives of the Muslims to a much greater degree, because there is no church in Islam. Anyway, there is neither a church hierarchy nor a priesthood, nor anybody called to holy, admitted to holy orders, no ordination, nothing of the kind. And therefore, one aspect of the problem didn't arise at all, anyhow. But that was not the only reason, though it was that also a very wise provision.

# The Quranic Emphasis on Knowledge and Reason

First, let us take the historical proof of it. I shall presently draw attention to the basis on which I base this well-known and well-accepted proposition. The historical proof is this. That though unfortunately, and most regrettably, many of our doctors of law have been occupied, after spirituality began to decline, in what would in lay language be described as hair-splitting. Now, to promote it, the very first revelation that came to the prophet of Islam began with the word, Iqra, read. He himself was unlettered, illiterate. It also means convey, proclaim. That also means the propagation of knowledge. And a verse later, this is chapter 96, verses 4 and 5.

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿١﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٢﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٣﴾

Convey or proclaim or read for thy lord is the lord of great generosity or great dignity. He translated both ways. And the proof of it, that he is the lord of great dignity, God is the lord of great dignity or God is the lord of great generosity, is he teaches man by the pen. Teaches him what he does not know. That the greatest blessing of God, in the very dawn of Islam, when Islam was beginning, the very first day's revelation that came to the holy prophet, draws attention to the generosity, to the dignity of God,



because of God being the source of knowledge. He bestows knowledge upon mankind.

Then with regards to Adam, though one mentions Adam on one side and then people begin to think that all the stories with regard to Adam everywhere else are part of Islam, also they are not. Again, that is not my main subject today. The Quran says God taught Adam the knowledge of all things, which has been interpreted as meaning that he created in man, he placed in man the capacity to acquire knowledge with regards to the nature and properties of things. That is to say, in the very creation of man, God has put this need and this capacity to acquire knowledge. That is chapter 2, verse 32. Again, at one place it is said, God bestows wisdom upon whom he chooses, and he who is granted wisdom is granted the greatest good. And nobody is reminded, that is to say, takes advantage of God's guidance that comes. Nobody is reminded, save those who possess understanding. As you see, understanding and reason and wisdom are first exalted as a condition of being able to take advantage of the guidance that comes from God. This is chapter 2, verse 270. But I might here incidentally explain, because these things are brought up very much with regards to the phraseology of the Quran, God grants wisdom to whom he chooses. God does not choose to grant me wisdom, what fault is it of mine? But wherever in the Quran it is, God does this where he chooses or where he wishes, there are in the Quran also ways taught of how to acquire that which is good, and how to discard that which may be a defect or evil. God grants wisdom, but he grants wisdom in consequence of something that man attempts.

At another place in the Quran, I will not read in each instance the original, it is said, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of day and night, there are signs for men of wisdom and understanding. Then it goes on to say, who are those men? How can one become a person wise or learned enough to draw wisdom from the signs which abound in God's universe? It says, those who contemplate God and his attributes, standing, sitting, lying down, and reflect upon all these phenomena. Now here is the scripture, urging us to reflect upon these phenomena, because this is the way to knowledge and learning and wisdom and philosophy and science.

Or with regards to the very elementary purpose, both of a prophet or of an apostle, or of any common person identifying himself with a particular guidance, that is to say that he should spread that guidance among his brethren, on what basis should that be done? Should that be done on authority? Again, the prophet is commanded in the Quran,

وَالْمَوْعِظَةُ الْحَسَنَةُ

Call to the way of thy Lord, with wisdom, with hikmah, with wisdom, and kindly exhortation, *mauizatil hasana*, and make thy exposition, and base thy exposition on that which is best. God well knows he who strays away from his path, and he who is rightly guided. This is chapter 16, verse 126. So, you will see here, that there is no room for that conflict, the type of conflict arising to which I referred in the opening of my address. We are urged as a matter of fact, all the time, and I shall come to it a little later, to

look into the causes, the phenomena, the operation. And it is the way of the Quran, that with regards to the illustration of spiritual truths, it always draws attention to natural phenomena, and their operation. And drawing attention to that says, now will you not believe that in the spiritual sphere also, God's beneficence works in that way? How often does it not draw attention, for instance, to the clouds that come and bring rain, and revive the dead earth. And God says, in the same way we revive dead spirits, where spirituality is on the decline, then God's revelation, God's guidance, which is spiritual rain, revives it in people's minds. But each time the Quran draws attention from the phenomena of nature. They become a preliminary study, before the intellect and the spirit are prepared to accept spiritual truths.

