

ISLAM: THE ALTERNATIVE WAY TO PEACE AND PROSPERITY

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The modern world has achieved tremendous success in terms of material development. It has provided better living conditions to human beings and devised better means of satisfying human urges. Human life, in nutshell, is now considered more and more comfortable. Human beings have developed new dimensions of knowledge, achieved excellence in science and technology and tried their best to make their stay on earth more comfortable and this world a place worth living in. Humans have, so to speak, captured nature, been to the moon, flown in the air, changed their physical surroundings according to their desires and ambitions and developed sophisticated machines and tools to enable them to do their work in the most effective manner and live in this world in the most comfortable way. They can travel long distances within the shortest time possible, communicate their message and ideas to others in an effective way in no time at all, live in palatial and luxurious houses and enjoy the utmost freedom. In spite of all these achievements, ease and dexterity, comfort and opulence, pleasure and enjoyment, humans have failed miserably to put a stop to the exploitation, suppression and subjugation of others as well as the shedding of blood of their brethren. They have failed to distribute social privileges to their brethren in an equitable way and to live in peace and harmony with others. They are unable to create a society that honours others' right to exist and which provides them the full opportunity to lead a dignified life. They have turned this beautiful earth into an arena of conflict and competition where everybody is trying to grab the privileges at the expense of others. In this attempt, they do not even hesitate to build their palaces over the dead bodies of their fellow beings. The environment in which modern humans live is not at all free of tension and turmoil but is full of friction and tumult.

Humans in the so-called modern developed world harbor great anxieties and worries about acquiring more and more wealth and power and suffer apprehension and perturbation about losing what they have. Their excessive concern about themselves, their kith and kin and their work to gain benefit creates tension in their minds, results in loss of sound sleep and adversely affects their health. The reason is that they have unbridled desires for not only delicious food, pleasant drink, a comfortable house, love and unrestricted sex, but also a desire to wield power, dominate others, possess the utmost wealth, enjoy the utmost privileges, subjugate others and deprive them of their social privileges. Their days and nights are spent thinking about, devising and carrying out strategies to satisfy their desires and fulfil their ambitions at all costs. In fact, there is no control on human desires that often go wilder and wilder and press for their satisfaction even at the cost of the community and social interest. Human efforts in this direction damage the very fabric of social relations, spoil human values and destroy the dignity and

probity of humanity. If we have to live in this world with honour and dignity, peace and tranquility, cooperation and coordination, we have to rein in our desires and ambitions, put them within legitimate limits, take into consideration the needs and rights of our fellow beings, apply certain rules and regulations to our behaviour, lead life in an appropriate and befitting way compatible with life-ennobling values, excellent morals and manners. A system that channels human potentialities towards these goals, provides an arrangement for peaceful and dignified living, stands for righteousness, virtuousness, decency and nobility, exalts the position of humanity, enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong is embodied in Islam.

Islam is a Divine system revealed by the Creator, Master and Cherisher of the world to guide His most superior creation, the human being. It is, thus, a genuine set-up, a *modus operandi* to live in this world in the most appropriate way. It is quite different from all the man-made systems which are, in one way or the other, developed to satisfy the human ego and urges, give privileges to one group and deprive others. They have human limitations, are unable to create a healthy society and lead humans to betterment and refinement. The importance of the Islamic way of life is that it recognizes the absolute and ultimate reality which is none other than God, the most Supreme, Powerful, Exalted, Knowledgeable and Wise. He created the universe and things that lie between the heavens and the earth for a distinct purpose, set up certain rules and an established pattern according to which all objects work and perform their roles necessary to operate the universe. Every object works within its own limit, never deviates from the path or violates the law. He also provided human beings a complete and adequate guidance to lead a peaceful and meaningful life. He put certain restraints and limits on human actions which should not be violated if one wants to achieve success. No animate or inanimate object except humans strays from the path and exceeds the limits prescribed by God. Humans have been given free will and the faculty of understanding so that they may think, understand and judge what is right and wrong, select the end of life as well as the means to obtain it, what they have to do in this world and what they have to abstain from. The Lord of the universe time and again instructs humans to follow the Divine path, surrender to His will so that they may lead a moral life, satisfy their urges in an appropriate way, observe the limits prescribed for them, take into consideration others' rights and not usurp them, establish peace on earth and, thus, maintain the dignity of humanity. If humans apply their faculty of understanding in the correct way, ponder over the functioning of the universe, observe the occurrence of the natural events and take help from Divine guidance, comprehend reality, follow the Lord's commandments, they will get peace and prosperity and extend them to others also. In case they act based on their own will, to satisfy their egos, gratify their urges and get momentary physical pleasure, cross all limits and ignore the Divine path, they transgress the basic principle of existence and face destruction of their own lives and devastation of all of humanity. Human knowledge and wisdom are not at all perfect, and they have their own limitations. They are, by and large, affected by human desires, urges and their mental set-up. The result is that humans can never attain the perfect way of life by their own thinking and interpretation of the physical and social realities. This is the reason why Allah (swt), the Most Wise and Knowledgeable, revealed true and perfect guidance (the Qur'an) to human beings and

