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## THE WORLD OF ISLAM TO-DAY: SOCIAL STABILITY AND CHANGE

The most unchanging law of the Universe is the law of change. In this world of matter and motion nothing appears to constitute a fact, because a 'fact' implies permanence while the universal law of change is the denial of permanence. Since change is everywhere so everything seems to be in process, in making or in a becoming state. There is nothing as may be called a finished 'good' or a complete perfect unit. That which does not change, in fact, does not evolve or move on towards the 'Straight Path of Everlasting Bliss.' To remain static is, therefore, to lie dead as a stone. We call a stone dead because in spite of its huge weight and massiveness it cannot move of its own accord; but we call a tiny little ant as a living creature simply because it can move about freely and direct its own course of action. A machine also moves, and moves faster than even living objects, but its movement is within the control of somebody else and not itself; so, in spite of its speed and power it is deprived of the great blessing of 'life'. Thus, we come to the conclusion that life is a self-controlled, purposeful change; or, in other words, it is a process, a movement, a flux directed consciously towards a predetermined goal.

All progress may be said to be a change for the better, but every change is not progress. To be progressive all changes must be subjected to a full play of purposive free-will. But, then, the question poses itself as to who is going to assign a purpose to the human free-will — the individual himself or the society of which the individual is the most integral part. Unfortunately we are living in an age dominated by individualistic philosophies of the West born of competing rather than cooperating tendencies, which give a narrow and one-sided interpretation of human life and worth. These modern so-called 'isms' are the necessary outcome of the frustration caused by industrialisation of Europe and the consequent emergence of over-socialised States. To counter-balance the exploitative trends of capitalism these new philosophic conjectures have gone

to the other extreme of shifting the emphasis from the society to the individual and of treating him as a separate entity or an original, primary and causative unit in the human affairs. As a result of these tendencies undue stress is laid on egoistic consciousness or a personal independence for individual development as compared to group loyalty or to society's advancement. In the eyes of Islam each individual is unique, the best of Allah's creation possessing invaluable capabilities and worthy of all honour and respect. He is, no doubt, a most valuable asset but without social contact, without cooperation, without love it may be possible to exist but it is certainly impossible to live. Dependence and interdependence are the indispensable conditions of life. There is always an unconscious recognition of the close dependency of everyone's happiness upon the happiness of all, and a sense of justice and equity which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own. Even in the Darwinian Theory evolution is a process which favours cooperating rather than disoperating groups and "fitness" is a function of the group as a whole rather than that of separate individuals. The more cooperating the group the greater is the fitness for survival. As man is the only being to be able to direct his own evolvment, therefore he possesses the most dynamic potential for growth and development.

Development is of two kinds—the incidental and the telic. Incidental progress is mainly the result of chance or a trial and error method. It is, by its very nature, individualistic because it lacks the wisdom of a group and is consequently ill-planned, without a broad-based common purpose. It is, therefore, slow, toilsome, uncertain and short-lived progress. It can at the most satisfy a few men's desire of rising in the world rather than the desire of the whole society of rising with the world. Telic progress is the result of a long-term planning of a composite group with deliberate collective attempts to harness nature to man's collective purposes.

No amount of casuistry can abstract the individual from the society which produces and nourishes him; nor a society from the individual of which he is the active, working part. They are not separate entities mutually different from each other; they are, rather the complementary aspects of the same, but temporarily differentiated, whole. The Muslim Ummah considers both the individual and itself as the cause and effect of each other; hence inseparable. Every Muslim has the relationship of a real brother with every other Muslim of the world, irrespective of racial, occupational or geographical distances. The individual can never tell as to which quality of his is the outgrowth of his distinctive ego and

which is the result of his social inter-relationship. Unlike most human societies the Muslim Ummah is bound by Quranic injunctions to cater to all the material, moral, intellectual and spiritual needs of the individuals and develop to the maximum capacity each personality according to its natural endowments purely on basis of respect and honour: "We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our creation." (17 : 70) This individual development is subservient to the great purpose of Allah's Plan of man's evolution towards an everlasting life of justice, harmony, right proportion and an abiding peace. The Muslim Ummah's unflinching belief in one God virtually implies a belief in the unity of the whole mankind.

There are only two Nations in the world, according to the Holy Quran:—those who believe and those who do not believe. Those who believe, or the Muslims, are those who submit their whole selves to the supreme will of Allah. They have one and only one common ideology to which they are committed for their lives. This common ideology ties up the Muslim Ummah in the unbreakable bondage of 'Brotherhood.' It is, therefore, this permanent value of a universal import that gives solidarity to the great Ummah and an abundance of strength and courage to meet effectively all the threatening challenges.

