

*Qhutbah, Insha Allah, Friday, March 28, 2008*

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

*Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim*

Insha Allah, these Qhutbahs are “some reflections on true Islam”. We humans are the crowning glory of God’s creation and have been given the freedom of choice. God has given us the potential ability to shape our destiny though only within God’s control. The Quran rejects the idea of chosen people and makes righteousness the sole criterion of inheriting earthly power [19:96] *Surely, those who believe and lead a righteous life, the Most Gracious will shower them with love.* There is also no moral holiday in Islam and the true idea of redemption that the Quran enjoins is to abide by the Divine Law. *Repentance: Cleaning the Slate [9:11] If they repent and observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), then they are your brethren in religion. We thus explain the revelations for people who know.*

We know the Quran as God’s Final Testament. This very title is legal as the word “testament” means a covenant or bond entered into between two or more persons, in this instance between God and us. The whole concept of this relationship between God and us is legal. God enters into a covenant with us whereby He contracts that in consideration of humans performing certain stipulated duties He will bestow upon them certain rewards. God is the Lawgiver, God is the Judge, God is the Witness, God is the Jury and God is the Executioner and it is these aspects of the Deity that are constantly emphasized. We often hear the term “*Islam is a way of life*”. This expression covers both the universality as well as its philosophy.

The first example of intermingling of law with religion is to be found in the *Old Testament*. The first five books composing the *Pentateuch* are predominantly law books. *Lord Coke* claimed Moses as “*the first reporter and writer of law in the world*”. Sin and Crime convey to our minds two quite distinct conceptions, one subjective the other obvious, but the distinction is of comparative recent origin and the two have still a meeting ground. The same act may be both a sin and a crime but we have learned to discriminate between its two aspects. We punish the crime; we leave the sin to be answered for before another tribunal – *the Heavenly Tribunal*.

Islam’s remarkable success in capturing the hearts of millions, within 30 years of the death of Prophet Mohammed in 632 C.E. led most of the Western World to concoct the

extraordinary charge that Islam had been propagated at the point of a sword. Actually, Islam seized the sword and held it in self-defense. However, there were unfortunate exceptions. What attracted many was its ability to recharge its moral, social and religious values by fresh energy and renewed vigour.

When the Quran came into existence there an acute difference on the basis of customs of ethnic groups. Purity of blood was always recognised as the symbol for nobility and much of this difference existed as it exists even now among people on that basis. The Quran struck a note of warning against this idea and recalled the origin of man as also pointed out the division of humankind into tribes and sections was only for identification. It gives no superiority to one man over the other by virtue of birth or blood. Attempts are always made to weaken Muslim solidarity. Certain sections are led to believe that they were divided into classes; certain Muslims call themselves privileged and the rest as unprivileged. The very idea is grossly offensive to Islam as evident from Quranic injunctions.

The Quran places an emphasis on conduct and on duties. There is an essential concept of responsibility mixed with accountability. Usually, a stress on rights rather than duties leads to a sense of power and authority within an individual and a society formed by such individuals is too self-righteous and arrogant towards others. Alternatively, the prominence on duties based on rightfulness, as creates a harmony in social life. Rights that belong to individuals are a consequence of their being human. There are a variety of values that are universal in character and equally claimed for all souls.

Since a long time, political and economic conditions of the so-called Islamic world have deteriorated perceptibly. Newspapers are full of articles lamenting this situation *ad nauseam* and some make specific suggestions how things can be improved. It is amazing that none of these proposals suggest a change of character and a resultant change of the system. We run the present system and will run the future system too. Most people assume that the human factor is of no consequence – they believe the legal system is wrong, too much dependence on Western goods so boycott Coke and Nike, a tsunami is just an “act of God”, Muslims have been killing one another for centuries, we are here to suffer, so what is new etc. The biggest joke is on us.

