

DAWAN BOOKLETS

The Revolutionary Role of Islam

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THE REVOLUTIONARY ROLE OF ISLAM

As a result of ignorance the evil known as the worship of natural phenomena was born in human society. Man attributed divinity to mere creatures. He began to worship all the things in the world, holding them to be gods. Owing to this intellectual aberration, idolatry became a rooted feature of human civilization. Not even the coming of thousands of Prophets and reformers could bring about any change in this state of affairs, in the practical sense. The rejection of the Prophets brought down on the deniers the chastisement of God, but *shirk* (idolatry) could never be wiped out from society. Then God took it upon Himself to intervene. One major manifestation of this divine intervention in human history was the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him. An American encyclopedia has very appropriately described his coming as having “changed the course of human history.”

French historian, Henri Pirenne, has expressed it thus: “Islam changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of history was overthrown.”



The Qur'an, in defining the objective of the divine intervention, has this to say:

It is He that has sent forth His Prophet with guidance and the true faith, so that he may exalt it above all religions. God is the All-sufficient witness (48:28).

This has found expression in a *Hadith* recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari:

He will not depart from this world as God has decreed, unless and until these people are brought to the straight path. (*Fathul Bari* 449-8).

This shows that, for the prophets of the past, communication alone was required, whereas for the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, not just communication but also implementation was required.

The task of the earlier prophets was completed with the full communication of the message to the people. But the divine plan in sending the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, to the world was to bring about a practical revolution. His

message could not, therefore, remain at the theoretical stage.

It being beyond human capacity to make the end result a certainty, how was the Prophet's message to be translated into reality? It all became possible due to the special divine succour extended to the Prophet by God. This took the form of a divine plan which had two basic aspects to it: one, to provide the Prophet with a powerful and trustworthy team, and the other to significantly weaken the enemies of monotheism by means of a special strategy, so that the Prophet and his companions could easily dominate their opponents.

The first part of this divine plan was brought to completion in the form of the settlement of Ismail, son of Prophet Ibrahim, in the unpopulated desert of Arabia two thousand five hundred years ago. At that time it was a totally isolated place situated far from the centres of civilization. There a community was raised by Ismail ibn Ibrahim, trained in the desert atmosphere where there was nothing save nature. As a natural result of this unadulterated atmosphere, (free from all man-made pollution,) the



human qualities of the inhabitants of the desert were fully preserved. It was like a vast natural training camp. It took more than two thousand years to evolve a nation of such high calibre as to be called a “nation of heroes” by a western scholar. In the history of the Arabs, this nation is known as the Ismailites. Despite religious perversion having set in, so distinguished were they in human values—thanks to their particular training—that they had no peers among those who came before or after them.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, one of the distinguished members of the Banu Ismail, struggled for about thirteen years in Makkah and ten years in Madinah. Ultimately, more than one hundred thousand people believed in him and joined his mission. Each and every one of his companions possessed a strong and dependable character. In this way the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, in an exceptional way, secured a team by which he could bring the message of the prophets to fruition—taking the prophetic mission from the theoretical stage of ideology to the practical stage of revolution.

The next part of this divine plan consisted of weakening these anti-monotheism forces so considerably that the last Prophet might subjugate them and usher in the desired revolution in the very first generation itself. To achieve this end, the Arabian tribes remained engaged for a long period of time in bloody, internecine warfare. Consequently, when the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was sent to the world, the idolatrous tribes of Arabia, having so weakened themselves, could not continue their resistance for long. This enabled the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, to overcome Arabia and root out idolatry completely within a short period of time.

In those days there were two great empires outside of Arabia. These empires kept the major parts of Asia and Africa under their full control. Their power was so great that the Arabs could not even have dreamed of overcoming them. Despite this extremely out of proportion difference, how did it become possible for the Arabs of the very first generation, to conquer both these empires—the Sassanid and Roman—in such a decisive way as to

crush them absolutely, resulting in the dominance of monotheism over idolatry throughout this region? This miracle became a reality owing to a special divine strategy, which is paralleled by the case of the Romans:

The Romans have been defeated in a neighbouring land. But after their defeat they shall themselves gain victory within a few years. (Qur'an, 30:1-3)

History shows that from 602 to 628 A.D., extremely extraordinary events took place between these two great empires.

