

of Divine punishment, they continue to believe that God truly loves them. Due to this self-deception, based upon their claimed association with a holy Messenger of Allah (SWT), they continue to live in a fool's paradise of their own making. They feel satisfied in the unfounded conviction that they deserve, as a birthright, some kind of preferential treatment from God. The Qur'an tries to shake such complacent people from their deluded slumber thus:

The Jews and the Christians say: "We are sons of God and beloved of Him." Say: "Why does He punish you then for your sins? No! You are only mortals, of His creation."  
(5:18)

And they (the Jews) say: "Hell fire will not touch us for more than a few days." Say: "Have you so received a promise from God? Then surely God will not withdraw His pledge. Or do you impute things to God of which you have no knowledge at all?" (2:80)

Unfortunately, the image we get from these verses is a disturbingly true representation of the beliefs of Muslims today. Even the repeated episodes of severe punishments, in the background of continuous suffering, has failed to produce in us any sense of guilt or remorse. Instead, our deeply ingrained myth of being a privileged people has remained intact. Unbelievable as it may sound, the more disgrace we receive, the more we fell in love with ourselves, blinded by our supposed righteousness and delusion of our own grandeur. Such irony, however, might well be a part of our punishment.

(To be continued)

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For those who do good there is good in the world, but certainly the abode of the next is better. (16:30)

### Privileges & Obligations

But the trouble with being the chosen people of God the Almighty is that this privilege is coupled with a whole lot of obligations. The more glories and bounties a nation is blessed with, the more are the responsibilities of its people in the sight of God.

A community that claims to be the follower of a Messenger of God, and the custodian of His message in the form of a revealed Book, in fact represents the Almighty among other nations. This is a tremendous liability. If the behavior of such a community is in contravention to its claim, then, according to Divine Justice, they deserve all the humiliation and disgrace, sufferings and miseries. If their individual character and morals, their collective way of life, their society and culture, and their politico-economic norms are contrary to the teachings of the Divine Revelation, then this constitutes an unpardonable crime. The reason is that such behavior, instead of presenting an attractive and true picture of the way of life based on the Right Ideal — and thereby bringing people nearer to God — serves only to repel them away from the Divine Guidance by displaying a distorted and ugly image of that guidance. The Qur'an is very explicit on this point:

O you who believe, why do you profess what you do not practice? Saying what you do not practice is most hateful in the sight of God. (61:2,3)

Do you believe a part of the Book and reject a part? There is no other award for them who so act but ignominy in this world, and on the Day of Judgment the severest of punishment. (2:85)

A common but strange characteristic of such disgraced communities is that, in spite of receiving frequent installments

Lot, the people of Shoaib, and finally the Egyptian Pharaoh and his followers who rejected Moses. May God's peace and mercy be upon all of His prophets.

It should be kept in the mind that such overt manifestations of the wrath of God used to appear only after one of His Messenger has clearly and explicitly communicated the Divine message to a particular audience, and they still refuse to surrender before God's Will. The Qur'an is very emphatic on this point:

We never punish till We have sent a messenger. (17:15)

But your Lord does not destroy habitations without having sent a messenger to their metropolis to read out Our commandments to them. (28:59)

Similarly, a nation that unconditionally accepts the sovereignty of God and acts accordingly is blessed with all that is desirable in this world. This unchanging Divine Law has been described by the Qur'an in several ways. Here are two examples:

And if they had followed the teaching of the Torah and the Gospel, and what has been sent down to them by their Lord, they would surely have enjoyed (blessings) from the heavens above and the earth below their feet. Some among them are moderate, but evil is what most of them do. (5:66)

But if the people of these regions had believed and feared God, We would surely have showered on them blessings of the heavens and the earth; but they only denied, and We punished them for their deeds. (7:96)

The Qur'an maintains that the real and everlasting rewards for believing in and obeying the commands of Allah (SWT) will manifest themselves in the next world, the Hereafter. However, there is a lot to gain in this life as well, in the form of social harmony and general prosperity.