Again, you open the Quran anywhere, go on reading, presently, before you have read a page or two, you will find, this is a guidance for those who understand. This is a sign for those who reflect. This is a sign for those who reason, all the time in exhortation, to exercise the mind and the intellect, in respect of these spiritual truths. And the function of the Prophet himself, is described in the Quran, in the first place, he recites to men God's signs, and I have already indicated to you the type of signs, the alternation of the day and night, the creation of heaven and earth, the creation of man himself. Draw man's attention to these signs, and through these signs to create faith. Then to purify people, and also it means to foster, make provision for their progress. Then to teach them the laws that govern life, through which a man can make progress. One *Hikmah* and the philosophy lying behind them. It is not enough in Islam, do this because God says so. A

man may say, yes, I accept the authority of the Quran, I accept that the Prophet was a righteous man, I accept that God says so. Why does God say so? What good will it do me if I do this? What harm will it do me if I don't? And the Quran explains any constraints. For that it was necessary that the *Hikmah*, the philosophy behind the teachings, should also be made plain, so that intellect being satisfied, the motive power for conduct and action, should be created inside man.

# Understanding the Quran

I am going to attempt a small experiment, in order to interest you further in this matter. Let me hope it will not take too much time and let me hope I might succeed in it. I have chosen the simplest illustration. I have referred to the Quran, I will go on referring to the Quran. The Quran is only a small book; here is a great deal of introduction to the Quran. Then the text is only just this Arabic, the rest is English translation. But it is both universal and comprehensive. And yet people say we find it cryptic; we find it is not easy to follow, and a certain amount of, no doubt, study and reflection is necessary. But there are some very simple principles, by following which one can begin to understand a great deal more, next time more, next time more, next time more. Not because it is difficult, but because being the world of God, it has multi-facets. Each time one draws fresh light upon the problems of life.

Now I will take a very simple illustration, because I had used this part of the verse here, and I thought I might draw your attention to how the study of the Quran, even the elementary study of the Quran, ought to be carried out. And then perhaps those of you who may be further interested, might begin to find delight in the study of it, and better understand it. Now I shall just read the English translation, it is not necessary to read the original Arabic.

*Whatever is in the heavens, and whatever is in the earth,*

*glorifies God.*

That simple. Though glorification in Islam, so far as the universe is concerned, means the proper performance of the functions which God has appointed for them glorifies God, the Sovereign, the Holy, the Mighty, the Wise. The four attributes are mentioned. Just not at random, as we shall see presently. Though even a large section of the Muslims also thinks, well God's attributes are mentioned in the Quran, to draw our attention only to the attributes. That's not enough. They are relevant to the subject which is being dealt with at that place. Not merely as attributes of God, but each attribute is relevant to what follows. He it is who has raised, among the unlettered people, that is to say the people of Arabia of that time, a messenger, a prophet, from among themselves, who recites unto them, what I have just told you, God's signs, and purifies them, and teaches them the law and wisdom, though they had been before in manifest misguidance.

Now here are four attributes of God mentioned. And thereafter four functions of the prophet mentioned. And a moment's reflection will show that each function of the prophet corresponds to the corresponding attribute of God that has been mentioned. The sovereign, who has raised a prophet, who recites to them the signs of God, who draws attention to the sovereignty of God, to the majesty of God, to the phenomena which under God's laws operate in nature, and in this way creates faith in their hearts. Second, and purifies them, and the second attribute mentioned was the sovereign, the holy. Purification is related to the attribute of God's holiness. And it teaches them the law, the

book, by the laws, by acting upon which they would make progress in life. The sovereign, the holy, the mighty. And fourthly, he teaches them wisdom. And the fourth attribute mentioned was the wise. He is the source of all these things which the prophet will perform. But we do not stand here. We go a little further, and you will find a much more interesting sequence that follows. He has raised among the unlettered, and it happened. These unlettered people, first they became believers in the unity of God and in all the attributes that God possesses. Then, from the depths of moral degradation, they became an example to the world in purity of life. Third, from weakness, and of course it started with one man who was mercilessly persecuted, they, by following these laws, became for centuries the greatest power in the then known world, the mighty. God the mighty, through his attribute. And they not only rescued all the knowledge of the ancients, Greek philosophy today, would not be known to us here, were it not for the translations which the Arabs made from Greek into Arabic and preserved it for us, and then enriched it by their own contribution. Mathematics, algebra, chemistry, all the sciences known in those ages, some of them were the inventions of the Muslim Arabs, and some of them were developed almost out of shape from the stage at which they found them, and they carried it further. The wise, the wisdom of God requiring that these people should so apply themselves.