Humans have the largest egos. We are too selfish, have lost basic character and the requirements of justice. God warns in the Quran in [100:6-8] *The human being is unappreciative of his Lord. He bears witness to this fact. He loves material things excessively.* It is this unwarranted love of wealth and power that becomes the basic cause of all injustice and the inhumanity of humans to one another. Other than the

Quran, there are no sets of laws, no system of administration or procedure, which can change this state of affairs except if there is a real change in the hearts, and minds of these individuals. [13:11]. *...Thus, GOD does not change the condition of any people unless they themselves make the decision to change. ...*

The Quran covers everything including monetary corruption. There is large-scale tax evasion, fraud, double sets of accounts, bribing of tax collectors and cheating going on. The perpetrators of these sins should realise that they are not only violating man made laws but are also and most importantly blatantly defying the laws of God for which they will be called, one Day, to account. [104:1-7] *Woe to every backbiter, slanderer. He hoards money and counts it. As if his money will make him immortal. Never; he will be thrown into the Devastator. Do you know what the Devastator is? GOD's blazing Hellfire. It burns them inside out.*

The government too should realise that the money collected is in the public interest and not squandered on themselves. People claim to be Muslim and yet are determined to disregard the warnings and admonitions of God. It is doubtful that they realise and even if they do, do they pay any heed to the fact that the money paid by the taxpayers is a sacred trust in the hands of the government. God says so clearly that man is commanded to render back his trust to whom they are due. In this context, it would mean spending the taxpayers' money only in the national interest. *Honesty & Justice Advocated [4:58] GOD commands you to give back anything the people have entrusted to you. If you judge among the people, you shall judge equitably. The best enlightenment indeed is what GOD recommends for you. GOD is Hearer, Seer.*

The main hurdle is human nature, its greed, self-centeredness and obsession with the comforts and pleasures of this material world. For fulfilling these demands we are prepared to go to any length to commit extravagance in all its innumerable forms in spite of clear cautions contained in the Holy Quran. [17:26-27] *You shall give the due alms to the relatives, the needy, the poor, and the traveling alien, but do not be excessive, extravagant. The extravagant are brethren of the devils, and the devil is unappreciative of his Lord.* People never tire of swearing by Islam day in and day out. Can there be a greater hypocrisy than this?

Sectarianism and Terrorism born of fanaticism is posing the biggest threat to the peace and order in society and state. This orgy of murder and killing, resulting from years of indoctrination for religious intolerance, obscurantism (a policy of opposition to enlightenment or the spread of knowledge or a deliberate act intended to make something obscure) and bigotry has already taken a huge toll of human lives. The tragic irony is that all these inhuman acts are being committed in the name of Islam

that, by its very definition, has its root word in peace. It should attach the highest sanctity to innocent life, human or non-human. In clear and blatant violation of God's explicit command not to fragment their religion, our so-called professional religious leaders have contributed to this exploitation of religion. *Religious Sects Condemned* [6:159] *Those who divide themselves into sects do not belong with you. Their judgment rests with GOD, then He will inform them of everything they had done.* [3:105] *Do not be like those who became divided and disputed, despite the clear proofs that were given to them. For these have incurred a terrible retribution.*

Both capitalistic and communist economies have utterly failed to bring about economic justice. Islam provides a solution to all social economic problems of the world. The western tendency to divorce religion from politics has reduced it to a meaningless ritual. Masha Allah, Islam has socio-economic justice inherent in it.

The Islamic concert of brotherhood cuts across all artificial barriers between humans and is great leveler too. It confers dignity to one who earns his or her living by honest employment of God given faculties no matter whether they are defined as intellectual or manual in nature. When Islam was practicing and preaching equality, many nations in Europe and Asia were highly inflexible and were divided into *Patricians* and *Plebeians*. In South Asia particularly the caste distinction gave the laborers the lowliest place in the social order. This difference persists despite all the efforts of great reformers. The Islamic order has liberalism and exalting effect and went a long way in raising the status of the workers.

