

The Mercy unto Mankind and The Modern World

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The world today stands on the mouth of a seething volcano. Once again a scenario is building up which points towards unforeseen catastrophes. Trouble spots all-over the world which had hitherto remained as festering wounds only, are assuming cancerous proportions and are threatening the very existence of the world. Economic disparities and a world order brought into being to sustain them are finally tearing apart the facade of a stable world. The hypocritical garb made up of democracy and concern for human rights is no longer able to conceal the hideous face of an imperialism, which continues to work baazenfacedly for oppression and injustice, and penalizes all resistance as crime against civilisation (read imperialism). Discerning eyes weep at the buffoonery which sets up organizations to save animals—tigers, pandas, whales—while killing human beings in thousands day in and day out, and producing and stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. (Save animals by all means, but have some regard for human life as well). It seems that the noblest of species yet known to this globe is hellbent on committing suicide. Man is losing all control over his science and knowledge which is now turning on him like the proverbial giant of Frankenstein. In Yeast's words:

Turning and turning in a widening gyre.
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

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Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

This scenario is similar to the one which obtained in the world before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (sal Allahu alihi wasallam) with the difference that science has been misused by modern man to produce weapons of total annihilation. The Quranic description of the pre-Islamic world situation fits the modern world squarely:

وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ (آل عمران-١٠٣)

And you were precariously placed on the brink of a pit of fire
and

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ (الروم-٣١)

Disorder and anarchy has broken out in land and sea because of man's own misdeeds.

In the midst of this scenario appeared Prophet Muhammad (sal Allahu alihi wasallam) as Allah's Mercy unto mankind. As the Qur'an declared:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ (الانبياء-١٠٤)

We sent you only as a Mercy to all mankind.

Embarking on his mission of rescuing the human race, the Prophet diagnosed the root cause of all trouble in the moral corruption of the individual — the pollution of the heart and the mind. It was an age faced with complicated political problems — national as well as international. The tribal Arab society had no political organization and was in a perpetual state of internecine warfare for reasons ranging

from tribal feuds to petty individual rivalries. Tensions, not seldom leading to warfare, prevailed on the international level because of the bitter rivalry of the two superpowers of the day — Rome (the great Roman Empire) and Iran.

The age had more than a fair share of its economic woes as well. Very few people could have their two square meals. This state of affairs was to continue for many years even after the establishment of a genuine welfare society under the auspices of Islam, as is revealed by many an incident during the reign of Kalifah Umar (Allah be pleased with him). The result was that robbery and highwaymanship was the order of the day of which the Qur'an gives a graphic picture in the beginning of *Surah al-Adiyāt*.

On social plane too the Arabs, as well as the rest of the humanity, faced numerous problems — slavery, maltreatment of women including the burying alive of daughters, racial discrimination, inequality, tribal pride and the evils that proceeded from it.

Unlike a mere political leader or socio-economic reformer, the Prophet did not attend to the symptoms of the disease — the political, economic or social problems — but went straight to the heart of the disease, the mainspring of all evil. As he proclaimed:

الا انّ في الجسد مضغة اذا صلحت صلح الجسد كله و اذا
فسدت فسد الجسد كله الا وهى القلب (بخارى)

Lo, there is a lump of flesh in the body; if it is right
the whole body is right and if it is corrupt, it corrupts
the whole body: and lo, it is the heart.

This was an exposition of the soul-stirring Quranic pronouncement:

فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ (الرَّج-٣٦)

It is not the eyes which turn blind; it is the hearts within the
breasts that turn blind.

This spiritual blindness and moral corruption was in turn rooted in the conviction that material well-being and worldly pelf and power was an end in itself and not means to an end. The Prophet, under the Divine guidance, put his finger at this root cause of the trouble:

بَلْ تُؤْتِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ﴿١٦﴾ وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (الاعلى، ١٤-١٦)

You prefer the life of this world when the truth is that the life hereafter is better and more enduring.

In his first public address on the mount Safa, the Prophet challenged this world-view as the mainspring of all evil and disorder. The guardians of the order, the establishment of the day, felt alarmed and declared a war on him. Abu Lahb, speaking for the establishment, cursed him in the foulest possible language. There was nothing novel in this reaction as the behaviour of the establishment has always been the same in human history. The Prophet persisted in his mission of spiritual transformation attracting the noblest souls towards him, purifying their hearts and minds and moulding their characters. Khadijah, Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali, Uthman, Hamzah, Abu Ubaidah, Bilal, Ammar and many others (Allah be pleased with all of them) joined him in his mission of purification and peace. Meanwhile the struggle between the forces of evil and darkness on one hand and missionaries of piety and peace on the other intensified. A time came when the Prophet and his companions, after bearing with horrendous persecution for thirteen long years, had to migrate to Madinah. As God willed it, this proved to be a blessing in disguise as it gave the Prophet an opportunity to establish a society on the principles of justice, peace, equality, brotherhood and, above all, the spiritual purification and moral transformation of the individual. No wonder then that the Islamic calendar begins with this momentous event of migration (*hijrah*). *Hijrah*, incidentally is the most revolutionary factor not only in Islam but in the whole of human history as the greatest and most revolutionary epochs of history owe their origin to it.