And God will raise this prophet, now that's a spiritual advent, among others, from among them, who have not yet joined them. He is the mighty device. Now this requires further reflection. Here only two of the original attributes are mentioned. And yet

it says that a time will come when the advent of this prophet will be spiritually repeated. Today the Muslims are not quite to the same degree, naturally, because they have had the Islamic traditions and so on, but as compared with the first Muslims, the Muslims today are in a condition of stagnation, the Muslim society. And through this guidance they will be revived to a position of active strength, the mighty. And they will be enabled to take full advantage of the benefits which this atomic age offers for the service of man, the wise. Now here is a prophecy. I shall stop here with regards to this, but I shall go on.

Now, take what the prophet himself said. This is the revelation coming to him, the word of God. The prophet said and his way was to say in aphorisms, simple, not requiring any commentary or explanations. He said, the pursuit of knowledge is a duty laid upon every Muslim man and Muslim woman. That's simple. That's direct. No conflict could arise. That's a duty. It has to be performed. Or A word of wisdom is the property of every believer. He should grasp it wherever he finds it. Not merely that the attitude of Islam is it does not condemn knowledge or philosophy or science. It incites all the time. Go forward. Wherever you find it, whether you find it in the West, whether you find it in the East, whether you find it in the North, whether you find it in the South, it is the property of each of you. It is the lost property. The lost camel, meaning the lost property of every woman. He should grasp it wherever he finds it. Make it his own. And then improve upon it.

Or, for instance, here is a practical proof. When the first battle in Islam took place, the Quraysh of Mecca brought an army



of 1,000 well-armed, well-mounted veteran warriors to wipe out Islam by use of force. And the Prophet had to go out of Medina to meet them with 313 ill-fed, almost starving, ill-armed, and not at all mounted, almost, people. And anybody making any estimate would have laughed at them and said, well, these people will be wiped out in 10 minutes' time. But the reverse happened. And again, it's not my purpose to go into that detail. And practically all the leaders of the opposite host were killed on the field of battle, and many of them were taken prisoners. And those prisoners were brought into Medina. The Prophet said, now there are among you, who are the prisoners, some people who are literate. Now the ransom of each such person is that he should teach the alphabet to 10 of our children. That will be your ransom. Now that's simple enough. Now, again, Islam does not stop short there at general exaltation towards science and learning and knowledge and so on. It goes much further. It establishes this central position, this doctrine, which in a sense we find in the first chapter of Genesis also, because all these guidance(s) came from God. Though unfortunately being translation upon translation upon translation upon revision, it does not appear in the same words there, but the idea one finds there, all the same.

# Reason, Faith, and the Absence of a Church Hierarchy in Islam

Everybody, according to his capacity and the strength of his inclination and his opportunities, must look into these things for himself and try to resolve them either with himself, or in consultation with those who are better versed in these matters than he is. We have these expressions, *ulama*, that merely means learned people. We have the expression *mufti*, that means what you would call in English a jurist. We have the word *qazin*, which only means a judge or a magistrate. In certain places the word *mullah* has also been used, but that again does not signify either priesthood or ordination or a hierarchy. It means a man who has devoted some time and attention to the study of religious matters. But we have no such authorization. That's number one. Number two, Islam does not seek to rule by authority. Now that's a fundamental distinction. Of course it invites belief. Of course it invites faith. And faith does mean, it predicates faith in something which cannot be demonstrated 100% like the rising of the sun. Nobody is asked to believe in the rising of the sun. It's a phenomenon that we experience every day. It's a tremendous phenomenon. It is, if you like, a daily miracle. But it's not a question of faith. Faith has certain aspects where from certain premises you arrive at certain conclusions, and that arriving at certain conclusions must also be reinforced by a certain amount

of experience in yourself. And then you begin to believe in certain things which may not be physically demonstrable to the same degree as physical phenomena are. It's true, Islam bases itself on faith in fundamentals. But it bases itself upon faith not on authority. You must believe because I say so. It invites belief on the firmness of reasoned conviction. Without that, a person is not a believer.