Islam has completely banished the concept of untouchables and outcastes and has elevated man to a new stratum of human dignity. The Glorious Quran emphasises the value of noble deeds as the criterion of dignity. He alone is the most noble in the eyes of God who performs righteous deeds and is conscious of his responsibilities and duties to God and his fellow humans. Wealth, power and position are no hallmark of this greatness.

Sectarianism has long since assessed alarming proportion leading to and resulting in insane religious frenzy, violence, terrorism and shedding of innocent human blood. Take the *Indo-Pak-Bangladesh* subcontinent for example. There are two main divergent and different versions of Islam here. One version is the die-hard "Muslim" clerics who have a conservative, orthodox and hair-splitting frame of mind that put more stress on the legal and penal side of their brand of Islam. They are the "*Deobandis*". These misguided mullahs follow their favourite hobby of calling everyone who does not accede to their way of thinking as "*Kafirs*" of infidels. The

others are the “*Barelvīs*” who worship “saints” and believe in Sufism. Incidentally, the Hindus generally prefer these people because they present “the softer side of Islam”.

No government especially in the so-called Islamic states have made even meager efforts to promote the cause of Islamic moral values such as justice, tolerance, austerity, honesty and accountability. There is only chaos and instability in the so-called Islamic countries. As such unless the fear of answerability in the Hereafter grips the hearts of the ruling classes, massive problems will not be solved because there would be no real commitment to the ethical values of Islam. Teachings have to be propagated in the most tolerant and liberal approach and not through the ritualistic manner which is the way it is currently done in the Madressahs. These institutions are by and large shops of fanaticism and those who run them are mostly the source of sectarianism. They do not impart Islam’s higher ideals of truth and justice, of reason and moderation, of humanity and compassion, of human unity and equality. Instead, they produce types of mind and character that are extremely narrow, closed, intolerant and opinionated. They resort to physical punishment with rods and sticks, punishments that are repugnant to Islam’s teaching and to modern educational theories. There is a downward and most apparent slide and yet both the rulers and ruled keep denying their wrong beliefs and actions.

Take for example the proliferation of the so-called Madressahs in Pakistan. They run more as business concerns, trade unions, feudal fiefs and states within the state as no government dared ask them even the simple questions: what they are teaching, how they are teaching, what are their financial sources and what quality of human material they are producing? These institutions are not as much concerned with the promotion of Islamic wisdom and learning as with acquiring material benefits and a means of livelihood for the management of the organization.

First and foremost what we need is the total, implicit and unchangeable faith in the Oneness of God and in all His authority, power, glory and command over all creation, with motivation and implementation of His sovereign will. He alone is the Creator of good and evil and of every object in the whole universe. Belief that some other entity exists that has power other than God is to deny God’s supremacy. Similarly, a belief that even rare aberrations from natural law are brought about by some other energy is a sacrilege to His unparalleled power. God alone lays down all laws called natural laws and also guiding principles for humanity to follow if they wish to lead a peaceful, content and profitable life both now and in the Hereafter.

All Prophets, Messengers, Saints, Martyrs and godly people were people inspired by a purpose with unlimited faith in God. They took personal dangers, hardships,

difficulties and vicissitudes, defeats in their stride and victories in a good cause with equal fortitude and went on struggling for their missions. They had their courage of conviction with the strength vouchsafed by God for the great cause of triumph in the Name of God and the glory of the Faith. They had courage of conviction in God's Omnipotence, Omnipresence and Omniscience. For example, the setbacks at *Uhud* and the early reverses in the battle of *Hunayn* did not dishearten Prophet Mohammed.

