

Qhutbah, Insha Allah, Friday, Oct 26, 2007

Alhamdu lillah, wa ash hadu ala ila ha ill lallah

Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim

True Islam is universal and is for all humankind. Cultures are zonal and national. Hence, Islam cannot be equated with any particular culture, it is a transcultural message to all humans (and jinns) in all regions of the world inviting to God. It shapes the submitter's private and public life under God's Guidance and creates in them such consciousness that despite different hues and colours of their nations, all of them become "bricks in the wall" of the worldwide alliance of humanity.

We are not unfamiliar with the word "Islamic culture" which may offer some convenience to historians. Due to a repetitive broadcast of this term, nations of the world are prepared to tolerate it as a culture within its own regional borders, but its attempt to expand and draw attention to people beyond, is apprehended by them as an invasion on their own cultural complexion. Islam has no inclination to identify itself with any local or regional embodiments of its principles. Nevertheless, it has its own criteria to judge their effectiveness and lead humanity from darkness into the light. Every culture may follow and reflect God's Divine Advice and Decrees in accordance with its own patterns of social attitude and fashions.

There are so-called Muslims who are prone to believe in their social habits and etiquettes as norms of conduct with "Divine sanction". Masses and even "scholars" in the Indo-Pak Muslim arc consider using a spoon and fork, dining tables and chairs, playing of music during formal dinners as features of "Western culture".

Take marriage for example; it is a worldwide value and institution. Islam defines marriage as a contract of conjugal union between a male and female. It need not have witnesses but there must be a solemn pledge, mutual attraction and dowry. Beyond it, all rituals and ceremonies are accessory trimmings that belong to the customs of people and not to Submission, which is beyond it. Marriages are performed with paraphernalia of traditions and ceremonies that differ from culture to culture. All people take their own ways as natural and "divinely allowed" and those of others as distortions and deviations. In some regions, this system has been corrupted to the extent that it is tantamount to the purchase of girls and in others the purchase of boys. Both of them are outright evils that are to be rejected.

Islam is not against cultural expressions but it is for regulating them to keep them in reasonable limits. There will be group patterns, folklore, societal procedures and mannerisms of a culture but yet the Quran provides us obligatory criteria to save us from sin. Cultures are tolerable if everything is kept simple and not intricate. It should fulfill the purpose they are meant for without ill effects. They are required to spurn extravagance and wanton waste of wealth. The requisite is to be within everyone's capacity as a rule. They should be free from all aspects that promote disunion and division or other evils in our social environment.

As a global phenomenon, cultures overgrow and become domineering to their masses. Their manners and customs develop glamorous and frivolous crusts in the course of time under the lead of their elite. Instead of providing for people facilities for their mutual interaction and allow sound functioning of their basic institutions to merit their needs, cultures fatten and stagnate to the detriment of human interest. Consequently, we need a “supracultural” light to guide us. Submission, the religion of all Prophets and Messengers is from that light. It has neither “eastward nor westward” culture. It leads us from our narrow-mindedness to the concern of all humanity at our heart and makes it incumbent on us to view all our works and ways, patterns and methods by the right criteria bestowed upon us by the Most Gracious.

Righteousness Defined [2:177] Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or the west. Righteous are those who believe in GOD, the Last Day, the angels, the scripture, and the prophets; and they give the money, cheerfully, to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the traveling alien, the beggars, and to free the slaves; and they observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat); and they keep their word whenever they make a promise; and they steadfastly persevere in the face of persecution, hardship, and war. These are the truthful; these are the righteous.

Comparatively speaking, this is a long ayat but it is also distinctive that it summarizes the innermost essence of the guidance provided in the Quran. In spite of its very great importance, it remains as a matter of conjecture how many people who have “Muslim” names are even aware of the existence of this ayat, much less having absorbed its guidance, have moulded their lives in accordance with its directives. Apart from other matters, this ayat puts in its proper perspective the entire teaching of submission. All points touched upon in this ayat are vital. However, some of them need to be highlighted because over the course of time, Muslims have lost sight of them or have forgotten how critical these forms are for observance by those who claim to be “true Muslims”. First, there is a belief in the last Day, a concept very much central to the idea of being a Muslim. And yet one wonders that if the Muslims of today had a firm faith in the Hereafter, how can they have indulged in such flagrant violations of Islam’s moral code as bribery, nepotism, exploitation, prejudice and injustice without batting an eyelid. Then there is crucial importance of fulfillment of contacts that has been considered so essential that it is given a prominent place in the list of acts that constitute real righteousness.