I shall, from the scripture of Islam, just quote two slight instances, both positive and negative. On the positive side, in the Quran, God commands the Prophet to announce O Prophet, proclaim to mankind I and those who follow me, we stand on the firmness of reasoned conviction. I don't ask you to believe in certain things because I say so. And because I am the Prophet, therefore you must believe. *Allah basira*, faith must be based on the firmness of reasoned conviction. The second instance I wanted to quote is, after the Prophet's thirteen years of severe persecution inflicted upon him and his followers in Mecca, when he was compelled to leave and his followers were compelled to leave Mecca and go to Medina, and then Islam was sought to be put out by the use of force, ruthlessly employed, but it survived, and everybody began to see that this thing is going to triumph, and a large number of people began to accept Islam and become Muslims. Now with regards to some of them, the Quran says, these people say, we believe, we are believers. Tell them that they have accepted, or they have submitted, but faith has not yet entered their hearts. Now Islam itself makes that distinction. A prima facie, for any reason, a prima facie acceptance is not belief or faith. It is faith only when it gets on to the firmness of reasoned

conviction, *Allah basira*. That was the second great distinction. There was no ex-cathedra of pronouncement on anything, not even on doctrine. Doctrine was put forward, one was invited to believe in it, act upon it. But not ex-cathedra. Much less in the fields of science or technology as the case of the laws of nature. On the other hand, one of the proclaimed objectives of Islam was the promotion of learning and philosophy and science and mathematics, and whatever might contribute towards the beneficence of human life. So, there could be no conflict. If the object is to promote these things, then the promotion of these things creates no conflict.

# Man as God's Vicegerent and the Subservience of the Universe

The Quran in express words describes that man, that is to say mankind as such, no particular man, that man is God's vicegerent upon earth. He is God's steward. And that the universe is made subservient to man. And the word subservient, the original word used in the Quran in Arabic, has two aspects. One, that it is bound by a set of laws. It operates in accordance with those laws. And subservient, that is to say it is placed at the service of man to serve the beneficence and progress of mankind. Now, immediately therefore, a Muslim is again incited to a study of, to research into the laws which bind the various phenomena of the universe which operate in them, and then to discover what benefit can it serve for humankind. It lays the foundation of science and research. And as a matter of fact, those of us who unfortunately are beginning to be either bewildered or being frightened by this tremendous power being in the hands of man, what will he do with it? They are being puzzled and bewildered by a beginning, the end of which today is inconceivable, but the volume of it will go on increasing manifold almost every year.

It's a thing to rejoice over, that God through His grace should have, and through the promises contained here, should have set in process the discovery by man, the greater and greater discovery by man of the operation of the laws of nature, and then to bring it into His service.

# The Current State of Muslim Societies and the Path Forward

Well, I shall, the rest of it I shall put in a very brief way. I've spoken nearly an hour, five minutes short. So, consequently, in Islam that aspect of the question doesn't arise. But one aspect does arise. As I have already indicated, Muslim society today is in a state of stagnation. It's historical reasons again, it's not my purpose to intervene. Whose fault it was? It's mainly their own fault. They had all this treasure, this guidance, and they were at the pinnacle of learning in science and philosophy for several centuries, but they got away from these principles, and therefore they lost their intelligence as they deserved to lose it.

Again, the Quran says, it lays down a law, it's also a warning. All this is for your benefit. This is my bounty to you. If you will employ these bounties of mine righteously, I shall go on multiplying them for you. But if you will abuse them, or misuse them, then my punishment that will overtake you will be severe. You see, the law operates in itself. As I have said, both a promise and a warning, as well as a law. But, with regards to this stagnation, Islam is also puzzled, and sincerely puzzled, with regards to the stagnation of Muslim society. Here are these 400 million people stretching, let us say, from Morocco, through Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, and around the Horn of Africa, Somaliland, and then the main Arab Peninsula, Turkey,

Iran, Afghanistan, West Pakistan, the Southern Soviet Union, the Northwestern Provinces of China, then on into India, 40 millions of them, over into Malaya, the majority of them, and 90% are over in Indonesia, and they occupy a very important position today, strategically, as well as with regard to their resources, only some parts of which have been discovered so far, and also, in this struggle between the East and the West, the ideological struggle, and their contribution might, in the last resort, prove decisive. Therefore, the West is also puzzled. Will they continue the way they are today, and become a handicap to the rest of mankind? Are there any means by which they will become beneficent in themselves again? Well now, the thinking of some has gone in the direction in which it had gone in the West. Why don't these people, and one reads it so often, why don't they carry out a division between what belongs to religion and what is outside of it? That will be their salvation.

