

*Ohutbah, Insha Allah, Friday, April 23, 2004*

*Alhamdu lillah, wa ash hadu ala ila ha ill lallah*

*Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim*

Since the dawn of humankind the world had a belief and faith. However, from time to time, there were different concepts and purposes from the revealed religion of Islam. People believed in pleasing God and receiving His favours and appeasing His wrath through varied forms of ritual and sacrifice, offerings and prayers. We now live in an environment of discoveries and varied interests and people make untiring efforts to find their roots and also of the universe to which they belong. We should rather rediscover our belief in God and the real message of the Quran. This will vitally affect our attitude to life which motivates all our actions and our ambitions to attain moral excellence both in this life and the Hereafter.

God knew that there were many in the world that had a dormant potentiality of becoming good submitters and believers. God wanted to raise and refine these persons. God wanted them to be molded to make them noble and cultured and to function as inspired beings with truth, honesty, sincerity, integrity, courage, patience, tolerance, courtesy, love, forgiveness, generosity and selflessness. So from time to time He sent Prophets and Messengers with different Scriptures and Messages.

God gave us three gifts which He gave none of his other creations – faculties of free will, intelligence and speech. It is thus for us to make its full utilization to attain the goal emphasized by the Quran. There is no blind faith in Islam. In the Quran, we are invited to either accept or reject Submission and we are allowed to reason. However, while the Quran lays a great emphasis on reason, it does not consider it as a sole means of gaining knowledge and the only criterion for judging the truth. So rationalism has to be looked at very carefully. The intellect through which divine knowledge is received must not be mistaken for reason alone. This great ability could easily be obscured by worldly passions and become the impediment between us and God and we would be led astray. So reason is a double edged sword we should be wary of.

So while the Quran is a great proponent of reason, it also requires us to believe in the “*ghayb*” – the unseen. Early in the Quran, God says [2:2] This scripture is infallible; a beacon for the righteous [2:3] who believe in the unseen, observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), and from our provisions to them, they give to charity. It seems a paradox – on one hand a great emphasis on reason and on the other to believe in the unseen. It would be presumptuous on our part if we tried to understand the entire Quran strictly in the context of modern science which itself is constrained by a number of limitations. Human observation is fragile and imperfect. The recognition of our inadequacies leads us to a faith in God which also extends to things which are beyond the reach of human

awareness. Knowledge comes to us through information and experience resulting in faith in God which leads a believer to certainty (*yaqin*) of the Absolute.

We have freedom of thought and action within the confined limits of good and evil as known to all of us as the awareness is ingrained in our soul. We are not like puppets whose strings are pulled by an invisible hand. Yet God is most generous as He takes on Himself the task of guiding us to the right path worldly as well as spiritually. This can be deduced from a number of pronouncements in the Quran [92:12] We provide the guidance. [90:10] Did we not show him the two paths?

We are free to choose our future. However, God knows how a particular individual will behave because He is God. But this in no way contradicts our inherent freedom. Islam literally means submission to the Will of God and it is submission with free will which alone is acceptable to God. So we submit with free will to the Divine Law, which pertains both to the rights of God and the rights of His creation.

We are not under any coercion to do or not to do a thing. [2:256] There shall be no compulsion in religion: the right way is now distinct from the wrong way. Anyone who denounces the devil and believes in GOD has grasped the strongest bond; one that never breaks. GOD is Hearer, Omniscient. [17:7] “If you work righteousness, you work righteousness for your own good, but if you commit evil you do so to your own detriment. Thus, when the second time comes to pass, they will defeat you and enter the masjid, just as they did the first time. They will wipe out all the gains you had accomplished.” In spite of being in light of the inspired knowledge of good and evil we are under no external pressure even in matters of religious beliefs and practices otherwise the Quran would not have said [6:107] Had GOD willed, they would not have worshiped idols. We did not appoint you as their guardian, nor are you their advocate.

Masha Allah, we have been given the gift of speech. The Quran enjoins us to speak well to one another. Importantly, this gift has also been given to us so that we can praise our Creator and do His *Zikr*. Humans were imparted the knowledge of vice and virtue at the primordial stage of their creation. [30:30] Therefore, you shall devote yourself to the religion of strict monotheism. Such is the natural instinct placed into the people by GOD. Such creation of GOD will never change. This is the perfect religion, but most people do not know. [49:7] And know that GOD's messenger has come in your midst. Had he listened to you in many things, you would have made things difficult for yourselves. But GOD made you love faith and adorned it in your hearts, and He made you abhor disbelief, wickedness, and disobedience. These are the guided ones.

