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Westernised Muslims

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“My Lord! I ask You for beneficial knowledge, and I seek refuge with You from non-beneficial knowledge.”

Muslims all over the world are faced with the problem of readjustment to the environment. We are unable to find a solution to our present decline and degradation, whether we belong to South Africa, Pakistan or the Arab world or anywhere else. Muslims find themselves in critical conditions and are even insulted. A Muslim poet asked: "What has happened to us that today we are looked down upon by the other communities of the world? We have become like international mercenaries and outcasts." Despite the fact that we are seven hundred million in the world and the inheritors of the glorious history of Islam, we enjoy no status in the international affairs of the world.

Although we take pride in the fact that we are the *muwahidun* — the believers in the One God — we generally have a wrong notion of Allah. This sounds like an amazing statement for we are believers in the One True God and His Unity but unconsciously, we believe that He is capricious and not a righteous God! Let me explain further. The Holy Quran says that Allah (swt) created this universe with all the laws that govern everything in it, but He has imposed it upon Himself to follow His Law. The Qur'an says:

Say, my Lord is on the straight path.

(Q 11: 5 6)

Like we have been asked to pray, Allah (swt) is saying about Himself that He is also on the straight path. He is not unjust and does not indulge in favouritism. Here, Islam negates the concept in the Bible that the children of Israel are the chosen people of God.

Allah has made the Law and sent the Guidance. Whoever follows the Guidance is dear to God, whoever does not follow the Guidance whether a Muslim or anything else has absolutely no status in the presence of God. Unfortunately, we proclaim that our God is Righteous but we unconsciously believe He is not because we believe He has chosen heaven for us, and hell for others.

This ugly theory has no basis in the Qur'an, nor the hadith and this point of view has brought calamity to the Muslims. If only they remembered that "dunya" is "dar al-amal" (house of action) — the place where a person earns heaven on the basis of faith and action. And not on the basis of superstition, ceremonialism, ritualism or petty bickering on theological issues. Salvation is not on the basis of formalism and externalism but on the basis of the transformation of the human personality, on the human social order, and on the basis of the spirit of iman billah (faith in Allah). It is also based on the spiritual orientation of life, to follow the divine law and the commandments given by the Holy Prophet(s).

The Qur'an says:

It is not possible for a true believer, whether male or female, to have his or her own freedom of choice after he or she has been given a command by Allah and His Beloved Prophet. (Q 33:36)

Islam means discipline which must be followed, Islam is not merely a signboard. Imagine a shop with signboards but without commodities. Can there be any business? The Muslims — especially those who claim to be religious — seem to believe that only signboards can do the entire job!

Travel to the east or the west as I have, and observe the different communities whether they are majorities or minorities and you will notice a crisis of moral character in the Muslim world. Muslims are not what they claim to be, they tend to be hypocritical, whether conscious or unconscious.

Why do we shed crocodile tears because we have fallen so low? We are going to fall lower and Allah Almighty is not going to forgive us, because He is the Righteous God and not capricious. He has to run the entire cosmos with everything in it, and remember that He created all human beings. You and I can take pride that we are Muslims, but remember that we are Muslims by accident.

How many of us devoted ourselves to acquiring education about Aristotle, Plato and Kant, but ignored Islam? Therefore, we remain Muslims because our parents were Muslims. Bear in mind that Almighty Allah has not promised anything to this category of Muslims. Promises have only been given to the believers — the mu'minin. History bears testimony to it. During the Makkan period of the Holy Prophet's (P.b.u.h.) life, when the handful of Muslims were being persecuted, Almighty Allah's promise came to them:

Allah promises to those who cultivate iman and who lead lives of purity, of moral integrity and the grandeur of character, He promises to them you will be the greatest dominant force in this earth. (Q 24:55)

The infidels of Makkah jeered at them and said that: "Your leader wants to boost your morale and holds out false promises." But history tells us that this small group of Muslims became the master force in the world and remained the supreme political and ideological power for centuries! This was the promise that was fulfilled, and the Holy Qur'an says:

Honour belongs to Allah and His Prophet and to the believers. (Q 63:8)

to those who possess a dynamic, loving and vibrant faith in Allah. To them belong the honour and if we do not have any honour in this world, then we are not Mu'minin. The promise came, but not to the Muslim, not to those who pay lip service, not a mere intonation, nor a spiritless proclamation of the shahadah.

Shall we remain in this state? Is it really worthy of a human being to stay in this abject condition? Do we realise that we have reached the rockbottom of our degradation? The proof of it is that the most persecuted, the most hated, the smallest ideological minority in the world, that is, the Jews, snatched away from you your *qiblah al-awwal* (Jerusalem), surrounded on all sides by so-called Muslims!