# Islam as a Comprehensive Way of Life

But as I just pointed out, Islam's definition of religion is not that. Islam is a way of life, and the Quran claims that it contains guidance universal and comprehensive, which will be adequate in each stage of human life. Whatever changes the pattern of human life might undergo, the Quran will yield guidance adequate to it. And before the changes set in, it will be visible in the Quran, because the Quran is preserved in the very word of God in which it was revealed to the Prophet. That is in itself a large subject, but anyway, that is the position. And if the Muslims were to accept this advice, to say the regulation of worship in the mosque upstairs here, and carrying out of the services, and the performing of marriages, and the funeral services, well that is the sphere of religion, and the rest science and technology, philosophy and learning are not, well it will not be Islam that the Muslims will be following, and they know it is the repudiation of Islam, therefore that doesn't help. Therefore what? Therefore again, if you choose the testing of the claim of the Quran, so far as we are concerned, we know it is not a testing, because it has been tested so often, and it has been proved adequate, that we shall find that guidance in the Quran, provided we approach it in the proper manner, and seek it, both with the intellect, and also with the soul, that is a true prayer, and understanding of the operation of divine attributes.



And that claim is contained in the Quran also.

كِتَابٌ أَحْكَمْتُ آيَاتُهُ ثُمَّ فَصَّلْتُ مِنْ لَدُنِّ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ

This is a book, whose verses have decisive meaning, that is to say, certain verses have decisive meaning, and then the rest is an interpretation, a detailed exposition, من لدن from God, حكيم who is wise, خبير who is all aware, he is aware of the needs of mankind, from age to age, and he has put that guidance here. Or again, this was chapter 11, verse 2, and the next one, chapter 67 verse 15,

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ ۖ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

Does God not know, who has created the universe, and created you, and he knows all the subtleties, and he is aware of all your needs, and he has put the guidance here? Or again in chapter 17 verse 10,

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّذِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

This Quran guides you to principles, which are enduring, and will continue. Now it has sometimes been suggested that the door of free interpretation, which is supposed to have been closed several centuries ago in Islam, that is to say, the door of exegesis, of commentary, of interpretation, of deduction, should be opened again. Now that also puzzles one. It's a self-evident truth, if one might borrow these words from a famous declaration, that where there is guidance of this kind, the door of interpretation

can never be closed, or deemed to be closed. It has to remain open. Otherwise, how is one going to gather that guidance from this source? And wherever in Islam it has been contended, that because a certain jurist has said a certain thing on that subject, that's the last word, that is a mistake. That is shutting the door of beneficence upon one. Life is dynamic, and guidance which becomes static will fall behind. It's a matter. And the Quran is not static. Quran is dynamic, and the universe is dynamic, being the work of God. The Quran, the word of God, is also dynamic, and keeps ahead of the universe, never falls behind. And the Quran itself, I do not want to take up too much more time, the Quran itself points out to that. It says, here it is, the reference is chapter 3, verse 8,

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ

Here it is who has revealed this book and guidance to you, that is to the Prophet. In it there are verses that are decisive in their meaning, that is fundamental and operating all the time in that sense only. They are the basis of the book. But there are others that are capable of several interpretations. Now several interpretations because repeated interpretations, and the Arabic language has that quality, that on the etymological basis, taking the root, you can spread out the whole tree from the meaning of the word. And those interpretations with regards to the philosophy contained in the Quran, will be found adequate at each stage in life.

