

How can man be successful?

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Excerpt:

In his talk, the Maulana explains why the human history became a register of losses. Being uniquely given the freedom of choice, man had to willfully tread the divine path - something that the entire universe was already doing, albeit compulsively. But in failing to do so, man brought upon himself, losses.

The Maulana clarifies that the mission of Prophets was to warn and guide mankind. They were not sent to establish a just system or an ideal world. This is because idealism can only be adhered to at an individual level but so far as a society is concerned, exercising patience is of critical significance.

Citing the importance of patience, he says that eradicating evil is not in the control of man because it is against the Creation Plan of God. There may be occasions when peaceful efforts seem to be yielding no result, but at such times, man must take an interval and exercise patience. Patience is the cornerstone of dawah work and the most significant attribute of a true dayee.

Lesson: In order to become an exception to the history of losses, man must uncover his mind's latent potential and discover the Creation Plan of God. The thrill of this discovery would be transformational and would make man mould his life such that he is able to develop a personality worthy of being inhabited in paradise.

Introduction

Quran comprises 114 chapters. Today, I would discuss *Surah Al-Asr*, which is considered to be the gist of religion. Elaborating the importance of this Surah, Imam Shafai said

Agar log sirf Quran ki Surah Al-Asr par sochein toh wahi unki guidance ke liye kaafi hai

[Reflecting on Chapter *Al-Asr* of the Quran is sufficient for providing guidance to a seeker.]

Surah Al-Asr reads

I swear by the passage of time, that man is surely in a state of loss, except for those who believe and do good deeds and exhort one another to hold fast to the Truth, and who exhort one another to steadfastness. (103)

In this verse, time is taken as a witness. Time is a phenomena that is flowing from past to present to future. It is in this fleeting phenomenon that history is being shaped. In other words, history is a phenomenon of time and is therefore a witness that man is in loss but this is not a mysterious statement.

Human history is replete with negative incidents. Gibbon, a renowned historian wrote, 'History is a little more than a register of crimes.' It is ironical how on one hand is human history – a record of crimes, with a few positive exceptions and other hand is the material world, which faces no loss or negativity. Universe as is agreed by all scientists is well-designed, well-planned and flawlessly created. This difference gives rise to the question that why did history of man become a register of losses?

Everything is beautiful, except man

Someone rightly said, "*Everything in this world is beautiful, except man.*" Now the question is why is there this difference between man and rest of the material, animal and plant world. The following verse of the Quran makes it clear

We have created man into a life of toil and trial. (90:4)

Man possesses a unique mind. Along with his mind, man has also been granted total freedom unlike any other creation in the animal, material or plant world.

Material world is controlled by the laws of nature – be it galaxy, universe or stars etc. Likewise, the animal world is controlled by instinct (*jibillat*). Instinct or law of nature refers to the compulsory control which governs all creations, except man.

It is overwhelming to realize that God gave man the freedom to follow the right path, willfully. This is distinct from all other creations that follow the right path under compulsion. No galaxy, solar system, or tree is seen fighting with each other. All creations exist peacefully. The human world on the other hand is marred by violence, fighting, hatred, revenge etc on account of misuse of freedom. Because other creations had no other choice (to follow any other path besides the right path), they were under compulsion to follow the right path and there was no deviation therefore.

Man can earn a huge credit if he chooses to tread the right path, something which the rest of the universe is already doing, compulsively. But man has failed in this test and this has brought loss to him.

Those who would be an exception to the history of loss

The above verse of the Quran also explains the characteristics of those men who would be an exception in this human history of loss: those who adopt and tread the path of faith (*imaan*).

It must be understood that faith (*Imaan*) is not a matter of recitation of certain phrases. It refers to man's discovery of the Creation Plan of God. God bestowed man with a mind so that he thinks, contemplates and reflects on what is he is surrounded with and realizes that God wants him to discover the right path and follow it, willingly.

In other words, those become an exception who are able discover the abilities of their mind and develop their intellect to discover the Creation Plan of God. They put to use these faculties to understand that man is an exception - that God bound all others but gave man free will. This is a transformational realization and brings about the next phase – leading life as per the divine plan.

The phrase, *Amal-e-saleh* (or doing good deeds) in the above verse refers to adopting a pattern of life that is in accordance with the discovery of the Creation Plan of God. By doing so, man can save himself from acting mindlessly and can become Mr. Exception.

The term “self-made” man is used very often. The opposite of this is “environment-made” man. An “environment-made” man is a product of the environment he is raised in whereas a “self-made” man stands on his discovery of the truth. The ones in loss would be those who became “environment-made” and instead of using their reason and rationale, they followed what the environment taught them.

