

The phenomenon of degeneration

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Muslims, like other religious communities, went through a phase of degeneration in their later period and matters have not improved in the present day. What to do when this happens? The remedy was outlined in advance in the chapter entitled Al-Hadid (Iron) of the Quran. The translation of the relevant verses is as follows: "Has the time not come for the faithful when their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of God and of the revelation of truth, so that they should not become like those who were given the Book before them, whose hearts with the passage of time became hardened and many of whom were disobedient? Remember that God brings the earth back to life after its death. We have made Our signs clear to you, so that you may fully understand" (57:16-17).

These Quranic verses refer to the period of decline of the *ummah* (Muslim communi-

ty). What is the formula for their regeneration, or their reform, so that they may be brought back on to the right path? The formula is given here in terms of an example from agriculture. With the passage of time, land which has been fertile becomes barren. If the farmer starts his job by harvesting, it would be like putting the cart before the horse. The same is true of the declining Muslim community. Here reformers must start their task from the beginning, and not from the end. For example, if they try in such circumstances to establish their political rule, it will not work. But if they start by reviving the spirit and bringing about intellectual development, then it will be a right beginning. The decline of an *ummah* means decline in terms of spirit, and not in terms of form. Forms or rituals have always been in existence: what disappears is the spirit.

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