According to some traditions, there have been 124 thousand prophets in all, 313 of which were also messengers. Although the Qur'an doesn't explain the difference explicitly between the two and hence there are a number of opinions on this point, the most logical explanation will be adopted here. That is, a prophet (*Nabi*) who is specifically appointed by Almighty God to guide a particular nation or community, gets promoted to the rank of His Envoy, in a manner of speaking, and becomes a Messenger (*Rasool*). A nation that adopts a system of beliefs and a way of life based upon one of the countless wrong ideals is doomed to destruction anyway, though this decline may take centuries to complete. However, when a prophet of God was appointed to the position of a Messenger and was sent to a certain nation, the whole scenario changed dramatically. Now the rise and fall of this nation depended solely upon its collective response to the Messenger of God. If they surrendered to the commands of Almighty God, they enjoyed peace and prosperity and material comforts. But if they showed ingratitude and refused to follow the Divine message, then, in the sight of Allah (SWT), they became worthy of His punishment.

Such a group of people constitute an impediment in the evolution of the humanity towards the ultimate realization of the Right Ideal. Therefore, the Divine plan for the human race demands that such a useless and spiritually barren people be removed from the face of the earth, once and for all. This is the law of "annihilation of the worst".

In this context, nearly identical stories of six different nations appear in the Qur'an, each of which was guilty of rejecting their divinely appointed Messengers. All of these nations were destroyed and eliminated as a Divine punishment for their sins. These condemned nations included, in chronological sequence, the people of Noah, a nation called *Aad* to which the Prophet Hud was sent, a nation known as *Thamud* to which the Prophet Saleh was appointed, the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which were assigned to Prophet

culture-civilization gradually dies and disappears, making way for the next — possibly better — ideal to capture the imagination and passion of a fresh generation, and the process repeats itself at a relatively higher plane of evolution. One Qur'anic verse summarizes this entire process in these words:

Do they not see how many generations We laid low before them, whom We had firmly established in the land as We have not established you, and showered abundant rain on them, and made rivers lap at their feet, yet whom We destroyed for their sins, and raised new generations after them? (6:6)

A deep study of history will show that the social evolution of humanity is progressing in a particular direction. Adopting and discarding one ideal after another, it is destined to reach the ultimate, permanent, and stable culture-civilization which will be based on the Right Ideal, i.e., an ideal which is in harmony with the human nature, and therefore free from all possible defects. This culture-civilization of the future would be characterized by the domination of the right ideal; in other words, by the domination of Islam.

### **The Wrath of God**

Our Creator, God the Almighty, has provided the means to satisfy all human needs and urges, and, therefore, He established the institution of Prophethood in order to guide humanity towards the Right Ideal. This is because the need to know the highest ideal of Beauty and Perfection, and the urge to love and worship that ideal, is the most irresistible desire of the human soul.

A prophet is a person who is endowed with the knowledge, through Divine revelation, that the only true ideal worthy of our love and worship is none other than God. The system of life based on this ideal is characterized by an unconditional surrender to God's Will, and this is what every prophet has preached to his people.

facts. Nothing is arbitrary and futile. A profoundly meaningful evolutionary process is taking place by which humanity is moving, slowly but surely, toward its final destination, though the details of this ongoing process are often incomprehensible to us.

Within this general scheme of things, there are certain universal truths which remain constant. As the Qur'an warns us:

You will not find any change in the law of God (48 : 23)

The Islamic view of history can be explained in terms of the Philosophy of Ideals, as presented by late Dr. Muhammad Rafiuddin (1904-1969), former director of Iqbal Academy (Karachi, Pakistan). According to him, the unchanging characteristic of the human nature — established, of course, by Almighty God — is that the motivating force behind all human endeavors is the urge for ideals. Thus, different stages of the life of a culture-civilization, i.e., birth, growth, decline, and death, can be correctly understood only in terms of this philosophy of ideals, briefly described thus.