Even as the Prophet was inaugurating the brightest epoch of human history

after *hijrah*, the Makkans began to attack his citadel of peace. The Mercy to mankind had to fight in self-defence but what a unique way of self-defence! You can fight, he declared, only the belligerent army that attacks you. Those who leave the battlefield are immune. Old men, women and children cannot be touched. Crops and trees cannot be harmed, houses cannot be razed and no offensive war can ever be waged. For many years the Prophet and his companions had to defend themselves but the Prophet himself never shed a drop of blood for did the Qur'an not declare in unmistakable terms:

مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ
النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا (المائدة-٣٢)

Whoever slew a person, without his having slain
someone or having spread disorder in the land,
it is as if he slew the whole of mankind and
whoever saved a life it is as if he saved the lives of all mankind.

This respect for life particularly human life constitutes the cornerstone of the Prophetic message of peace. Not to speak of human life, the prophet forbade harming birds, animals and even plant life without any real need or necessity. He was deeply grieved when one of his companions stole the young ones of a sparrow and asked him to replace them immediately in their nest. It was he and he alone in the history of mankind who declared the plantation of a tree as an act of worship. When Makkah ultimately fell, he declared a general amnesty to all his sworn enemies and they included Hindah — the woman, who had masticated and swallowed up the liver of his beloved uncle, Hamzah, after his martyrdom in the battle of Uhud — and many others who had done grievous wrong to his person, household and honour:

Once in command he set a glorious example of living a life of self-denial - feeding and clothing others but caring very little for himself and his family. This was

quite in accord with the primary tenets of his teaching that a believer lives for higher ideals and , not for luxury and grandeur; his goal is the salvation in the Hereafter and not worldly wealth and comfort though it does not imply escape from the world but a purposeful use of it as a means.

At the same time he inaugurated the most blessed and effulgent phase of human history whose glory remains unparalleled. Based on the moral purification of the individual he established a social order free from political disturbance, economic disparities and social evils. To a lawless Arab society he gave the rule of the law ordained by Allah and governance by the most pious and virtuous souls chosen by the will and consent of the people ascertained not through the dubious and inherently immoral ways of modern democracy but through a mechanism that guarantees the choice of the most honest and God-fearing individuals, not hankering after power but obliged to accept the responsibility by the force of enlightened public opinion.

To a society whose economy was essentially based on exploitation spearheaded by a universal system of usury he gave a set of principles which ushered in justice, equality of opportunity and fulfilment of the basic needs of every member of the society. And this was achieved not through coercion and regimentation which breeds hatred and kills all individual initiative but through voluntary and soul-enhancing and sympathy-generating acts of mutual assistance — not charitable acts of condescension but institutionalised assistance which is the inalienable right of the recipient and a bounden duty of the giver. A time then came in the progress of this glorious revolution when well-to-do people would go out to pay *zakah* but would find no needy person to receive it.

He replaced a society riddled with social evils by a humane, equitable and just social order which discouraged slavery and worked towards its final abolition, where woman, for the first time in history, was treated as equal with man (not degraded in the name of equality but given all that she deserved as woman), where tribal hostility was replaced by mutual love and brotherhood, and where racial discrimination was not only eliminated but looked upon with horror and disgust.

And all this was achieved on the basic pedestal of the moral purification of the individual.

Never was the world more in need of the mercy that flows from the Ocean of Mercy called Muhammad (sal Allahu alihi wasallam) than at present. Let us remind ourselves of three of the basic tenets of his teaching and life-example as implicit in the above-mentioned discourse:

- I) Worldly pelf is a means to an end and not an end in itself; the end is to live for higher spiritual and moral ideals — ideals of peace, justice, equality and brotherhood. It is in this way alone that we can acquire the pleasure of God Almighty and realize our latent potentialities as the noblest creatures of God. If material welfare becomes an end in itself, all moral corruption is justified and man is reduced to an animal.
- II) Respect for all forms of life particularly human life is the corner-stone of the edifice of human culture and a society and a world, where this respect is non-existent, is doomed.
- III) Spiritual and moral transformation of the individual is the only way to save mankind. No revolution, no code of law, no social or political system can prove beneficial in a world where the individuals are morally corrupt and diseased.