Guidance from God is always readily available to humans. For us argumentative creatures, the Quran explains the reason why the entire community was not created as perfect believers so as to obviate the need of external guidance. [16:9] GOD points out the paths, including the wrong ones. If He willed, He could have guided all of you. Simply put, God does not want robots. It was not His intention to see every human adopted the right path automatically without consciousness or intellect. Other creatures

like animals and plants, though good submitters have no option open to them but to follow the dictates of their respective intellects. So God has given us a self-criticizing conscience, discerning faculties of consciousness and commonsense and we have to pray to Him to help us choose a correct path out of a network of paths criss-crossing one another.

The Quran conveys to us repeatedly and unequivocally [16:93] Had GOD willed, He could have made you one congregation. But He sends astray whoever chooses to go astray, and He guides whoever wishes to be guided. You will surely be asked about everything you have done. [2:253] These messengers; we blessed some of them more than others. For example, GOD spoke to one, and we raised some of them to higher ranks. And we gave Jesus, son of Mary, profound miracles and supported him with the Holy Spirit. Had GOD willed, their followers would not have fought with each other, after the clear proofs had come to them. Instead, they disputed among themselves; some of them believed, and some disbelieved. Had GOD willed, they would not have fought. Everything is in accordance with GOD's will.

As humans we individually and collectively confront situations and problems of a varied nature. Our life is not as simple as that of other living creatures. We are constantly subject to social, economic and environmental conditions. Therefore, we need additional and extraneous direction from the Most Gracious all the time.

We see in the Quran in the very opening Surah Al-Fatehah [1:6] Guide us in the right path; [1:7] the path of those whom You blessed; not of those who have deserved wrath, nor of the strayers. This guidance comes in three ways [42:51] No human being can communicate with GOD except through inspiration, or from behind a barrier, or by sending a messenger through whom He reveals what He wills. He is the Most High, Most Wise. Such a conclusion is based upon explicit indications in the Quran. [17:15] Whoever is guided, is guided for his own good, and whoever goes astray does so to his own detriment. No sinner will bear the sins of anyone else. We never punish without first sending a messenger. [20:133] They said, "If he could only show us a miracle from his Lord!" Did they not receive sufficient miracles with the previous messages? [20:134] Had we annihilated them before this, they would have said, "Our Lord, had You sent a messenger to us, we would have followed Your revelations, and would have avoided this shame and humiliation." [20:135] Say, "All of us are waiting, so wait; you will surely find out who are on the correct path, and who are truly guided."

Prophets and Messengers were sent when small communities lived in small and isolated settlements. Quite a number of them have been named in the Quran. There were others too whom the early listeners of the Quran were not familiar with as their locale and community belonged to far off places and even different continents. Others have not been named. [40:78] We have sent messengers before you - some of them we mentioned to you, and some we did not mention to you. No messenger can produce any miracle without GOD's authorization. Once GOD's judgment is issued, the truth dominates, and the falsifiers are exposed and humiliated.

As means of communication developed it became possible to disseminate inspired revelations to a much larger circle and the teachings and knowledge spread. Finally, by the Grace of God, we have the Quran which is available to us in its original text and also translated into several languages.

The remembrance of God through Salat is rated higher than any other religious obligations. [29:45] You shall recite what is revealed to you of the scripture, and observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), for the Contact Prayers prohibit evil and vice. But the remembrance of GOD (through Salat) is the most important objective. GOD knows everything you do. When we remember God this way we purify our hearts and minds and we augment our faith layer upon layer which will God willing lead us to attain certainty.

God wants all of us to lead a happy and useful life on earth too. To attain a state of felicity we need a direction and a set of rules and regulations. Our thinking should be correct on purely religious matters and also on broad social and political issues. *Our fears of today should not kill our hopes of tomorrow.*

Any laws made by humans will always be defective and open to loopholes because they are based on self interest and the logical conclusion of some of these laws would be disagreement, subjugation and oppression. Only the laws of the One True God could be in sync for the welfare of all mankind. We follow these laws not for their own sake but because they are God's laws and in fact are framed to serve us and not the other way around.

Finality belongs to God and the Quran alone. To ascribe finality to anyone or anything would tantamount to committing "shirk". The Quran is not a mere book of the sources of law. It is God's all embracing message to humankind which gives firm guidelines for our righteous path. Without the correct spiritual course and code of law we would remain an empty shell. But we have to develop a spiritual spring and allow it to erupt within us to establish a true believer's community and establish an order for peace, happiness and justice. Any other outward observance would amount to no more than futility.

I'll end with a prayer for a belief in a vaster and fuller life where final justice will remove all miseries, frictions and conflicts that plague us today. No more chaos, killings, social disorder, selfishness, corruption and unhappiness. Nothing was beyond our control in this life but for our ego, our psyche, our skepticism and above all our loss of faith in the Heavenly Power.