First, the royal families in the respective countries clashed internally with one another, and in consequence, many individuals of great political worth were killed. In fact, these feuds gave a deathblow to these empires, shaking them to the very roots. Subsequently, certain factors led to the destructive collision of these empires with one another. First the armies of the Sassanid Empire crossed the border of the Roman Empire to attack it. Circumstances proved favourable and they succeeded to the extent that the Roman Emperor



Heraclius decided to flee from his Palace in Constantinople. But again, events took a new turn. Heraclius regained his lost confidence and after making full preparations, attacked the Sassanid Empire, destroyed their armed forces and penetrated right into the heart of Jerusalem.

These civil wars, lasting for about twenty-five years, considerably weakened both these empires. Therefore, during the pious caliphate when the Arab forces entered the Roman and Sassanid empires, they managed to advance with great speed.

HISTORICAL REVOLUTION

This expansion of the Islamic empire was not simply a political event. Its aim, in fact, was to set in motion a revolutionary process in history. This process had been initiated in Makkah itself, then it traveled from Makkah to Madinah, to Damascus and Baghdad from where it entered Spain and thereafter it spread all over Europe and the entire world. We would probably be right in saying that

the 20th century saw the culmination of this process.

There are two basic aspects to this movement. One was the end of religious persecution. (This kind of persecution has been mentioned in the Qur'an as '*fitna*'). (8:39)

The process began with the end of idolatry and was completed during the lifetime of the Prophet. The other, the advent of religious freedom, came about later, during the pious caliphate; with the disintegration of the two great empires—the Sassanid and Byzantine—the two greatest pillars of religious persecution were uprooted, and religious freedom became the order of the day. However, no great revolution materializes all of a sudden. It reaches fruition only by a long historical process, and the Islamic revolution was no exception to this rule. The process of human liberation, initiated by Islam, continued over a long period to make advances through individual and collective efforts, taking various forms. The second Caliph, Umar Faruq (d.644) addressing one of his governors and his son in a well known case asked: “Since when

have you enslaved people while their mothers had given birth to them in freedom?" (*Al-Abqariat Al-Islamia*).

This voice was echoed eleven hundred years later by the well-known French reformer Rousseau (d. 1778). His book, titled *The Social Contract*, began with this famous sentence: 'Man was born free, but I find him in chains'. This concept of intellectual and religious freedom had fully matured by the end of the 20th century. With the establishment of the United Nations, all the nations of the world signed its charter of Human Rights, proclaiming that intellectual and religious freedom is the irrevocable right of every human being and that on no pretext can it be abrogated.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Through a long process, that age has finally come when man has secured the absolute right to adopt the religion of his choice and to propagate that religion, on the sole condition that he will not use violence in the exercise of his religious freedom. This change brought about in the world has thrown

open all the doors of communication formerly locked to the message of monotheism, doors that had been locked by the ancient absolutist regimes.

The creation plan of God regarding human beings has been thus alluded to in the Qur'an: "He created death and life, so that He might try which of you is best in deed." (67:2)

To achieve this end, it is essential that an atmosphere of freedom prevail in this world, that everyone without any hindrance may play his role. Without freedom, neither reward nor punishment can be awarded to anyone. An atmosphere where there is no intellectual freedom nullifies the very scheme of God—the scheme according to which man has been created and placed in this world. That is why these regimes based on an absolutism, which had taken root centuries ago, had to be overthrown.

In recent times, the communist revolution of 1917 again attempted to establish a vast empire based on the coercive system of the ancient type. But since this ran counter to the divine plan, God brought about a situation, which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Man again was granted the



same freedom as was available to the rest of the world.

THE END OF THE SUPERSTITIOUS ERA

Another basic change wrought by the Islamic revolution was similar in some respects to the scientific revolution of modern times; that is, the rooting out of superstitious thinking on scientific grounds and the general prevalence of thinking based on facts.

As mentioned above, the continued existence of the idolatrous way of life and thinking in ancient times was due to the ignorance of human beings regarding nature. Ancient man used to judge natural phenomena by their appearance. Holding them sacred, he began to worship them. For the first time in human history, Islam succeeded in convincing people that these phenomena of nature were not creators, but only creatures. They were entirely helpless beings, mere slaves and not the masters of man.

In the wake of this revolution, the ideological base of idolatry was wiped out altogether. All those



things held sacred were relegated to the status of mere creatures. They were there to be harnessed by man and not for man to be enslaved by them. The sun was held to be a god and worshipped in ancient times; the man of today is converting the sun into solar energy. Ancient man held the moon sacred; modern man has set his foot on it. Ancient man had deified the river; modern man has converted rivers into steam power, etc.