A number of individuals inspired by a single ideal organize themselves in the form of an ideal-group, e.g. a primitive tribe or a modern state. Their ideal may be a certain personality, a supernatural belief, or a social theory. By definition, members of the ideal-group believe their ideal to be the highest form of Beauty and Perfection. They make an effort to realize the ideal in practice, the result of their effort being the intellectual, cultural, and behavioral framework of that particular culture-civilization, including their language, religion, art, music, poetry, architecture, morality, philosophy, science, and law.

Initially, Allah (SWT) allows the culture-civilization to freely prosper and develop in all directions. In due course of time, however, the inherent defects and internal conflicts of the wrong ideal start manifesting and the ideal-group begins to deteriorate. Ultimately, over a variable period of time, the

and fall of nations, civilizations, and empires, it is necessary to emphasize that God is never a passive onlooker vis-a'-vis human history, but that each and every event takes place as a manifestation of His omnipotence and infinite wisdom.

There was an interesting idea called *Deism* that became popular in the 17th century Europe, and the subtle remains of which are still active in our minds. According to this view, God did create the universe, but He has long since removed Himself from its affairs, and only mechanical laws of nature are now running the show. God is busy, so to speak, in a sort of self-contemplation, and He doesn't care at all about the humanity He once created.

The Islamic perspective, in sharp contrast to Deism, is that Allah (SWT) is not only the creator, designer, and fashioner of the cosmos, but He is also its sovereign, ruler, administrator, and guardian. The logical conclusion that follows from this belief is that nothing happens in the universe — not even the movement of a tiny leaf in the morning breeze — without the permission of Almighty God.

Since God is also the most Wise, everything that takes place has a reason which may or may not be immediately apparent to us. Human beings are extremely myopic creatures, and they lack the infinitely broad perspective, in terms of both time and space, that is required to appreciate the wisdom behind historical events. This means that although we can understand the general purpose and direction of history in a vague and imperfect manner, the meaning behind every individual event and its significance in the Divine scheme usually remains tantalizingly elusive.

Therefore, what must be kept in mind is this: However random and aimless the events of history may appear, there is a definite purpose behind each one of them. It's the Divine creative energy, or the Will of God, that is active in the entire sweep of history. There is a certain order and a pattern hidden beneath the plethora of seemingly inconsequential historical

surface of earth? Isn't it true that we are intellectually effete and academically dependent on the West? That we are shamelessly willing to conspire with the enemy so that we may kill our brothers? If all this doesn't constitute the worst form of humiliation, then what does?

A common Muslim may plead before Almighty God: Aren't we supposed to be the best of communities? Aren't we among the followers of your most beloved Prophet (PBUH)? Aren't the Christians and the Jews and the rest of them enemies of Islam? Then how can anyone justify their domination and opulence and our miseries and destitution?

This most disturbing of questions demands our full attention, especially because of the following two reasons:

First, it is imperative that we familiarize ourselves with the Divine Law that has been operating throughout human history. We must understand that instead of being innocent victims of the vagaries of fate, we ourselves are responsible for our pathetic state of existence. We need to clearly realize that mere grumbling and complaining won't solve our problems, and that we need to confess our sins and repent with the true spirit of repentance.

Secondly, just as a correct diagnosis is an indispensable prerequisite for proper treatment, in the same way we need to identify the real cause of our miseries before we can formulate and chart a plan of action. This is important so that the limited amount of energies and resources available to us are not lost in superficial and useless undertakings. Instead, a precise appreciation of the seriousness of our situation, and a correct interpretation of that situation in terms of its etiology — both are essential steps as far as any hopes for a successful revival are concerned.