An ironical fact is that many non-Muslims act upon this directive more scrupulously than the Muslims and this is partly the reason for their “success” in this world and our failure. Lastly, we are told about the importance of patience and firmness in the face of pain, adversity, suffering and panic. This sort of resolve can come only through a sincere belief in and a total commitment to all things mentioned in the ayat. Owing to this lack of commitment, the Muslim world today is unable to show steadfastness or patience in facing the crises that confront it on all sides. They haven’t even got the most fundamental truth right i.e. worship God alone though they say these words every day in their Salat.

There are so many ayats, which provide a bird’s eye view of the basic and essential elements in the message of Submission – we should worship God alone, follow no source besides the Quran and also follow the Messenger. Muslims who are so only in name and style of dress even though many of them do not seem to realise it read them day in and day out.

There was a time when the message of the Quran could only be publicized through word of mouth, because no other facilities were available for this purpose. Today, by the Grace of God, powerful amenities of electronic media are available to all of us. If we do not avail of them to propagate God's message to the world it is not just a failure to do our duty but it is also tantamount to blatant ungratefulness to God. To make effective use of these conveniences it is necessary to evolve a clear-cut policy regarding what, how and when we should publicize the word of God. We always see people publicising the words of individual human beings considered more essential than publicising the words of God, which is what the Holy Quran is. Do we realise that nothing can take the place of the words of God when it comes to true and clear-cut guidance on all aspects of our life in the world and for the Hereafter? [9:40] He made the word of the disbelievers lowly. GOD's word reigns supreme. GOD is Almighty, Most Wise.

We have to possess faith without any mental reservations of all fundamental matters mentioned in the Quran. If we pause and ponder over it, everything would be made clear to us on the real nature of our religion of monotheism. Unfortunately, this has been obscured for the Muslims by the rot of confusion and controversy during the course of centuries. Give and take in cultures is a good human value that opens the gates to cosmopolitanism, the personification of a genuine submitter who is a true servant of God.

Tubu ill Allah - Repent

Islam lays much greater emphasis on the spiritual aspects of human life than on the material and the mundane. At the same time, it has to be admitted that the Quran gives much attention to the day to day material life of humans and there are so many ayats in the Quran that touch upon purely economic matters like inheritance, loans, usury, weights and measures, witnesses and business ethics that it cannot be said that Islam has no views about economic development.

In support of this view, it has to be taken into account is that if there was no economic development where would the resources come from for helping through zakat and charity to the poor and needy?

We have to ask ourselves a question: is this life on earth the be-all and end-all of human existence or is there another dimension to it? If our reply to the first part of this question is in the affirmative, then we have opted out of submission even if we don't admit it because total and unquestioning belief of accountability in the Day of Judgment is one of the most fundamental aspects of the life of a submitter. On the other hand, if we do believe in the Hereafter, then our views and attitudes towards economic development become subject to certain conditions that we have to accept without any reservations.

The Quran encourages economic development but makes the process conditional on two very important requirements. Firstly, it must be undertaken in complete conformity and consistency with the moral value system given and secondly, the benefits should be so

widespread and equitable that not only all humans but also all creatures on this earth should benefit from it and receive their fair share. There must be justice; honesty and it must induce in all the beneficiaries' charity and austerity. [64:16] Therefore, you shall reverence GOD as much as you can, and listen, and obey, and give (to charity) for your own good. Anyone who is protected from his own stinginess, these are the successful ones. [64:17] If you lend GOD a loan of righteousness, He will multiply the reward for you manifold, and forgive you. GOD is Appreciative, Clement.