There is a certain, or there is a great deal of rigidity in Islamic

society today, it is true. It is a true charge that there is a great deal of rigidity. But it has not been created by Islam, it has been created by the Muslims. As a matter of fact, almost everything in Islam, though preserving the spirit all the time, under certain stresses shows its elasticity. Take the daily prayers, the five services. One of course has been said to me, the five services a day, our daily services are congregational prayers. Only one has a sermon attached to it, and that's the Friday noon service. How much time does it take? I say about one third in the whole day and night of that which two rubbers a bridge take. It's a question of values. It's a question of standards. But once that is admitted, then you will see the elasticity of it all. A man is on a journey. He may combine the services at both, and he may combine the noon and the afternoon prayers, and he may combine the evening and the night prayers. Very good. We have to wash before each prayer because physical purity is insisted upon in Islam parallel with moral and spiritual purity. If you do not find water, then your symbolic called the *yamun* will be adequate. That is to say, the physical when it is not capable of being complied with, may be dispensed with to the degree to which it must be dispensed with. But the spiritual must be maintained all the time. We face towards Mecca in our prayers in order to have a unity and uniformity in our attention when we are all praying together. But if you do not know the direction, what shall you do? Very good. You make as good a guess as you can and face towards Mecca. But if you happen to be in a train and you cannot turn towards Mecca, you say then face towards whichever direction the train is going in. But if you cannot, then say wherever you are.

The rigidity is created by those who took the position of the priesthood in Islam. They had not the position, but they elevated to themselves. These are only instances. For instance, this month is the month of fasts. Every adult Muslim, man and woman, because believe me, women have in Islam as good souls as men have. Now that's another puzzle in the West. Man and woman, during this month, let's say lunar month, 29 days, 30 days, from the first strike of dawn, and we are in the middle of that month now, today was the 23rd day of it, till after sunset, must not eat or drink or smoke, must concentrate more on moral and spiritual matters, though they should carry on their daily occupations. Oh yes, but then if you are ill, not only there is a dispensation, you are commanded not to fast if you are ill. If you are on a journey, the same command. The discipline is kept, and yet also the elasticity. But if you are giving salt to a child, you are exempt. But if the person is weak, he is exempt. But if the person is approaching old age and now cannot endure the discipline of the fast, he is exempt. But those who are permanently exempt, in order to keep up again the parallelism of the discipline, should provide food of the average kind that they eat themselves for one needy person. Well, and so on. It was not my purpose to explain this, but what I mean is it concentrates on the spirit but is quite elastic with regard to what has its benefits – communicational prayer, together, and so on. If you can't say it together, you say it by yourself. It has its benefits, but in exceptional cases, so long as the spirit is maintained, you can depart to that degree from the physical requirement. Now, with regards to the second question with which we started, what does Islam say with regards to this puzzle

with which the Western world is faced? But guidance has been given. How? By accepting of what principles, by acting upon what principles, you can, in practice, ensure against any such catastrophe. But, of course, it's given to man.

## Principles for Beneficent Progress

As I began by saying, God doesn't force it. God is not forced by authority. God leaves it to man. Man takes the consequences. The beneficent consequences are destructive consequences. As I said, I'll compress it into two or three minutes. The fundamental thing which Islam says in such things would ensure beneficent progress is, first, faith on the basis of reasoned conviction, firm faith on the basis of reasoned conviction in the existence and the unity of God, and that man has communion with God all the time. God is not merely the first cause in the sense that he gave a push to the universe and then is sitting back looking at the fun. The Quran says so that those who think so, they deny the existence of God and the beneficence of God. God did not create the universe in sport or in fun. God created, he recreates, all his attributes are in constant operation. That he has a relationship with man and the universe, a live relationship. Some of us turn our backs on that relationship. We have only got to turn our faces and take it up. And secondly, the belief in the life after death. That is to say, in the full accountability of one's actions. As I have said, God has created man as his vicegerent upon earth. It is a most exalted and majestic station that God has bestowed upon his creatures. If we will be true to that, if we will be true to our stewardship and hold ourselves accountable to God for all that he has put under our authority, whether it is property, whether it is money, whether it is knowledge, whether it is power, any kind of

effort, whether it is intellectual, whether it is physical, and hold it at the service of man, which in Islam means in the path of God, that will ensure us against any such danger over which we are today in great apprehension. I wish to thank you for having kept you so long and you have been very patient. But as you will realize, the subject was not an easy one to deal with. And I do not claim that I have dealt with it in any profound degree, but still, if I have started certain lines of thought, my purpose has been well served. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.