### **History is the Key**

Before discussing the Divine Law which deals with the rise



It is indeed amazing that we are so many, yet we count for so little. All international disputes are being decided today by the United States and her allies, especially Britain and France, under cover of the UN Security Council. Our national policies — interior, foreign, and fiscal — are being formulated and dictated by the guardians of the New World order. Our natural resources are being controlled and exploited by them. The wealth belonging to most of the affluent Muslim countries is practically at their disposal. The Arab monarchies — despite material prosperity, majestic palaces, and luxurious life styles — are nothing but puppets in their hands. Muslim rulers all over the Islamic world are desperately vying to win favors from the West. The interests of Islam and Muslims hardly ever bother them.

Adding insult to injury are the massacres and other forms of sufferings being endured by Muslims in India, Kashmir, Bosnia, Somalia, and Palestine. Our sisters are being raped, our brothers mercilessly tortured and slain. On top of this, there are "Muslims" killing each other — in Algeria, Afghanistan, Egypt, and in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. No one can deny that we are, indeed, a disgraced and dishonored community in the comity of nations.

Going through the Qur'an, we often come across words of sever condemnation which specifically berate the Jews for their sins. We tend to pass over these verses with a smug self-righteousness, satisfied that the target of these scoldings are a corrupt people and that they have nothing to do with us. But consider the following Qur'anic words with an open mind, and see how accurately they apply to the Muslims of today:

"Humiliation and misery were stamped upon them, and they drew upon themselves the anger of Allah." (2: 61)

Isn't it a fact that our politics today in nothing but an ignominious slavery to the West? That our economy is based upon undignified mendicancy? That we are socially the most ignorant, undisciplined, corrupt and uncivilized people on the

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(Hikmat-e-Quran)

Every concerned and mature Muslim must have considered, at one time or another, the question of our bewildering rise and deplorable decline. Every historian — whether Muslim or non-Muslim — has his own theory to explain the ups and downs in our fourteen hundred years odyssey. We Muslims, however, are a unique group of people, radically different from all other nations, races, or communities in our very essence. This implies that the factors which usually cause rise and decline among other cultures are often not relevant for, or applicable to, the Muslims of the world.

Therefore, in order to make sense of all that is happening to the Muslims throughout the world, it is imperative that we investigate our history very carefully. We must pinpoint the decisive element in *our* rise and fall. We must identify the law that is governing *our* ups and downs. The threads of the past are closely linked with those of the future. History, as we keep hearing, repeats itself. By probing the past we may be able to get a vision of the shape of things to come. By analyzing our history, we may be able to catch a glimpse of our future. Moreover, we can chart our future clearly and wisely only when we know the path which has led to the present.

### **The Humiliated Ummah**

As for the present condition of Muslims, there are unfortunately few things to boast about. For all practical purposes, the Muslim Ummah doesn't exist anywhere in the real world. The authentic and genuine "Ummah" has long been demoted to a mere academic concept. In reality, we are left with a large number of Muslim "nations" and their respective "national" states. We are further divided into even smaller linguistic, racial, and sectarian groups — along with mutual hostilities and conflicts. The inescapable result has been that although we are at least 1300 million in number, our combined weight in the global policy making process is never more than zero.

# LESSONS FROM HISTORY

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## Prologue

Anyone who seriously reads newspapers and regularly watches international news would agree to this: Things are changing everywhere with a brisk pace, events are unfolding with an urgent rush. Different characters are entering and exiting the world stage in rapid succession. Each act of the global drama is instantaneously merging with the next. And, simultaneously, our daily lives have also undergone an unprecedented acceleration.

Due to all this celerity, most of us are either unable to connect different world events and appreciate their significance, or we are so wrapped up in our own immediate problems that we have simply no time left to brood over international affairs. But it does not, of course, diminish their importance in any way or obviate the need to study them deeply, placing them in their historical setting. We must remain in touch with the socio-political developments in the world, as ignorance can often lead to extinction.

## Traveling Through Time

Let us begin by reflecting on the condition of the Muslim Ummah: her quandaries and dilemmas, her swinging fortunes, her glorious and at times pathetic history, her uncertain present, and finally — her unknown destiny.