The proponents of economic development should realise that the objectives are not just for development's sake as is so clearly visible from the world of today, but progress for the sake of some clear cut objective covered by what was stated before. God has placed the whole world in our service and for our benefit. We have been given a noble responsibility for common welfare. God has endowed us with power, talent and authority to manage the affairs of this world. But we are also saddled with enormous responsibility and with multifarious duties in the respect of fellow human beings and as well as all God's creations. God has given us the faculty of initiative but our independent action should always perfectly display the Will of the Principal.

A very important Islamic value is justice including economic justice. Achieving economic development through such devious means as hoarding, profiteering, monopolization or exploitation of the weaker sections is totally unacceptable as far as Submission is concerned. If economic growth and development cannot be secured without resorting to unfair means, then it would be better to do without it. Integrity is one of the foremost requirements of a sound submitter society. We have to assiduously cultivate this trait.

Murder, Suicide, and Illicit Gains Prohibited [4:29] O you who believe, do not consume each others' properties illicitly - only mutually acceptable transactions are permitted. You shall not kill yourselves. GOD is Merciful towards you. Is this not what a large part of the so-called followers of the Islamic faith are doing?

The Quran is full of commandments exhorting us to give away in charity all that we can spare after meeting our essential requirements. All this, of course, after paying the necessary obligatory zakat. [2:219] They ask you about intoxicants and gambling: say, "In them there is a gross sin, and some benefits for the people. But their sinfulness far outweighs their benefit." They also ask you what to give to charity: say, "The excess." GOD thus clarifies the revelations for you, that you may reflect, [30:38] Therefore, you shall give the relatives their rightful share (of charity), as well as the poor, and the traveling alien. This is better for those who sincerely seek GOD's pleasure; they are the winners. *Stinginess Condemned* [17:29] You shall not keep your hand stingily tied to your neck, nor shall you foolishly open it up, lest you end up blamed and sorry.

While speaking about economic development we also have to examine a key element – austerity. It is a great misfortune that this has not been recognised by many Muslims. [17:26] You shall give the due alms to the relatives, the needy, the poor, and the traveling alien, but do not be excessive, extravagant. [17:27] The extravagant are brethren of the devils, and the devil is unappreciative of his Lord. [6:141] He is the One who established gardens, trellised and untrellised, and palm trees, and crops with different tastes, and olives,

and pomegranate - fruits that are similar, yet dissimilar. Eat from their fruits, and give the due alms on the day of harvest, and do not waste anything. He does not love the wasters.

The Quran's emphasis on austerity produces multipurpose benefits even from the slender angle of economic development. Firstly, it protects the society from all sorts of corruption and secondly it enables the people to build up a large savings that then can be utilised for spreading social welfare and for promoting economic development. It protects the economy from hoarding and the menace of inflation with escalating prices. Last but not least, it makes more money available for giving away in charity that is one of the greatest and most important forms of piety according to the Quran. Thus, austerity facilitates the process of economic development and betterment in many decisive areas. Unfortunately, people tend to believe that austerity is linked with hermitism that is something God does not ask for from us.

Deterioration of Religion [57:27] Subsequent to them, we sent our messengers. We sent Jesus the son of Mary, and we gave him the Injeel (Gospel), and we placed in the hearts of his followers kindness and mercy. But they invented hermitism which we never decreed for them. All we asked them to do was to uphold the commandments approved by GOD. But they did not uphold the message as they should have. Consequently, we gave those who believed among them their recompense, while many of them were wicked.

You cannot follow one commandment only to break another. It is obvious that until we are prepared to forgo some of our pleasures and curtail the large amount of extravagant expenditures on securing social prominence and fulfilling our insatiable egos, we cannot fulfill one of the most important directives of God and get anywhere near the required mode of economic development.

A big idol has appeared in the form of G.N.P. that is worshipped day and night by our planners, economists and financiers. This mad infatuation with G.N.P. has created numerous problems for humankind, the most notable being environment problems which are threatening to destroy the earth. Unless world leaders realise their responsibility that we are but custodians of God's world and embrace the moral values promulgated by Submission, it is difficult to envision how the process of economic development can become a blessing as it rightly should be rather than be a curse for large sections of humanity which it has become today.

[103:1] By the afternoon. [103:2] The human being is utterly lost. [103:3] Except those who believe and lead a righteous life, and exhort one another to uphold the truth, and exhort one another to be steadfast.