Those Muslims are helpless in spite of the fact that they are begging for help from the Soviet Union, China and elsewhere but still cannot do anything! What a contrast between that handful of Muslims in Makkah, to whom that promise was made and fulfilled, against the heaviest odds. What a pity for us that we are nine hundred million and we cannot do anything!

This hopeless apathy is a measure of our iman. We have no iman! And we still believe that the system of guidance, the Qur'an and sunnah, is true! That is the biggest tragedy. We have no iman but we believe; hence we cannot say on the Day of judgement that we did not know. We will be told: "You knew it, but you did not follow My guidance, you followed your hawa al-nafs, your baser or lower self! You followed the devil."

Allah has promised and proclaimed:

Whoever revolts against the devil and establishes his loyalty towards Allah, he obtains a support which will never fail him.

(Q 2:256)

Why is all the support failing us? Don't we think? Don't we have minds? Have we become so foolish and ignorant not to understand and this at least?

My dear brothers and sisters, Islam is the alchemy that transforms all the base metals into gold, and it has proved itself to be the alchemy. It was sent by Allah to the most backward people in the world — the Arabs of those days. Thomas Carlyle in his *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* said: "They were a people who made no mark in known history, those nomadic Arabs, a handful in number, filthy and barbaric in character. To them was sent Allah's greatest prophet, and within twenty years, this crowd of barbarians was transformed into a group of supermen!" And they challenged the entire world of batil (of all that was false) and they conquered the world and they established the truth! What are we doing? If my remarks sound bitter I ask pardon. But ask the doctors – a patient who suffers from malaria should not be given anything that is sweet - the remedy for malaria is bitter quinine!

Another important point raised was that the Muslims in the Republic of South Africa are living in a western-oriented country. They are a minority and living under a non-Muslim majority. This problem is not confined to South Africa only. It is to be found in every Muslim community, even in Pakistan, which is a country with an overwhelming Muslim majority. The Muslims are leaving the old culture and running after the new, to whatever country you may go. It is not a case of being a minority. They are doing the same things in Pakistan and on a stupendous scale in Turkey, Iran and in the Arab Middle East.

If you go there you will find that they are more westernised than the western people. There are people who condemn them - fortunately or unfortunately. I don't condemn them because there are certain Laws of the historical process called in the philosophy of history — the principle of historical compulsion. And this principle claims that however much a community may try to behave

in a certain manner, the historical forces that are around it, compel it to do as they want it to do."

A community can make itself immune to outside influences only when it is definitely superior and more virile than those other communities that are there in the environment. But if the community is docile, if the community has no law to govern its life, if it is bankrupt in respect of its character and its ideals, then it is, as the saying goes: "The devil occupies the vacant home."

A community which has no positive idealism and is not struggling to achieve the goal of that idealism, is a passive community. And the nature of God's Law is (the Sociological Law) that all human beings are moving ahead like a caravan. This caravan of humanity is moving all the time and whatever portion of the caravan becomes stagnant or stationary, or those who do not want to move, the law is that they will be thrown back. They will not be allowed to be stationary but will be trampled. This is the law.

What we have been doing is that we have left the mission of Islam long ago. We were not inspired by the Islamic Idealism anymore. Our plans were not what the Holy Prophet (P.b.u.h.) gave us. We were indulging in all sorts of unIslamic activities even before these Western powers came to wrest away our sovereignty in Africa and Asia. After they came, they tried their best to de-Islamise us. It was a duty to themselves that their potential enemies should be crushed. They did just that and we cannot complain.

In the meantime, another tragedy has happened. Islam, like every other religion or system, comprises certain components. The first being the values of Islam, from which emerge the norms, and then the laws. Then follows the rules and regulations such as etiquette — personal, religious and social.

What do we find in the Muslim world of today? The concept of values and norms have been forgotten. We stand by the Law. Our 'ulama' also study only the Law, the fiqh. This Law is given to the people and when that Law degenerates among the people, then only etiquette is left. How far have we gone in this?

While in New York, I had the opportunity of addressing a group of new converts to Islam. As I entered the hall, I thought that all the people present were villagers from Pakistan. I could never dream that the Afro-Americans could dress and behave like that. I inquired from the chairman and he confirmed that they were all Americans and none were "imported" from Pakistan. After the lecture, I invited all those people to me and asked them to explain why they were wearing that type of dress. They replied that it was the symbol of piety. They said that great Islamic workers came there and taught them that if they wanted to be really good Muslims in the eyes of God, they should wear a triangular pyjamas, the quadrangular kurta and the hexagonal cap!

