

Message of the Quran

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Introduction

A phenomenon commonly observed in present times is extremism in religion. I have participated in many religious dialogues in India and abroad and have realized that these religious dialogues are actually religious debates. Instead of these debates, there should be open discussions in the field of religion, just as they exist in the field of science. And the formula governing such open discussions must be *either one party agrees to what the other has to say or both agree to disagree*.

In my opinion, the most productive bent of mind is one that seeks truth at all times keeping intact its rationality and objectivity.

What does the Quran say of itself?

Explaining the purpose of Quran, a Hadith says,

"Quran is a rope (habl-ul-lah) between God and man." (Mishkat)

The verse above conveys the concept of *Misaq* (used in both the Bible and the Quran) which means a covenant or a solemn agreement. All the revealed books were covenants between God and man. Bible for example, has two accounts – the Old Testament and the New Testament. My studies have led me to conclude that though Bible is the Old Testament or the old covenant, the New Testament or the new covenant is Quran. In other words, Quran is the prevailing covenant between God and man. I do not consider Quran as a superior book but as only a preserved covenant of God. This can be seen historically as well because till date its language remains preserved.

Message of the preserved covenant

One of the beginning verses of the Quran says,

"It is a guide for those who are mindful of God." (2:2)

This verse explains that this Book will surely serve as guidance from God but to those who are mindful or *mutaqqi* (practice *taqwa* or caution). Here I feel the need of clarifying that there exist two broad fields of knowledge: science and humanities. Science as we all know is based on mathematics and therefore enjoys the ease of arriving at a single result and hence a unanimous agreement. But this is not the case with Humanities. The results in Humanities depend 50% on logic and 50% on the thinker's discretion, intuition and intellectual prowess.

And Quran is not a book of science, but a book whose subject is humanities; there is no mathematical argumentation in the Quran. Hence, unless one is sincere and mindful, he won't be able to take guidance from the Quran.

Personality of a muttaqi

According to verse in the Quran,

"Believers, if you fear God, He will grant you the ability (furqan) to discriminate between right and wrong." (8:29)

This verse lays down the personality attributes of a *muttaqi* (mindful person). It says that a *muttaqi* develops *Furqan* or the ability to clearly differentiate between two situations. A challenge while dealing in Humanities is that it inhabits a vast jungle of thought. In order that one does not get confused and lost in this jungle of thought, one requires the ability of differentiation. *Furqan* develops when one makes God his sole concern and lives with the concept of being accountable for one's deeds before God. The Quran provides man with the concept of accountability which inculcates fear and sincerity in an individual.

Also it is imperative to realise that while being mindful is necessary, a background about the subject is no less important when trying to understand a subject. While being mindful develops clarity in one's thought and makes one sincere (a pre-requisite to understanding the Quran), having a background plays a crucial role in understanding the message of the Quran. This is referred to in the Quran as the 'straight path' and the following verse explains that only a person who is serious and sincere is led on the straight path while he who is not, treads the deviated path.

"This is My straight path; so follow it, and do not follow other ways: that will lead you away from His path." (6:153)

Starting Point: Seeking Truth

According to a verse in the Quran,

"Did He not find you wandering and give you guidance." (93:7)

This verse indicates that the starting point in one's journey of God-realization is not belief but the spirit of seeking. This is because a seeker is one who is sincere and objective, and only such a person is able to understand the truth when it comes before him.

Purpose of life: Marefat

The Quran says,

"I created the jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me." (51:56)

This above verse tells man the purpose of his life, *Marefat* meaning God-realization. Man has been endowed with faculties of hearing, seeing, thinking only so that he can contemplate and ponder over the purpose of his creation. For example, man must reflect over facts such as, without the life support system existing on earth he wouldn't have been able survive. Man finds himself in a world where all his requirements are taken care of. A full-fledged life support system exists that is in absolute consonance with man's needs. Man must question himself about who understood, even before I came into existence, that I would need light, oxygen, water, food, well-balanced earth etc. to thrive? He who sincerely follows the questions pertaining to his existence is a seeker.

According to the Quran, life is *safar-e-marefat* or journey of realization of truth. The most pleasurable thing in life is a discovery. For example, when Archimedes discovered the principle of hydrostatics he became so ecstatic that he ran naked to tell people about his discovery. Our entire life is a journey of truth and we are the travellers. The material things which we find on earth are not meant for enjoyment, they are objects meant to merely sustain our physical existence; while, the real purpose (and also the true joy or enjoyment) is realization God.