sent the Prophet Muhammad (saw) to show the right path, lead a righteous life, satisfy human desires decently, use natural resources properly and operate in this world in a dignified and civilized way appropriate to the traits of humanity. This will, of course, elevate humans above all creatures in the universe. Thus, Allah (swt) bestows upon humankind a complete system of life, and sets His limitations and rules which are all beneficial and rewarding to humankind. It is clearly said that “these are the limits set by Allah, so do not approach them (Qur’an 2:187)”. It is, further, emphasized that “these are the limits ordained by Allah, so do not transgress them. If any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah, such persons wrong themselves and as well as others (Qur’an 2:229)”. This indicates that humans have to follow certain restraint in their behaviour, they should seek what is ordained by Allah (swt) and not go beyond that because that will be disastrous for all of the human community. These limitations enrich humanity and lead to prosperity.

Modern societies in the wake of development are facing various kinds of social problems – social unrest, political instability, poverty, homicide, killings, drug addiction, alcoholism, family break-ups, juvenile delinquency, suicides, homosexuality, prostitution and the most dangerous Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids). All these problems are the result of human efforts to satisfy their desires at the maximum level at the cost of others and against the interest of society, violating all decorum and decency. In the name of freedom, modern humans not only hamper and destroy the freedom of others, but also cross all limits of civilized life and perform most the undesirable and heinous acts. In the case of sex, humans who are proud of their civilization perform such acts and go to such extents which even animals do not dare to do.

Sexual behaviour in the form of rape, prostitution, homosexuality and sodomy is the obvious result of lust and the perverted thinking and attitude of humans. They do not get contentment, pleasure and peace of mind and body as expected from the proper and legitimate way of satisfying their sexual urges. Instead, they create disorder and distraction in the body and cause dangerous diseases like AIDS that has taken thousands of lives and is still spreading with great magnitude. It is predicted that some nations might lose as much as forty per cent of their population over the next few years because of the Aids virus. According to the World Health Organization, Aids cases are rising in many parts of the world. The victims are usually homosexuals and prostitutes and the disease is the byproduct of sodomy, homosexuality and prostitution. In spite of this devastating effect, this undesirable sexual behaviour is not only condoned and in some cases legalized but has become a worthwhile and lucrative source of modern living. The result is that society is heading towards the degeneration of moral standards and a dignified way of living. The Prophet Muhammad (saw) warned people of the dangerous consequences of sexual permissiveness at a time when they had no idea of Aids and other dangerous diseases. He said that sexual permissiveness when it spread among people, the infectious and killer diseases as well as illnesses not previously found in their ancestors would also spread among them. Islam presents a system in which there is no place for such disgraceful behaviour. It creates such a situation, inculcates such discipline and instils such views among

humans that they can satisfy their needs and desires in an appropriate way that gives them complete satisfaction, peace of mind and strength of body. This way of living lays the foundation of a sophisticated and elegant civilization and places humanity on the high pedestal of nobility and righteousness. Thus, Islam condemns and rejects the promiscuous sexual relationship outright, considers it a grave sin liable to severe punishment because of its gravity and destructive nature. It imposes certain restraints on human behaviour so that it may not go to the extreme. Islam presents a middle path, a balanced system, equilibrium between human needs and those of society for better and more refined living. According to Muhammad Qutb, “in trying to meet the genuine requirements of man Islam affects a perfect balance between the requirements of his body and soul, reason and spirit and in no case allows one side to predominate the other”. So Islam neither allows celibacy nor promiscuous sexual relationships. Islam recognizes the genuine desires of human beings: the desire for food, clothes and sex but imposes certain limits on them so that they may be satisfied in a reasonable and dignified way. This is the reason why Islam does not allow celibacy because it is against human nature as well as negating and rescinding humans’ role of procreating. On the other hand, Islam does not allow humans to submit themselves to lust and desires as we find in contemporary civilization. Islam prohibits promiscuous sex practices like adultery, prostitution and fornication and gives severe punishments to those who commit them because they are shameful deeds, social carnage and serious crimes. The Qur’an says, “Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)” (Quran, 17:32).