In this way, it has happened for the first time in human history that the phenomena of nature, looked upon by ancient man with reverence, have now become objects of investigation. In other words, Islam started the process of scientific enquiry. The Qur'an repeatedly enjoins man to reflect on the objects of the universe. This is no simple matter. The act of pondering over the nature of the phenomena of the universe has been accorded the status of worship in Islam. As a result of this thinking, for the first time in known history, all things in the universe have been subjected to research and investigation.

The scientific way of thinking of the modern age initiated in the early period of Islam, continued as a process to grow, spreading from one country to another until it reached the west where it saw its culmination in the western world. In respect of its reality, this scientific thinking is a revolution desirable by Islam itself.

After this revolution, for the first time in human history the idolatrous way of thinking has been totally deprived of its ideological base. The concept of the sacredness of natural phenomena is now seen for what it is—a superstition, for modern scientific investigation has demonstrated belief of this kind to be baseless.

All that happened was exactly in accordance with the divine plan, the Prophet and his companions having been asked to carry out this divine scheme: “Fight them until there be no persecution and religion be wholly God’s” (8:39). This means that there was no longer any barrier to man’s making a choice in the way of God.

This was the final goal of the revolution brought about by the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be



upon him, and his companions. It ended that absolutist system of coercion, which places curbs upon personal decisions about one's religion. It also removed the veil of obstacles in ideological terms, which confused and mislead people, as a result of which they began to worship creatures supposing them to be creators. (For further details see the author's book, *Islam: the Creator of the Modern Age*).

The Qur'an tells us that there is no compulsion in the matter of religion, with the proviso that true guidance and misconceptions should be thoroughly separated from one another. (2:256)

Truth and falsehood stand clearly separated from each other, just like light and darkness after the sun has risen. This was something, which—after the Islamic revolution—could be grasped beyond the shadow of a doubt by anyone who sought reality with an open mind. No one was left groping in the dark. And no one was left with any excuses for rejecting God.

TRUTH UNVEILED

To this particular end, God brought about the revolutions in human history, as mentioned above.



Now truth and untruth have become so distinct from one another that there is no thick or thin veil in between: the task of clarification has been performed so thoroughly that the man of today has total freedom of choice. Now in his journey towards God, man is hindered neither by false ideologies nor by practical barriers.

THE ROLE OF NON-MUSLIMS IN ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT

Islam is the religion of Nature, and in treading its path; it is non-discriminatory, finding room within its scheme of things for every segment of society. Rigidity is quite alien to its process of development.

There is a meaningful *Hadith* in *Sahih al-Bukhari* to this effect. According to this *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, said: “God Almighty will strengthen this religion [Islam] through a *fajir* (one who is not a true Muslim) person as well. (Bukhari)

This is a very important declaration because in this world, any natural process begins with the involvement of different elements—as happened in the case of Islam. Humanity as a whole is an interdependent body and Islam is not an exception.

Islam is an ideology aimed at human development, and no process of human development can endure without involving humanity at large. There are

several phases in the history of Islam, which illustrate this point.

The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, spent his first thirteen years of prophethood in Makkah. At that time in Makkah, there existed a tribal system. There was no organized state in the modern sense. It was necessary for everyone to have protection under one of the tribal chiefs. So, according to this prevalent custom, the Prophet availed himself of the protection of two of the local chieftains—Abu Talib and Mut'im bin Adi alternatively, both of whom happened to be non-Muslims.

After spending thirteen years in Makkah, the Prophet migrated to Madinah. It was a very risky journey because his opponents had announced a reward of a hundred camels to anyone who would bring them the Prophet's head. In spite of this, the Prophet chose a member of the rival group to be his guide for the journey, because this guide was known to be an honest person in his profession. He is known in Islamic history as Abdullah bin

Urayqit. He was a non-Muslim and died as a non-Muslim in Makkah.

After the migration of the Prophet, a series of armed conflicts broke out between the Prophet and his opponents. One of the military campaigns of his opponents, known in Islamic history as Ghazwa al-Ahzab, was so devastating that even the Qur'an refers to it as one of the most terrifying moments in Islamic history. At the time, the Muslims had become quite helpless against their opponents. The only thing that eased this most difficult of situations was the role a Madinite played—that of a middleman.