It took me a long time to convince them that they were committing a crime by wearing that dress in America. Firstly, no dress has been prescribed by the

Holy Prophet (P.b.u.h.). He only prescribed rules or decency about dress. Secondly, if you wear this strange type of dress then you are a walking propaganda against Islam among the Americans. If the condition to become a Muslim is to wear those clothes then the other Americans would refuse to become Muslim.

The problem is not unsolvable. If we go to the Qur'an and hadith, we'll find that many things we think are compulsory are in fact not compulsory. Islam is a universal religion, which has come for all ages. Students of sociology know that the cultural pattern changes with the industrial pattern. The change in the cultural pattern leads to a change in the psychological pattern. The Holy Prophet (P.b.u.h.) was aware of all that. He did not give this type of religious outlook that we have developed. It is we who are responsible for it.

Islam begins with the values and the moral life is the basis. Of course, the moral life is built on the spiritual orientation of life, in order to acquire the purity of motive, as the Holy Prophet(s) said:

The higher the morals of a person, the better is his iman.

The measure of a person's Iman is his moral integrity and his behaviour. It is the moral life that is the foundation of the Islamic life. The moral life — as prescribed by Islam — can be followed and practised fully in every society, whether that society is South African, German, or American. This is what makes a Muslim!

The other external factors vary from community to community, The dress, for example, varies from Indonesia to Morocco and Nigeria. We cannot object to the national dress of a people. Our 'ulama' raised objections to the English suit because it was imported from another community. They are correct in that to adopt the dress of another community corrupts one's outlook and creates a sort of inferiority complex. But the English suit has now been accepted by the Upper strata of Muslim society all over the world. So, the problem of imitating foreign dress out of inferiority does not apply. Islam emphasises the spiritual and the moral culture and if we follow those moral and spiritual teachings of Islam properly then that is what matters.

In Pakistan, for example, we find certain people who regard themselves alone to be Muslims. They behave in a strange way, for example, a Muslim merchant grows a long beard, wears a kurta, a triangular pyjama and wears the haji's cap — showing himself to be a person who is dedicated to Islam and Allah (swt). He makes a survey of the market and Muslim business all over Pakistan.

Go to Karachi, which is a Muslim town, and try to buy pure butter (prescribed by a doctor). You will find different brands of butter, but you will not find pure butter. These people who adopt all these paraphernalia of piety who own all those dairy farms and factories earn their money in this manner.

In Pakistan people have been caught so many times adding impurities to their dairy products. Once, a well-known haji was caught red-handed. He installed a factory in an underground cell where he manufactured butter from grease and that butter inflicted polio on about forty children! This is the type of Islam of those so-called religious people! Which Islam is this that has to be adjusted to a particular age and area? And mind you, these people go to Makkah four times per year with haram money and when they come back they are welcomed, praised and garlanded by all their friends that so-and-so has performed the hajj seven or seventeen times.

The sores on the body of the Muslim community are so many. It seems as if we have lost completely our grip on what Islam stands for. We have coined our own Islam. Certain portions of Islam have been taken, like prayers, fasting, charity and pilgrimage and given a certain organic unity, and this is the Islam we carry.

Islam can adjust itself anywhere; in a capitalist country or a communist country. It is adjusting itself under Jamaluddin Nasir, Turkey, Pakistan, etc. Why can't it adjust itself here? Why all this hue and cry about it? But as far as the original Islam of the Qur'an and sunnah is concerned, we have been told:

You are the best ideological group which has been raised and chosen by Allah for the purpose that you will establish all that is good and eradicate all that is evil, as soldiers of Allah. (Q 3:110)

If this ideal is not there for us, we won't know to proceed. If Islam is not a way of life and challenge for all evil, then Islam is only a cult with an otherworldly orientation combined with a few ethical principles.

We treat and accept Islam as a cult and we do not go beyond these requirements. This problem requires a scientific analysis. If this problem is understood fully as to what is the pattern of life, which Islam gives; what are those things that are obligatory and what are optional, then only can we understand!

And if our ideal is to establish those ideals for which the Islam came, then this work can be done methodically, like in a scientific analysis. Priorities one value after the other. If we do that, we will get an Islam that is very dynamic, progressive and enlightened. There will be no difficulty in living here as good Muslims and we'll be able to live Islam in a manner that will attract the non-Muslims!

All praises belong to Allah, Lord of all the worlds.