Mission of Prophets

I started thinking why the entire history has been labeled to as the history of losses because it is the same history where all the Prophets were born, one after the other. According to the Quran

We sent our messengers in succession. (23:44)

Those Muslims who consider themselves as revolutionary think that Prophets came in the world to establish a just and ideal system. But if this notion is analysed in the light of history, it would seem that all the Prophets failed in the practical sense because history as we know it, was full of crimes. The question is how is it possible that those whom God sent for guiding the world, failed? According to a verse in the Quran

God has decreed, ‘I and My messengers shall most certainly prevail.’ (58:21)

In the context of the above verse, the mission of Prophets will have to be re-defined so as to explain why the world became a history of crimes.

The fact is that the mission of the Prophets was not to establish a just system, ideal world or a crime-free world, in the practical sense. The mission of Prophets was just one – *to warn and guide mankind*. Given this mission, the work of prophets would be judged on whether they were able to give the warning and not on whether they could establish a just system. The latter would be a wrong criterion.

The present-day radical Muslims developed a very wrong understanding of the mission of the Prophets. The mission of the Prophet was to spread the message of God to mankind so that men may recognize and lead life as per the contours set by God and can be rewarded for accepting truth of their own accord. On the contrary, if establishing a just world would have been the Prophetic aim, it would have been tantamount to creating a compulsion similar to that which exists in the material world. According to the Quran

So, [O Prophet] exhort them: your task is only to exhort, you are not their keeper.

(88:21-22)

Exhortation and Patience

Exhortation (*tavaasi*) in Arabic refers to the act of offering advice one another to do good things (mutual exhortation). Commentators have misinterpreted this to suggest that a believer should oppose any evil that takes place. This is not correct. Islam focuses on an individual and as such it must be understood that this exhortation is *internal* and does not advise a believer to make any such claims externally.

Let me explain further. If the above verse referred to exhortation in the sense of fighting others to establish a just and ideal system, the proclamation would have been: *Watawasu bil haqqi watawaso bil jihad*, but this is not the case. Instead the verse reads, *Watawasu bil haqqi watawaso bis sabr*, which means that after realization of truth, a believer must adopt the path of patience. *Haqq* (truth) in this case refers to the ideological content of truth and *Sabr* (patience) refers to the practical content of truth.

Ideological content and practical content of truth

At the level of ideology, an individual must subscribe to truth – his intellectual life should be based on truth. At the level of society however, man must subscribe to patience. In other words, matters of ideology or perspective should be criterion-based and matters of practicality should be patience-based. This is because man lives in a society where each individual has freedom of choice. Individuals misuse their freedom and this results in crime and perpetration of all kinds of social evils. It is for this reason that Quran distinguishes the approach to be adopted at individual and societal level.

As an individual, man should be an ideal thinker. But in a society, man is already amidst injustice, hatred and corruption. If he tries to adopt a revolutionary approach to end injustice, it will only lead to anarchy, which is not the way of Islam. In the wake of an evil in the society, the Islamic way would be to make peaceful efforts to guide and persuade people. If the efforts don't yield result, the only other option is to exercise patience but fighting is never an option.

It is critical to understand that Jihad in Islam is only for the sake of defense and not for the sake of eradication of evil. Eradicating evil is not in the control of man and will never come to pass in this world because it is against the Creation Plan of God. Islam could not have given an impossible goal. Therefore, man is required to discover the truth and adopt truthfulness in his personal dealing and behavior but regarding matters of society and where other people are concerned, he can only strive to persuade them peacefully and if they do not agree, he must exercise patience.

What is patience?

Patience refers to praying and wishing well for others, even though when you tried to persuade them they did not agree with you. In other words, if a true dayee cannot become indifferent if his audience does not listen to him.

Patience means that if dawah work could not suffice, the dayee resorts to praying to God (doing *dua*). Dawah work is out of well-wishing and can a well-wisher or mother do this that her child is not listening and she becomes indifferent towards the child? No, she cannot. She would think of different ways and means to help the child.

Patience therefore is not indifference. It means that till now the dayee did dawah work and now he would do pray (do *dua*), plan and think about future course of action in a peaceful manner. Let me take an example to clarify this.

A Prophet named, Jonah came to Nainvah and he did dawah work with the inhabitants of this city. However, his community did not give positive response to them and according to the Quran, he became angry with his community:

Remember the man in the whale [Jonah] when he went away in anger, thinking We had no power over him. (21:87)

He was so angry that without the commandment to do so, Prophet Jonah left the community and went away. But this deed of the Prophet was not acceptable to God. Through a series of events when Prophet Jonah realized the displeasure that his act had brought, he sought earnest repentance from God. He decided to return to the people of Nainvah - not to do *Jihad* or fight them but to undertake dawah work with renewed planning.