This man came to the Prophet in the night when Madinah was surrounded by enemy forces. He said, "I have become a Muslim in my heart, but I have not made it public yet. So the mushriks and the Jews both have trust in me." Realizing that this man was in a position to play a peace-making role between the two parties, since he was trusted by both, the Prophet said, "You are the only one in this position among us."



This man began, therefore, to negotiate between the two parties and history tells us that it was he who cleared the path to peace at this juncture between the two rival parties. It was because of his efforts that the enemy decided to lift the siege of the city of Madinah and return to their homes.

Islamic history contains many examples of the role played by non-Muslims in the development of Islam. This principle of non-Muslim involvement in Islamic development can also be extended from an individual level to the level of an entire group.

In the present day context, Western Civilization is an appropriate example. Although Western Civilization developed in non-Muslim societies without any direct contribution from the Muslim minds, it is helpful for Islam in many aspects. For example, it is this Western Civilization that finally ended religious persecution and opened the door for religious freedom and *da'wah*. Similarly, it is this Western Civilization, which has developed the modern means of communication that has made it possible for Muslims to do *da'wah* work on a global scale. Also, modern scientific discoveries made in

the West have paved the way to proving the beliefs of Islam on a scientific basis.

In previous times, it was assumed that the truths of Islam, or religion for that matter, could be supported only by arguments that were inferential in nature and not by arguments that were direct. But modern science, in bringing human thought from a macrocosmic level to a microcosmic level, has made it possible to accept that inferential reasoning is as valid as direct reasoning. This development has allowed Islam to prove its truth on the same level as scientific theories are proven.

From these few examples, it is clear that non-Muslims are also helpful to the cause of Islam in many ways. Islamic development is such a universal process that all Muslim and non-Muslim forces contribute towards its fulfillment.

This aspect of a role for those other than Muslims in the development of Islam serves a moral end as well. It makes Muslims sympathetic towards the rest of the world so that the hearts of Muslims are filled with love for others instead of hate, enmity and distrust.



The contribution of non-Muslims to Islam has not been of a temporary nature. It has continued throughout Islamic history. In present times these contributions made by non-Muslims, especially in the field of scientific discoveries, have been far greater than ever before.

What are these scientific discoveries? They are, in actual fact, the discoveries of nature. Nature, or in the words of the Qur'an, "all the things of the heavens and the earth" are signs of God. Accordingly, all the things of the universe serve as scientific argument for Islamic teachings. In this respect the discoveries of nature are in fact the discoveries of the divine realities, which testify to the truth of the teachings of Islam. I have gone into considerable detail on this point in other books I have written. Here I wish to give only one example to illustrate my point.

There is a verse in the Qur'an:

We shall save your body this day, so that you may be a sign for those who come after you.
(10:92)

This refers to the Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh, a contemporary of the Prophet Moses. As we know, Pharaoh had been drowned by God in the deep waters of the sea. At that moment God had decreed the preservation of Pharaoh's body in order that it might be a sign of God for future generations.

However, neither at the time of revelation of the Qur'an, nor even a thousand years later, did anyone have any knowledge regarding Pharaoh's body; it remained absolutely unknown to the Muslim world. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that this preserved body was discovered. This prediction of the Qur'an had been fulfilled to the letter. However, this task was performed entirely by non-Muslims.

It was a French scholar, Professor Loret, who discovered this mummified body of Pharaoh at Thebes in the King's Valley, from where it was transported to Cairo. Professor. Elliot Smith removed its wrapping on the 8th of July, 1907. He gives a detailed description of this operation and examination of the body in his book, *The Royal Mummies* (1912).

In June 1975, Dr. Maurice Bucaille was allowed by the Egyptian authorities to examine Pharaoh's body. Special investigations were made during this examination of this mummified body along with a team of specialists. By means of several modern techniques like radiography, Carbon-14 dating, and endoscopy, the exact period of this body was established. After study and research lasting several years by a team of western experts, it was scientifically proved that this body definitely belonged exactly to the period of Moses.

It was also established beyond any doubt that this Pharaoh died either from drowning or from very violent shocks preceding the moment when he was drowned.

The French author, Dr. Maurice Bucaille, rounds off the chapter called 'The Exodus' in his book, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, with these thrilling words:

Those who seek among modern data for proof of the veracity of the Holy Scriptures will find a magnificent illustration of the verses of the Qur'an dealing with the Pharaoh's body by

visiting the Royal Mummies' Room of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. (p 241).