The other problem which affects social life and endangers the stability of society is family break-up. It is increasing day by day in the modern world particularly in Western societies. The bitter truth of the modern world is that it has spoiled the sanctity and inviolability of the family institution. The family institution nowadays is not only disintegrating but is also losing its character, disposition and form and is unable to discharge the functions assigned to it. It is, in fact, in an anomic situation. First, it was split up into nuclear families, then illegitimate groups of persons living as husband and wife without marriage and further into single families. Those who are living in families, by and large, face tension, conflict and do not have peace, happiness and contentment which are the characteristics of family life. The continuity of the conflict, contrasting attitude, behaviour and differentiation result in a situation where husband and wife break family ties and live separately. This catastrophe not only destroys the lives of two adults but also spoils the lives of children who often go astray, revolt against social norms and turn into deviationists. The reason for this disaster is the individualistic and egoistic attitude of the couple, lack of understanding, and mutual confidence in each other, mistrust, not taking care of each other and not living for others. Islam presents a viable solution and the best way to make the family institution more effective to establish peace and tranquility among its members and produce individuals with potential. First, it reminds persons of the purpose of life which is to obey Allah (swt), live according to His instructions and serve Him. Family is the means to develop potentiality and competence through cooperation and mutual help of each other to discharge one’s function as vicegerent, and submit to the Divine will. Second, it instills the

feeling in the minds of the couple that they are dependent, and that their dignity and survival depend upon each other. This is the reason why the Qur'an declares that they are the garments of each other. Third, Islam prescribes the rights and duties of the husband and the wife which they have to perform in order to seek the pleasure of Allah (swt) and lead a happy life. Last but not least, in case of serious dispute the community members and close relatives are duty-bound to pacify the couple before the friction between them becomes serious. It is also provided to appoint two arbitrators, one from each side, to settle the matter, and to find peace and reconciliation between them. The purpose is to maintain the sanctity and integrity of the institution for the peaceful and contented life of the couple and the adequate training and socialization of the offspring.

Islam is a comprehensive and valued way of life. Its beauty is that it is based on justice and righteousness. Islam impresses upon its members to do justice in all aspects of their lives: eating, drinking, sleeping, establishing relations with others, performing their roles as well as governing the private and public affairs. Justice, characterized as '*adl*' in Islam, refers to the division between two things equally or keeping a balance between the two. It indicates fairness in living in this world: performing actions and dealing with situations and living beings. The Qur'an, time and again says, "And when ye judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice (Qur'an, 4:58)". Islam not only instructs believers to do justice among themselves but also urges them to do justice to all animate and inanimate objects, all living beings even in the case of their enemies. The Qur'an exhorts, "And let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice (Qur'an, 5:8)". The Islamic concept of justice demands that what we require for ourselves we should also give to others. This is the basis on which the Islamic community came into being where believers were not only concerned with their own needs but were also duty-bound and obliged to look after one another and to be responsible for the well-being of the whole community. It is justice to provide equal opportunities to all members to develop their personalities and enjoy the privileges of society.

The Islamic principle of justice and righteousness, if followed in their true sense, will prevent crime and activities damaging the lives and property of individuals. Most of the criminal activities take place in the modern world because of the injustice done to a section of the people and depriving them of their fundamental rights. The contemporary world has witnessed extreme forms of violence and so-called terrorism that have taken a lot innocent lives but men of power have shut their eyes to the basic causes of the problem, that is, injustice, deprivation of people's basic rights of existence, not allowing people to live according to their own preferences, and imposing a particular view on weak and downtrodden people.

The holocaust of the modern world is the division of people and nations into high and low, rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged. Though the modern civilization claims and preaches equality, freedom, liberty and human rights, all these soothing terms are meant for the affluent section and dominant group of society. They are not extended to the weak, poor and persons without power. The affluent and powerful group gives the impression that what they do, what

they cherish and what system they have is correct and preferable, others are wrong and they have only to follow the affluent and their view and culture. Islam proclaims equality in the true sense based on noble principles and the well being of humanity. It treats all humans as equal, the progeny of the same father and mother, having equal rights and deserving the same privileges. They are the 'family of Allah (swt)' and thus are 'equal like the teeth of a comb'. They are the vicegerents of Allah (swt) and, as such, have to follow His commandments, implement His system, look after all of humanity and establish peace on earth.

Islam, thus, lays the foundations of a distinct civilization, a complete and thorough system encompassing all aspects of human life based on high standard of morals, virtues and values as well as on practical considerations. It develops human potentialities, promotes human dignity, decency and rectitude. It assures the well-being of humanity and affirms that it is not at all possible without spiritual and moral development. Islam as a system of life descends from Allah (swt), and, as such, is indeed just, natural, humane, perfect, absolute and in the best interests of human beings. It leads humans to peace, prosperity and success in this world and in the hereafter.