Phases of Discovery

Discovering the truth means discovering God. There are two phases of discovering God; one is the *unseen level* and the other is the *seen level*. In the present world, we discover God at an unseen level. In the Hereafter, we'll discover God at the seen level or we'll realize God directly.

According to a tradition, Prophet was asked whether God will be seen in the paradise. He said, 'Yes, *just like we view moon and sun today, we shall see God in paradise.*' This means that there would be direct God realisation in paradise but God is so magnificent that this would be a partial observation. Everyday however there would be enhanced realisation. According to the Quran, the life – both in this world and the hereafter is a journey of God realisation – indirectly in this world and directly in paradise.

According to a another Hadith,

"In Paradise, man will be able to see glimpses of God." (Mishkat)

The Hadith further says that these glimpses of God will be so enthralling that man would forget all other pleasures of Paradise in comparison to it. This means that the pleasures of Paradise would be nothing compared to the direct realization of God in Paradise. Similarly, in the present world, the unseen realization

of God is far more pleasurable than material enjoyment. The other world will also be a journey of *marefat*; the only difference is that the present world is imperfect and the next world would be perfect.

Paradise: God's perfect guesthouse

Our life in the present world can be likened to a diplomat of a country being invited in another country to hold talks. This diplomat will be offered a place to reside in the foreign country and all other amenities. However, his real purpose of visiting the foreign country is not to enjoy the grandeur or beauty of hotel in which he is residing. Rather, his real purpose is to hold successful talks with the diplomats of the country to which he has been invited. Similarly, the present world is God's guesthouse and the real purpose of man is not to enjoy the guesthouse but to discover and realize God.

The same will be the case of the hereafter. Paradise is that perfect guesthouse of God, living where one will be able to realise God eternally. According to traditions, while the paradise dwellers would be delighted with the bounties of paradise, they would be told that they will get a glimpse of their Creator. This glimpse though partial, would be so mesmerising that it would belittle the experience of everything else that they had experienced till then. It would be the most joyful experience for these men and women. This would be direct discovery and would enthrall them beyond imagination.

But to enter the perfect world of God, we will have to pay a price. The price is to acknowledge God at the unseen level. The Creator and the Lord of the universe ought to be discovered and acknowledged. From here the journey of realization starts and a process ensues. The seeker man discovers God and then acknowledges Him at His level. This is the spirit of "al-hamd-u-lillah".

Acknowledging God

Citing the example of modesty, Quran mentions about King Solomon. He was a very rich and powerful king. However, he said of his empire, "This is the gift from my God." King Solomon never said that his empire was due to him. Explaining the fate of those who would fail to realise God in the present world, the following verse of the Quran says,

"but whoever has been blind in this life, will be blind in the life to come."(17:72)

This verse means that there are some men who do not realize God in the present world and remain blind to His bounties and blessings. These people did not acknowledge the potential endowed in nature by God that made our existence possible. Such men and women attribute the beneficence to fellow-men but fail to recognise the bigger beneficence bestowed by God. Such men live as 'blind' in this world and could not see

the Creator in His creations. They failed to relish the joy of realising their Creator in this world. Therefore, when the time comes in the Hereafter, for experiencing the 'super-joy' of catching a glimpse of their Lord, they will remain blind. In other words, those who do not discover the reality in the unseen level will not discover it even at the seen level.

Man has been created in difficulties

According to a verse in the Quran,

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

This verse means that the problems we face in this world are a test. That is, in spite of all the difficulties and unpleasant situations faced in this world, man has to be grateful to God. Being grateful to God even in the face of difficulties is the real test; had there been no difficulties, and man would have only thanked God, it would have been of no value.

The test arises when man faces unpleasant situations. Despite all such situations, man has to go on discovering the blessings of God. If he reacts negatively, he would prove that he not been able to realise God. If, for example, somebody throws mud while you are walking down the road and if you retaliate then you show that you were not living on higher morality.

It means that in retaliating, you forgot the bigger blessing that had been bestowed upon you in the face of a small problem. If instead you think that you are still partaking of blessings million times more than the situation faced by you – the oxygen, light, water, gravity that enables movement and all that you are availing to live in this world – you would never feel offended by anyone's unpleasant act. This is referred to in the Quran as *khuluq-e-azeem* or higher morality. If you give respect in return of receiving respect, it is equal morality but if you give respect even when respect is not returned, it is higher morality. In other, a believer should maintain his positivity even in negative situations. Exercising patience therefore, is the price of Paradise.