"To all are assigned degress according to the deeds which they have done," says the Holy Quran vide verse 46: 19, "in order that Allah may recompense their deeds which they have done." Thus, the individual differences become an asset of great value for the entire Ummah and, allegorically speaking, the eye of the lame becomes the eye of the blind and the legs of the blind become the legs of the lame. This unifying process of the inter-change of capabilities, then, enables the blind and the lame both to come triumphantly out of the blazing fire of death and destruction. The freedom of a solitary self cannot fructify unless it recognizes the freedom of all other selves also. The interplay of these two freedoms brings forth unity of purpose, unity of action, and a unification of energy from separate, isolated parts to an organized, unified, integrated whole.

The Holy Quran lays the greatest stress on individual responsibility for the achievement of common collective goals. It says, "Man can have nothing but that which he strives for. So strive all of you in all the virtues as if in a race." (53 : 39)

In the World of Islam today the solidarity of the Muslim Ummah is not only well-nigh in sight, by the grace of Allah, it is getting stronger

and stronger with every fresh challenge that confronts it in ever new form on the political horizon of the world. At this important critical juncture, sufficient are for us the truly inspiring words of Allah that, "We have made you an Ummah, justly balanced, that you be witness for other nations and the Rasool (peace be upon him) a witness to yourselves." (12 : 143) To be a witness for other nations is indeed, a great honour, a great blessing and at the same time a great responsibility. Allah has rightly chosen this great Ummah for this splendid work, and to complete his blessings He has favoured us with an unfailing guidance also, which is:—

"Hold all together by the rope which Allah stretches for you and be not divided among yourselves. Remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you, that you were enemies (to each other); but He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace you became brothers; you were on the brink of Fire and Allah saved you from it. Thus, Allah makes His Signs clear to you that you may be guided." (3 : 103)

Certainly no guide-line better than this can be imagined. The relationship of *Akhawat* based on the *Kalimah-i-Tayyabah* is a relationship which rises much above the hollow foundations of race, colour, country or worldly status. The solidarity of the Ummah is much beyond these ephemeral limitations.

It can be asserted without fear of contradiction that an absolute faith in Allah is the greatest propelling force that can steer the Ummah safely through troubled waters. The hope for a better future rests on our faith in a value system of which there is no parallel in the world. For reasons known to us all, we have not remained in close touch with this value system for some time during the past. We will have to come back to it with a change in our outlook. We will have to change all the patterns of our past behaviour, because no progress is possible without this necessary change. "Verily Allah will never change the condition of a people until they change it themselves within their own souls," says the Holy Quran (13 : 11). "Similarly Allah will not change the grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their own souls." (8 : 53) With a full belief in the infallibility of this promise as well as a warning we must march on the right and straight path of peace, security and progress all together 'as if in a race'.

As has been said above, the Muslims all over the world constitute one Nation. To judge the progress and prosperity of a nation the best criterion with us is the Holy Quran. In the light of this sure guidance we may lay down the following general principles to gauge our progress:—

(1) The extent to which individuals and peoples are able to cope with their physical environment.

(2) The amount and variety of economic goods available for maintaining a respectable plane of living for all the members of the nation. It may include food, raiment, surplus, as also the means of their production, tools, machinery, work processes and such other things that are necessary for self-sufficiency.

(3) Advancement of the media of social-intercommunication such as language, printing, spreading public opinion etc.

(4) The state of health, knowledge of diseases and of the principles of longevity etc. including provision for games and sports.

(5) Maintenance of religio-social institutions like the mosques, the graveyards, the courts of justice, places of historical importance, government offices, philanthropic organizations, family relationships etc.

(6) The development of literature and fine arts.

(7) The status of learning at the common man's level as well as the facilities provided for higher research in all the branches of knowledge. This may include adult education programmes not only for literacy but also for in-service and post-graduation level.

(8) The level of ethical practices, particularly of the masses.

In short, to bring ourselves up to the expectations of a strong Ummah we will have to re-assess our assets and liabilities, pool all our resources and take stock of our potentialities. This presupposes re-organization of our symbolic institutions right from the road-side mosques to the most sacred centre of our unity and solidarity, the Ka'abatullah. Islam, being the universal social order, encompasses all aspects of human life: social, cultural, economic, educational, spiritual, material, political, in fact all that concerns a full vigorous life. Thus a reorganization of the existing institutions necessarily means having common art, common culture, common language, common trade and commerce, common defence, common economy etc. Patience and perseverance bring firmness in determination and strength in national character. Those who patiently persevere, on them there is no fear, nor do they grieve. Let us once again bring to mind the golden rule of unity set by Allah for our mountain-like solidarity in the following verse of the Holy Quran and pray to All-Mighty Allah to give us the strength and courage to work selflessly for the great cause of our national solidarity:—

“Obey Allah and the Rasool (peace be upon him) and fall not into disputes, lest your power (the favourable wind of a sailing ship) depart. Be patient and persevering, for Allah is with those who patiently persevere.” (8 : 46)