The above example conveys that if a dayee does dawah work in a way that did not yield positive result, he must re-plan and think in a different manner. Neither can a dayee quit doing dawah work nor can he undertake Jihad. The only option is to re-plan and act.

This is what a mother does. If mother sees the child doing something which is not to her liking, she stops the child. If the child does not mend his behaviour, she thinks of other means to make him understand. This is because planning knows no bounds and can be done in endless ways. Let me share an illustrative incident.

Prophet Abraham brought the message of tawheed (the oneness of God) to King Nimrod of Babylonia. But the King refused to accept his message. A part of their conversation is quoted in the Quran as follows:

“Have you not heard of him who argued with Abraham about his Lord, because God had bestowed the Kingdom upon him? Abraham Said, “My Lord is the one who gives life and brings death.” He answered, “I (too) give life and bring death!” Abraham Said, “God brings up the Sun from the east, so bring it up yourself from the west.” Then the disbeliever was confounded. God does not guide the wrongdoers.” (2:258)

This conversation between the Prophet and the King gives us a very important principle of planning. That is, if the response of the other party is not positive, do not follow the futile course of insistence. See the mind of the other party and adopt an alternative form of dialogue. When the Prophet said that God Almighty was the Lord who gave life and brought death, the King said he could do likewise. This answer was wrong, but the Prophet avoided repeating himself and, with a change of stance, he raised a different point. His second point was so compelling that the King became speechless. In other words, the best dayee is one who is not obsessed with his own mind, but is able to see other party's mind, which he tries to address.

In other words, as a well-wisher, a dayee takes the message of truth to the other person and gives him due reason and logic but if the mind of the addressee has not been addressed, a dayee must take an interval to think what to do next. It is this interval which is referred to as patience after which a dayee is ready again to spread the message.

Conclusion

God took the example of human history to make man realize that his record so far is full of crime, corruption and injustice. It is in comparison that we understand and by doing this comparison with animal and material world, man understood that his case was different from the rest of the universe because God gave man uniquely, the freedom of choice. Having the freedom, man often misuses the freedom and opts for a wrong choice.

Along with giving him the freedom of choice, God also endowed man with the ability to discern between right and wrong. It is upto man to convert this potential into actual and discover truth. In order to help man in this process, God sent Prophets in succession so that man could receive guidance from them and follow the right direction. No Prophet was sent to force people to tread the right path. They were there to guide man to the right sign posts. Discovery of truth is not a dormant phenomenon. One who has discovered truth (Creation Plan of God) with the help of Prophetic guidance is then charged up to share this realization with others. In the practical sense, dawah work marks the sharing of this inner realization but a dayee never tries to create a compulsion.

He allows his *madu* (addressee) to discover the truth. If a dayee is not listened to, he nonetheless chooses to exercise patience. He takes an interval to re-evaluate his strategy and think about the next steps. The fact that Quran gives a basic framework and not the minutest details is in accordance with the divine scheme of things. It seeks to activate the mind of man so that he starts thinking. If everything was told, like in an encyclopedia then man would have had nothing to discover and find out on his own. Quran therefore has basics but not the detail so that man elaborates and understands himself. If the Quran would have included everything, intellectual big bang would not have been possible. Quran aims to arouse thinking and reflection in man. According to the Quran

We did not create heaven and earth and all that is between them in vain. That is the opinion of those who deny the truth. (38:27)

This style of the Quran is aimed at uncovering the latent potential of the human mind. “To think” means that people ponder upon the verses of the Quran and discover its deeper meaning. In arithmetic, there is nothing new to discover, because everything is black and white but in religion, a seeker is required to discover every meaning. Discovery of truth is not a simple occurrence. When man discovers truth after a constant process of thinking, he undergoes the same thrill as experienced by the Greek philosopher, Archimedes who discovered the law of hydrostatics while he was in the bath tub and in his elation he ran out naked to tell people that he had found it! This is the joy of discovery and the basic difference between being told and realizing on our own. And only the person who stands on his own discovery and choice would be selected to inhabit paradise.

It must be understood that paradise would be inhabited by those who would deserve to be there. Paradise is a very refined colony and only refined personalities would inhabit it – those who discovered the truth on their own and then moulded their personality in accordance with the Divine Plan. The present world is a selection ground to identify and those as would deserve to be inhabited paradise. This is that for which man must aspire and act!

I pray that God gives us wisdom and ability to strive to develop a paradisiacal personality, one that may be selected by God to inhabit paradise.