

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

(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.