There is a historical incident when Prophet Mohammed was immigrating to Medina and he and his companion *Abu Bakr* were hiding in the cave of *Saur* and the party in pursuit was very close to finding them. The Prophet calmly reassured his panicky companion. [9:40] *If you fail to support him (the messenger), GOD has already supported him. Thus, when the disbelievers chased him, and he was one of two in the cave, he said to his friend, "Do not worry; GOD is with us." GOD then sent down contentment and security upon him, and supported him with invisible soldiers. He made the word of the disbelievers lowly. GOD's word reigns supreme. GOD is Almighty, Most Wise.*

The decline of Muslim people can be directly traced to the time when they statered to gather *Hadith* and false *Sunnas*, the advent of "religious scholars", "mediators" with God, self-appointed saints etc. The Quran was and is virtually repudiated. If we can shun internecine antagonism and devote ourselves to the system laid down in the Quran, no new laws are needed nor any revision of old standing laws.

*Sarojini Naidu* was a famous poetess of Hyderabad. In a speech "*Ideals of Islam*" given to the *Young Men's Muslim Association, Madras, 1917* says: *It was the first religion that preached and practiced democracy, for in the mosque from the minaret the call to prayer is sounded and the worshippers are gathered together, the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant and the king kneel side by side and proclaim, "God alone is great." I have been struck over and over again by this indivisible unity of Islam that makes a man instinctively a brother. When you meet an Egyptian, an Algerian, an Indian, and a Turk in London, what matters that Egypt was the Motherland of one, and India the Motherland of another?*

At times, a question arises whether it is humanly possible to follow each and every command in the Holy Quran? Does its comprehensiveness make it impossible to attain? The second question that flows from the first is to what extent and on what pattern are variations permissible in this era?

Knowledge is required. Knowledge for humans spiritually, morally, physically and materially which makes us better persons now and forever. The Quranic view of

knowledge is so universal and cosmic that it includes not only the study of the verses but also the reading of the Signs of God in the heavens. God says in His Scripture that He would show His Signs to people in the Heavens and their own selves. *More Proofs [30:22] Among His proofs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors. In these, there are signs for the knowledgeable.*

Certainly, education is the basis of proper understanding without which there can be no real commitment to any cause. We have to ourselves set the best example to set the attitude and prepare the ground for the growth of moral values. There is a perpetual downward slide for without the right type of morally guided leadership no Islamic country can get out of the quagmire into which they have walked into with their eyes wide open.

It is high time that all responsible, saner and concerned intellectuals, writers, journalists, lawyers, teachers and leaders of public opinion raised their united voice against the menace of sectarian extremism and against its promoters who want to push us back to the Dark Ages. The Quran had brought humankind out of the darkness of ignorance and barbarism into the light of reason, knowledge and civilization. Islam has to be presented on rational lines. We need reconstruction of religious thought fearing God alone. We have to reflect to find a correct answer to a question involving ethical and legal issues or to arrive at a correct decision for some “grey areas” in the Quran. If a person, God willing, arrives at a correct decision, or finds a correct answer to a problem Subhan Allah and even if the answer or decision is not correct he still receives a reward because he has mentally exerted and strived and made an effort to please God.

There is unity and continuity in the evolution of societies and men and nations rise and fall subject to the decree of God 18:58, 22: 45, 26: 208, 38:2

In a largely agnostic world the challenges faced mankind today is how the dragon of materialism can be slain with the moral sword without causing earthly turmoil or injury to the human soul. How life can be enriched and preserved as a unity, without the artificial dualities of this world and the Hereafter, the heavenly and the terrestrial. The merger of the actual and the ideal and the sacred and the Profane. Rejecting the

allegedly unbridgeable gap, between Being and Thought. Life is neither the exclusively sacred nor wholly material but a combination of both.

The ideology of freedom not of enslavement- a practical way of life and not a veiled bid for power. A cosmopolitan look into obscurantism. A policy of opposition to enlightenment or the spread of knowledge A deliberate act intended to make something obscure There was the petrified dogmatic irrationistic view of the priest to which Europe was yoked for centuries with disastrous results. People picture the universe as a random, pessimistic degenerate one but actually it holds undreamt possibilities. We can build a religious edifice on hope and a bright future.