"Most surely, you will have a never ending reward. For you are truly of a sublime character." (68:4)

Importance of purifying the soul (tazkia)

The Quran says thus,

"he will abide forever in the gardens of eternity, through which rivers flow. That is the recompense for those who purify themselves." (20:76)

Only purified soul will be able to go to paradise. These are the people who are on justice and have a peaceful behaviour. This is said so because we inevitably experience negative situations in this world but it is in such situations that we must maintain our positive behaviour. Such is a purified soul; that is, a person who shuns hate and intolerance.

The mind Quran builds

A verse of the Quran says,

“Do not let your enmity for others turn you away from the path of justice. Deal justly.” (5:8)

The Quran here exhorts us not to have a mentality of “teaching others a lesson.” That is to say, that a bad experience must not become an excuse for resorting to revenge. Paradise is for those who show patience and forbearance all along and have feelings of respect and love for all. The formula for purifying oneself of negative thoughts would be thus: *‘If you have a good excuse, don’t use it.’* This is because we are living in a world which is less than ideal and hence we will repeatedly undergo bad experiences. But we cannot afford to stoop to negativity despite all problems. Such is how a purified soul would be, who is able to extract hate, intolerance and negativity from within himself. Purification is a process which continues in the life of a believer because experiences take place everyday and so there management also must happen on a regular basis. Jesus Christ said, *“Love thy enemy”* that is, *“love all, including your enemy.”* Those who live in the mentality of vengeance and intolerance and are happy to take revenge from others will be cast into hell, not paradise.

Wasting resources

The Quran says,

“Spendthrifts are brothers of Satan.” (17:27)

‘*Tabzeer*’ in this verse means ‘wastage of money’ and those who waste money belong to the company of Satan. Therefore, one should only spend money on bare necessities or real needs only and not on outings, marriages and other extravagances. Quran repeatedly exhorts man to not waste his money because it has been given to man by God – man is a mere trustee. Those who go against this will not be awarded Paradise because paradise is a place for angels, not companions of Satan. Those who were in the companionship of angels in the present world will live with angels in this world and those who sided with Satan in this world will have to live with Satan in the hereafter. According to a tradition, when companions asked how they must use their money, Prophet told them that they should use only as much is required for satisfying the bare needs, the rest should be spent in the way of God. Those who spent their money extravagantly did not pay the price for paradise.

Sufferings and man

In this world, oftentimes man undergoes suffering and pain and becomes enraged. Giving a formula to manage this anger, the Quran says,

"Whatever misfortune befalls you is of your own doing." (42:30)

This verse simplifies the whole situation by indicating that though apparently, we seem to have been hurt by some other individual; in actual fact our suffering is the price we pay for the mistakes committed by us.

This is a unique concept. It inculcates the mentality that when one suffers, one should rather get into introspection than resorting to thinking about the ways of avenging it. Our mind should therefore not be governed by revenge but by introspection. This is a very important teaching of Islam. If this is practiced by all, then the society would become truly peaceful.

Another verse in the Quran states,

"So surely with every hardship there is ease.(II)" (94:5-6)

The same verse is repeated twice to stress on the fact that with every problem there are opportunities. Instead of fighting the problem, we should discover and avail the opportunities available at the same time. It teaches us to not confront the problems headlong and instead discover the opportunities that exist alongside and avail them. If one follows this teaching, one would not fall prey to ill-feelings of malice and revenge and will continue to develop a positive personality despite all odds.

People often live in conspiracy mentality. They try to disguise their problems in the garb of conspiracies thinking that everyone is busy conspiring against them. Quran has this to say to such people,

"If you persevere and fear God, their designs will never harm you in the least." (3:120)

We don't have to concern ourselves with the conspiracies of others rather we have to only strive to make ourselves patient.

Another problem that often confronts us is of enmity. Quran says,

"Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that the one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend. (41:34)

It says that your enemy is potentially your friend, so turn this *potential* into *actual*. It is a revolutionary teaching one that makes even one's enemy a friend. That is why Quran says, "*Peace is the best.*" (4:128)



In other words, whatever situation one may be in, if one adopts the course of peace, he would definitely be successful.

Quran therefore tells us the way we must live in this world and the price that we ought to pay so that we may become successful in the hereafter.

May we imbibe the true spirit of roza and discover the ocean of meaning in the Quran!